



Digital Harassment of Women Leaders: A review of the evidence

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Query: A rapid review of the evidence on digital harassment of women leaders

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1. Introduction

Digital harassment of women leaders is part of the **continuum of violence and discrimination against women in the public arena**, including women politicians, activists, civil society leaders, prominent feminists or simply female political commentators, academics and journalists. This phenomenon is extremely widespread globally, and encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion, shaming, harassment, threats and intimidation against women in leadership roles on the basis of their gender. These acts not only cause significant psychological, emotional and even physical harm to the individual victims, spilling over into real-world acts of abuse, violence or self-harm, but collectively work to silence or limit women's voice and agency in public spaces, and undermine democratic culture and practices.

The UK Parliament defines online harassment and cyber bullying as a phenomenon which can take a variety of forms including trolling, trying to damage someone's reputation by making false comments; accusing someone of things they have not done; tricking others into threatening someone; identity theft, publishing someone's personal information, known as 'doxing'; cyber-stalking; and encouraging other people to be abusive or violent towards groups of people (Strickland and Dent, 2017). Technology-related harassment and abuse of women leaders can be understood as acts of gender-based violence that are committed, abetted or aggravated, in part or fully, through information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as mobile phones, online media dialogue through articles and comments, social media platforms and email. It can be argued that a key component of harassment is that the behavior is repeated and persistent, even after the harasser has been told to stop (Herring, 2002). Women, particularly those from minority religious and ethnic groups or who are non-heterosexual, are pervasively targeted online through such behaviours.

This report presents findings from a rapid review of available evidence on digital harassment of women leaders. It builds on and analyses the sources identified by VAWG Helpdesk Query 209, which provided an annotated bibliography and quality assessment of available literature on the scale and impact of, and the effectiveness of interventions to address, digital harassment of women leaders. Specifically, this rapid review outlines relevant evidence in relation to six areas:

1. The scale of the problem of digital harassment of women leaders;
2. The impact of digital harassment of women leaders – at an individual and collective level;¹
3. The types of interventions to address digital harassment of women leaders;
4. The effectiveness and impact of different interventions (positive, negative, no effect);
5. The challenges faced by interventions to tackle digital harassment of women leaders; and
6. What helps or hinders the effectiveness of different interventions.

Each of these issues is discussed in turn within this report. A brief discussion of the overall nature and quality of the evidence available is also provided. For more detail on the methodology used to identify and select sources for inclusion, please see VAWG Helpdesk Query 209 on *Digital Harassment of Women Leaders: An Annotated Bibliography*.

2. Overview of the evidence

Overall, there is **very limited high-quality research available directly focused on understanding the scope and range of digital harassment of women leaders**. The summary findings presented in this rapid review should be read with some caution in light of this limited evidence, as well as potential limitations to the rapid review methodology, which was limited to available sources. An outline of the methodology used is included in the Annotated Bibliography.² Most of the sources identified by the annotated bibliography are empirical studies with relatively small sample sizes, focused on one country or short time period, or overly descriptive in nature. Some literature, whilst limited in quantity and quality, confirms that digital harassment of women leaders is a serious and pervasive issue. There is no primary research directly assessing the number or proportion of women leaders affected by digital harassment, although there is some assessment of the proportion of general digital political harassment which has a gender dimension.

There is very limited literature on the effectiveness of interventions to address the broader harassment of women and girls (see forthcoming query Q212 on 'What has worked to help to prevent cyber violence against women and girls, including digital tech based solutions?'). Some literature outlines the interventions themselves, but there is limited literature that critiques the effectiveness of these interventions. There is no literature that directly assesses the effectiveness of interventions that address digital harassment of women leaders. Literature discussing online violence against women, particularly girls, is much stronger and provides some sense of scale and types of online violence.

The majority of high-quality sources come from anglophone contexts, particularly the UK, USA and Australia. Public debate, as well as the legal and policy framework, is particularly developed in these settings, eliciting more concrete research and lessons on interventions. However, the relevance of these lessons to other places which may have very different sociocultural, legal and political environments needs to be carefully weighed up.

¹ This report takes 'collective level' to mean groups of women – whether it is women's rights organisations or groups of women MPs in a particular party or assembly etc. The review sought to better understand if digital harassment of women in leadership has an effect on women more broadly rather than just the women directly targeted by the digital harassment.

² Faith, B. and Fraser E. (2018) *Digital Harassment of Women Leaders: An Annotated Bibliography*, VAWG Helpdesk Report 209. London: Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Helpdesk.

3. Scale of the problem

Multiple sources confirm that **women are more likely to experience severe forms of online harassment and abuse than men**, including (often gender-based) insults, threats, ‘forced pornography’ or ‘revenge pornography’, cyber stalking, online sexual harassment, ‘doxing’ (the releasing of a victim’s personal details or information to others online) and trolling (UN HRC, 2018; UN Broadband Commission, 2015; Henry and Powell, 2018; Citron, 2014). In terms of scale, whilst there is not yet any comprehensive global data, one recent EU-wide survey found that an estimated **23% of women reported experiencing online abuse or harassment at least once in their lifetime** (UN HRC, 2018:5). Another much-cited study by the Pew Research Center in the USA found that whilst men reported experiencing slightly higher rates of online harassment overall, women, and particularly young women aged 18-24, “experience certain severe types of harassment at disproportionately high levels: 26% of these young women have been stalked online, and 25% were the target of online sexual harassment” (Duggan, 2014: 3-4).

There is very little literature which systematically examines the scale of digital harassment against *women leaders*, although it is generally recognised that “women human rights defenders, journalists and politicians are directly targeted, threatened, harassed or even killed for their work” (UN HRC, 2018:8). The few systematic studies that do exist focus on a limited period, context or medium, but nonetheless provide useful insights; these are discussed further below. Literature discussing online abuse of women who are particularly visible in the public space more broadly paints a bleak picture of how **the same disturbing forms of digital harassment and abuse are considered “par for the course” by women in journalism, academia, feminist commentators and activists** (Sobieraj, 2018; Citron, 2014; UN HRC, 2018; NDI, 2017). The most common experiences discussed for these women include rape and death threats, vulgar language objectifying the target physically and/or sexually and questioning their competence due to their gender. This section draws on both sets of literature to consider the scale and scope of digital harassment against women leaders.

According to research by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the international campaign #NotTheCost, Stopping Violence against Women in Politics, there are **three characteristics which distinguish harassment and violence against women in politics (including online)**:

- (1) Women are targeted because of their gender;
- (2) The abuse can be gendered, for example threats of sexual violence; and
- (3) The impact of the abuse and harassment is to discourage women from being or becoming active in politics (IPU, 2016).

Further research is needed to understand the extent to which women are being targeted due to their gender, and/or due to their political role, but subject to gender-specific forms of violence.

There are several robust studies which use statistical methods and large sample sizes to analyse tweets and online comments, looking for gender biases, harassment and abusive language. One recent study by Atalanta (2018) applies a modified version of Christie Aschwanden’s Finkbeiner Test³ to 27,000 tweets about male and female political leaders in prominent national leadership positions in the UK, Chile and South Africa. Tweets were scored according to whether they included: comments on the person’s physical appearance; comments about the person’s relationship or marital status; comments about whether the person has children or not; derogatory or provocative language to describe the person and not their profession; and comments about competence due to gender. It

³ A simple test developed by journalist Christie Aschwanden similar to the Bechdel test which assesses gender biases in how stories about professional women (particularly women in science, for which it was initially developed) are reported in the media: <http://www.lastwordonnothing.com/2017/10/26/the-finkbeiner-test-a-tool-for-writing-about-women-in-their-professions/>

found that **female politicians were “more than three times as likely to see derogatory comments directly related to their gender compared to their male counterparts”** (p7). Women leaders had a larger volume of comments made about them in all five categories measured, with 31.4% more comments overall than men. Women leaders experienced more negative comments than men in all categories, with comments on their **physical appearance and marital status** being most common.

Similarly, research by the IPU which surveyed more than 55 women parliamentarians worldwide found that **“social media have become the number one place in which psychological violence – particularly in the form of sexist and misogynistic remarks, humiliating images, mobbing, intimidation and threats – is perpetrated against women parliamentarians”** (2016:6). The IPU cites a study⁴ conducted in the USA, Australia and the UK which showed that Hillary Clinton received more than double the number of tweets containing insults and offensive comments than Bernie Sanders during their campaigns for the Democratic Party nomination. This study found that the same was true in Australia of Julia Gillard in comparison to Kevin Rudd between January 2010 and January 2014. In the UK, however, the study found a less marked gender split in abuse on the 2015 Labour leadership contenders, with Jeremy Corbyn receiving more abuse than the other contenders, two women and another man.

A broader (focused on journalists) yet methodologically strong study by the Guardian analysed 70 million online comments on its website over a 10-year period, looking for patterns of trolling and abuse according to gender and background of the journalist. It found that although most regular Guardian opinion writers are white males, the **10 regular writers who got the most abuse were eight women (four white and four non-white) and two black men** (Guardian, 2016). The 10 who got the least abuse were all male. This study also found that articles by women received more abusive and disruptive comments across all subjects, but the women writing for more male-dominated sections in terms of authorship (Sport and Technology) received a higher proportion. Articles discussing feminism and rape attracted the highest numbers of abusive comments. A related analysis by American journalists Cuen and Evers (2016) scrutinised 80,000 tweets directed at Megyn Kelly, a well-known American news journalist, over the 24-hour period after Donald Trump announced he would not participate in a televised debate she was moderating. Whilst a much more limited sample in terms of time period, in that short time the authors found a significant number of tweets directed at Kelly with gendered insults such as bitch (n = 423), bimbo (n = 404), blonde (n = 128), whore (n = 88), cheap (n = 66), ugly (n = 59) and skank (n = 39).

Multiple sources reviewed (Sobieraj, 2018; Jane, 2014a; Jane, 2014b; Guardian, 2016; Citron, 2014; NDI, 2017) highlight the **significance of intersecting identities** in increasing a woman’s likelihood of experiencing digital harassment. Women who are black, asian or minority ethnic (BAME), from minority religious communities (particularly Muslim and Jewish women) or non-heterosexual experience more abuse than other women, often in the form of explicit attacks based on their race, religion or sexual orientation. For example, Scottish Parliamentarian and Leader of the Opposition Ruth Davidson told Amnesty International (2018) that the online abuse she faces is both misogynistic and homophobic. Analysis of online abuse against women MPs on Twitter before the UK general election found that Diane Abbott (Shadow Home Secretary and first black female MP in the UK) received almost half (45%) of all abuse against women MPs active on Twitter (Amnesty International, 2018). Several feminist scholars also discuss this intersectionality, pointing to the experiences of women in the public eye in the UK, US and Australia such as Anita Sarkeesian, a north American feminist blogger and gamer of Muslim heritage who is frequently abused online with racial as well as gender slurs (e.g. abusive messages that include the word “Arab”) (Sobieraj, 2018). Imran Awan

⁴ See Guardian article for further details on study: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/datablog/ng-interactive/2016/jun/27/from-julia-gillard-to-hillary-clinton-online-abuse-of-politicians-around-the-world>

describes the intersections between Islamophobia and sexism online which can leave female Muslim commentators facing multiple forms of identity-based attacks (Barlow and Awan, 2016).

A sub-set of feminist literature discusses the common forms and impacts of digital harassment against women journalists, activists and academics, particularly **those who comment regularly in digital media on social justice and feminist issues**. Much of this literature is not methodologically robust in an empirical sense but provides a feminist critique of how digital harassment of women in public spaces fits within existing patterns of gender inequality, patriarchy and silencing of women's voices, drawing largely on case studies and deep-dive accounts of individual experiences. The examples of public figures such as Stella Creasy (British MP for Walthamstow), Anita Sarkeesian (Canadian-American feminist activist), Caroline Criado-Perez (British feminist activist and journalist) and Emma Jane (Australian feminist academic and journalist) are all discussed and cross-referenced in multiple papers (see Jane, 2014a; Jane, 2014b; Sobieraj, 2018). Whilst limited methodologically in analysing scope and prevalence, the patterns of harassment discussed are disturbingly similar – all women experienced a multitude of **rape threats and death threats immediately following campaigns or public commentary related to gender equality**. Penny Laurie, a journalist in the UK, even received a bomb threat – this is not a unique experience (Laurie, 2013). These threats usually involve a range of extreme, graphic and sexually abusive threats, made by multiple perpetrators.

The **case of Caroline Criado-Perez** in the UK is cited as one of the most well-known and mirrors the experiences of the other women mentioned. In 2013, she led a petition to challenge the Bank of England's decision to remove Elizabeth Fry from the £5 bank note and to replace it with Winston Churchill. She succeeded and in 2017 secured Jane Austen's image on the £10 note. In the wake of this petition, she received multiple threats of murder and rape, particularly via her Twitter account. Although Criado-Perez's case did lead to the prosecution of several perpetrators, many similar cases receive no legal redress (see Barlow and Awam, 2016).

In terms of the scale of violence against women in politics (VAWP) more broadly, within which digital harassment of women politicians can be situated, global research by the Inter-Parliamentary Union which surveyed 55 women MPs from 39 countries found that **81.8% of women parliamentarians had experienced psychological violence during their parliamentary term**, primarily in the form of threats of rape, death, beatings or abduction (IPU, 2016). A shocking 21.8% reported having been subjected to at least one act of sexual violence, and 32.7% reported having witnessed acts of sexual violence against female parliamentary colleagues (ibid). More than one in four respondents had experienced some form of physical violence.

There is a stronger body of literature analysing the **scale of online/cyber violence, harassment and bullying and its links to real-life experiences of VAWG**. Whilst not specifically related to women leaders, some key trends are worth highlighting given the limited amount of more focused literature. A comprehensive review of literature on cyber harassment shows that **60-70% of cyberstalking victims are women** and evidences how cyber "hate crimes" spill over into real-world acts of violence and fear of violence (Citron, 2014, Amnesty 2018).

A significant study by the UN Broadband Commission (2015), drawing on multiple global data sources, found that **"in the EU-28, 18% of women have experienced a form of serious Internet violence since the age of 15**, which corresponds to about 9 million women", and that women aged 18 - 24 are at a heightened risk of being exposed to all kinds of cyber VAWG (UN Broadband Commission, 2015:16). For further information on cyber VAWG see VAWG Helpdesk Query 211.

4. Impact on women leaders – individual and collective

The main impacts of digital harassment and abuse on women leaders discussed by the literature include: “silencing” or self-censoring, discrediting of women’s voices and harm to their reputations, which can all happen at both individual and collective levels; and various forms of psychological and emotional harm, which directly affect women as individuals, but have some indirect collective impacts.

Multiple authors highlight the systematic **“withdrawal or silencing of women in public online spaces and conversations”** as one of the most concerning collective impacts of online harassment towards women in the public sphere (Sobieraj, 2018:1706). Research from India quoted by the UN Human Rights Council (2018) indicates that “28% of women who had suffered ICT-based violence intentionally reduced their presence online” (p.7), and that this is a common response for women human rights defenders, politicians and journalists who are targeted. Indeed, many commentators see this as the overt goal of the perpetrators, who use tactics of “intimidating, shaming, and discrediting – to silence women or to limit their impact in digital publics” (ibid; see also Lumsden and Morgan, 2017). “Self-censoring”, using pseudonyms or switching to anonymous commenting is also discussed as a common coping strategy, further limiting women’s online participation and voice (UN HRC, 2018; Jane, 2014b; Lumsden and Morgan, 2017). Others argue that this self-censoring constitutes a denial of women’s individual and collective right to free-speech (Barlow and Awan, 2016). Common advice to women to not engage online, which is impossible for women leaders, or to ignore online harassment implied through tropes like ‘do not feed the troll’ can be considered another form of silencing strategy and victim-blaming, reflecting wider discriminatory norms (Lumsden and Morgan, 2017).

Some particularly serious cases have involved **the withdrawal of women from the off-line public sphere as well as online**. One example cited is that of American tech blogger Kathy Sierra, who cancelled a public appearance at a conference in 2007 “because of sexually graphic e-threats including images of her as a sexually mutilated corpse” (Jane, 2014b:540). An example from the UK is that of Laurie Penny, who when writing for the Independent in 2011 described “becoming fearful of leaving her house after she received multiple electronic communications which contained rape and murder threats” (Barlow and Awan, 2016:4). Penny is a lesbian journalist who writes frequently on gender and inclusion issues, and is often targeted for both her feminist writings and sexuality. Penny withdrew from Facebook for a period and discusses the impact on her emotional and mental health (Penny, 2013). Following a series of Twitter threats to attack her at her place of work, feminist academic Charlotte Barlow discusses how this forced her to avoid walking around her own university campus alone, particularly in the evening (Barlow and Awan, 2016:6).

Multiple sources confirm the **serious emotional and psychological impacts** for women in the public eye targeted for digital harassment and abuse (UN HRC, 2018; Jane, 2014b; Barlow and Awan, 2016). Common emotional responses discussed in the literature range from “feelings of irritation, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, vulnerability, and unsafeness; to feelings of distress, pain, shock, fear, terror, devastation, and violation” (Jane, 2014b:534). Whilst experienced at an individual level, these impacts must be understood as connected to the withdrawal and silencing of women from public discourse discussed above, with many victims describing how it was the unrelenting online harassment they experienced eroding their mental health which led them to withdraw (Jane, 2014a and 2014b). This harm can be particularly significant due to the “scale and repeated occurrence of such acts” (UN HRC, 2018:7). Laurie Penny discusses how she considered giving up her feminist writing and activism “for the good of my mental health” in the wake of years of harassment (Penny, 2013). Importantly, these impacts have been found to mirror the harms done by equivalent real-life forms of VAWG; for example, feelings of violation are commonly experienced by victims who receive rape threats and other threats of sexual abuse (Barlow and Awan, 2016; Jane, 2014b; UN HRC, 2018). Loss of sleep is also discussed as a common experience (ibid; Lewis-Hasteley, 2011). The

frequent anonymity of perpetrators is thought to heighten the victim's sense of fear and vulnerability (UN HRC, 2018).

Wider literature on violence against women in politics (VAWP) confirms that broadly, **VAWP discourages women from entering politics; limits their access to leadership positions; and hinders their ability to fulfil their mandate** as elected or appointed officials (IPU, 2016; NDI, 2017). Online abuse and threats have the same effects, and indeed “can undermine democratic culture and practices around the world” (NDI, 2018:14). Research from Australia found that 60% of women aged 18 – 21 and 80% of women over 31 reported that they were less likely to run for political office after seeing how negatively former Prime Minister Julia Gillard was treated by the media (NDI, 2018). The research further suggests that online harassment against women in politics can have a “gateway effect,” paving the way for increased violence in other spaces and further discouraging women from entering politics at all. As with other forms of discrimination-based violence, VAWP discourages those with additional vulnerabilities the most, such as poverty, geographical marginalisation or disability (ibid).

Other harms discussed by the literature include **economic harms**, for example if an explicit image of a victim appears in search engine results, making it difficult for them to seek or find employment (UN HRC, 2018); **reduced access to technology** as a secondary effect of women seeking to avoid further harassment (ibid); and **limitations to women's digital or actual mobility**, as discussed by many of the authors cited above in relation to silencing and self-censoring.

5. Effectiveness of interventions to address digital harassment of women leaders

Interventions discussed in the literature to address digital harassment include **targeted programming for women political leaders; technical solutions and steps digital service providers can take; legal/law enforcement measures; and the use of innovative technology platforms**. Many of these interventions, or solutions, are focused more broadly on preventing and addressing online harassment and abuse generally, or online violence against women, but not specifically women leaders. However, there is **no evidence on the effectiveness of these interventions**. Where information is available on challenges or factors that hinder or help interventions, this is included.

- **Targeted guidance for women leaders and activists:** Two examples of programming and monitoring guidance for addressing violence against women in politics, which include some recommendations on preventing digital harassment, are provided in the box below. Neither has been evaluated for effectiveness and both were listed in Q209 as based on lower quality (less rigorous) evidence and should be read with some caution.

Examples of Programming and Monitoring Guidance to Prevent Violence against Women Politicians

The National Democratic Institute (NDI)'s (2018) **#NotTheCost Programme Guidance for Stopping Violence against Women in Politics** includes several specific recommendations on preventing digital harassment against women politicians on how to: integrate online issues into training and mentoring for women candidates; share coping strategies on how to decrease vulnerability and respond effectively to online attacks; raise awareness across justice and security sectors on the existence of legislation on violence against women where it exists; and train media representatives to prevent online VAWP. NDI have also produced an online form for reporting violence against women in politics, launched in November 2016, which allows women and men worldwide to submit electronic reports of violence against politically active women safely and securely (no details available on effectiveness or usage).

UNDP and UN Women's (2015) programming guide on **Violence Against Women in Elections** makes suggestions of indicators to measure in pre-election phase (# posts of online harassment targeting women)

and post-electoral period (# postings with online harassment and bullying against women elected officials) (Ballington and Bardall, 2015).

In addition, there are targeted digital safety education and resources for feminist activists and human rights defenders, such as [Security-in-a-Box](#)⁵ which aims to assist human rights defenders with their digital security and privacy needs by providing them with a collection of hands-on guides; and [A DIY Guide to Feminist Cybersecurity](#)⁶ with links to available cybersecurity tools, and a hashtag on Twitter (#SafeHubTech) to which users can also tweet cybersecurity questions and concerns (IGF, 2015). As yet, there is no evidence on the effectiveness of these tools.

- **Technical solutions by service providers:** To date, service providers have not developed solutions specifically for preventing abuse or harassment against politicians, although Facebook are testing updates to tackle the spread of fake news stories (Krook, 2017). Online providers have however taken a range of steps to protect all service users from online harassment and abuse, which are relevant to women leaders; however the effectiveness of these measures has not been studied. For example: stricter identity checks before users can join online or social media platforms; more proactive investigation of reported incidents by service providers; filters to detect abusive language on online communications and more effective cooperation with law enforcement agencies. Multiple sources argue that the “anonymity and dissociation from the embodied self” (Barlow and Awan, 2016:3) which happens online creates fertile ground for harassment and abuse of women and girls, and therefore removing or reducing user anonymity is an important way to tackle this issue (see Jane, 2014b; Sobieraj, 2018; Henry and Powell, 2018). Examples include the introduction of Facebook’s “real name” policy, which requires users to provide their actual identity (first and last names), although this is critiqued as being too easy to avoid since nicknames are still allowed, and platforms like Twitter are yet to introduce such a policy (Barlow and Awan, 2016). Lack of response or follow-up from service providers is highlighted in several studies as a major challenge to the effectiveness of technical solutions (Barlow and Awan, 2016; HMG, 2018). A recent public consultation on the UK Government’s Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper found broad support across ages and social groups for technology companies playing a bigger role in protecting users (Strickland and Dent, 2017) so this is likely to remain a key area for future UK policy.
- **Legal/law enforcement measures:** There is a consensus that current legal frameworks and law enforcement capacity are inadequate to address the current reality of cyber harassment and abuse. Factors which reduce the effectiveness of legislation include: the difficulties of identifying a perpetrator due to anonymity online; the complexities of transnational jurisdiction if perpetrators or service providers are located overseas; the difficulties of prosecuting when there are dozens or even hundreds of perpetrators; inadequate provision or response by Internet service providers, including around anonymity (see above); insufficient understanding or capacity in the police to investigate; and punishments not acting as a sufficient deterrent (APC, 2017; Strickland and Dent, 2017; Barlow and Awan, 2016; Jane, 2014b; Citron, 2014). Two case studies of the UK and Pakistan are provided below.

⁵ Jointly developed by Front Line Defenders and Tactical Technology Collective, along with a global network of thousands of activists, trainers and digital security experts.

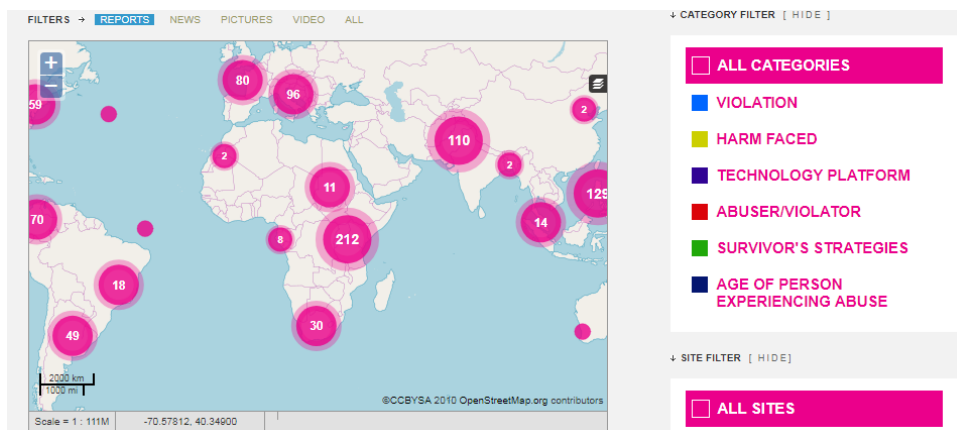
⁶ Developed by Boston Safety Hub Collective

Examples of Legal Protections and Enforcements of Online Harassment and Abuse

UK: Several steps have been taken to strengthen legal protections and prosecution of online harassment and abuse. For example, “revenge pornography” has recently been added as an offence under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 (see Strickland and Dent, 2017), and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) recently published a set of guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent via social media (CPS, 2018). When section 103 of the Digital Economy Act 2017 comes into force, it will require the Government to issue guidance on action which might be appropriate for social media providers to take against bullying, intimidation or insulting behaviour. The UK Government continues trying to address shortfalls in existing legal and policy provisions, including through its recent **Digital Charter and Internet Safety Green Paper** published in 2017. The Green Paper prioritises online misogyny as one of the most significant forms of harm online, alongside online bullying (particularly of children) and racial abuse (see HMG, 2018 and CPS, 2018).

Pakistan: The effectiveness of recent legislative developments (e.g. Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016) has been constrained by underinvestment and lack of trained staff to enforce regulation, according to a report by the Digital Rights Foundation (2017) submitted to the UNSR on Violence against Women. For example, the report notes that the National Response Center for Cyber Crime (NR3C) is “criminally understaffed” leading to severe backlogs, and there are not enough judges in the ‘cybercrime’ courts. The organisation responsible for regulating online harassment (Pakistan Telecommunications Authority) reportedly lacks the capacity to act on individual cases. Furthermore, international social media companies are not subject to Pakistan’s cyber laws and not accountable to users.

- **Use of innovative technology platforms** Another set of interventions from the human rights community involves using technology platforms in a positive way to monitor and follow-up on cases of harassment and abuse. For example, Take Back the Tech! developed a data visualisation mapping tool [Map It!] which plots incidents of technology-based VAW reported from around the world (see below). The stories are used by campaigners to raise awareness and advocate for redress for online violence against women at local, national and international levels. These platforms are not yet focused on online abuse of women leaders, nor do they have evidence on effectiveness.



- **Online campaigns and collective empowerment:** Users have created campaigns against online violence and harassment against women in politics through hashtags like #NotTheCost, #NameItChangeIt, and #ReclaimTheInternet (Krook, 2017). These campaigns have led to online cooperation between women and women’s groups, as well as meaningful discussions on strategies to prevent technology-related VAW (APC, 2015). Another example is #ByteBack

campaign⁷ which aims to stop the online trolling and abuse of women journalists and commentators in South Asia. It has created guides, videos and online resources to raise awareness (although to date no evidence of impact is publically available). Analysis of the #ЯНеБоюсьСказать (Ukrainian for #IAmNotAfraidToSayIt) online campaign⁸ highlighted the ‘power of affective networked storytelling’, with a study concluding that “although the hashtag campaign did not directly generate any legislative reform, it shifted the tone of public debate about sexual harassment from abstract and shameful to personal and persistent” (Lokot, 2018: 814).

⁷ The campaign is supported by the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSAN) and International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), representing unions and press freedom organisations.

⁸ Started in the Ukrainian segment of Facebook in July 2016 by a local female activist to raise awareness of how widespread sexual violence and sexual harassment are in the Ukrainian society

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