

# Digital Rights Foundation

## Cyber Harassment Helpline: Four Month Report

December, 2016 - March, 2017

ARE YOU BEING HARASSED ONLINE?

DON'T HESITATE TO CALL THE **CYBER HARASSMENT HELPLINE** FOR EMOTIONAL, DIGITAL SECURITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT  
**0800-39393**

**Digital Rights Foundation**  
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

**Hamara Internet**  
www.hamarainternet.org

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## Introduction

Digital Rights Foundation's (DRF) Cyber Harassment Helpline is the region's first dedicated helpline for cases of online harassment and violence. The soft launch of the Helpline was on November 28, 2016 and it began its operations on December 1, 2016.

The Helpline is operational from Monday to Friday between 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Support Team is trained in matters of cyber law, digital security, and psychological support. It includes a qualified psychologist, digital security expert and trained lawyer, all of whom provide specialised assistance when needed.

The Helpline strives to help women, children, human rights defenders, minority communities and anyone who might feel unsafe in digital spaces.

## The Mission

Digital Rights Foundation's Cyber Harassment Helpline aims to provide assistance to victims of online harassment in Pakistan. DRF has been working in the field of cyber harassment since 2012, and after a need assessment and the successful completion of the [\*Hamara Internet\*](#) (translates as "[\*Our Internet\*](#)") project,<sup>1</sup> the organization felt that there was a lack of awareness about digital safety and the relevant legal remedies for harassment. DRF identified the need for an institutionalised mechanism to deal with complaints of online harassment in a gender sensitive and confidential environment.

The Cyber Harassment Helpline aims to provide digital security support, emotional counselling, legal advice, and a referral system to victims of online harassment. The service is primarily provided through a toll-free number [0800-39393], however assistance is also given through email and private messages on DRF's Facebook page.<sup>2</sup> The Helpline boasts an all-female Support Staff and there are strict measures in place to ensure that callers are given a confidential, gender-sensitive and secure environment.

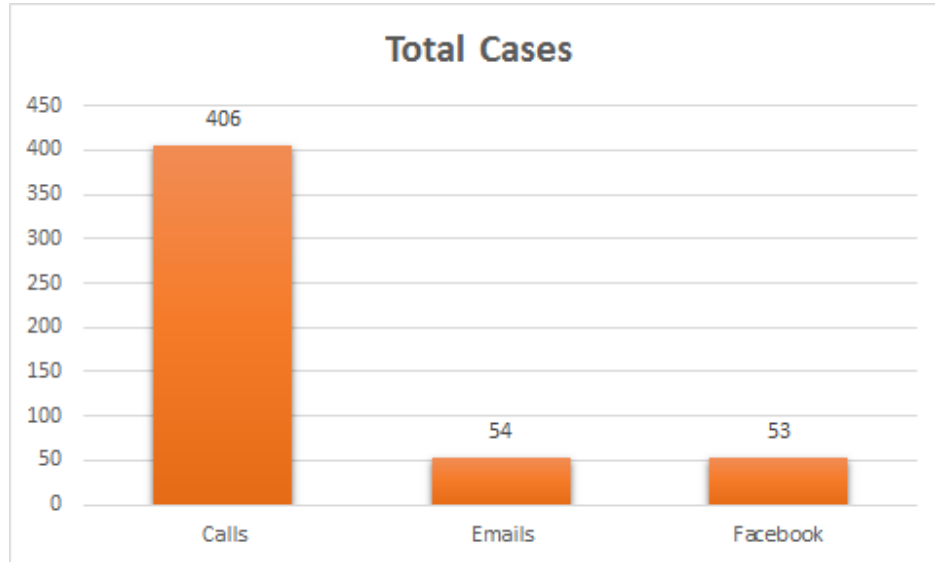
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<sup>1</sup> The Hamara Internet project was a nation-wide campaign that provided training sessions for female university students regarding cyber harassment and digital security. The campaign reached 1800 young women and operated in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan.

<sup>2</sup> As a matter of policy, the Helpline Support Team redirects all complaints obtained through the Facebook page to more secure channels and discourages sharing of personal information on Facebook.

## Response: Volume of Calls

The Cyber Harassment Helpline has garnered an overwhelming response since its launch. The Support Staff has received **513 complaints** in the form of calls, emails and Facebook messages from December 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017. It is important to note that these numbers do not reflect the total number of calls received at the Helpline as we do not count calls outside of the Helpline hours and on non-working days (weekends and national holidays).

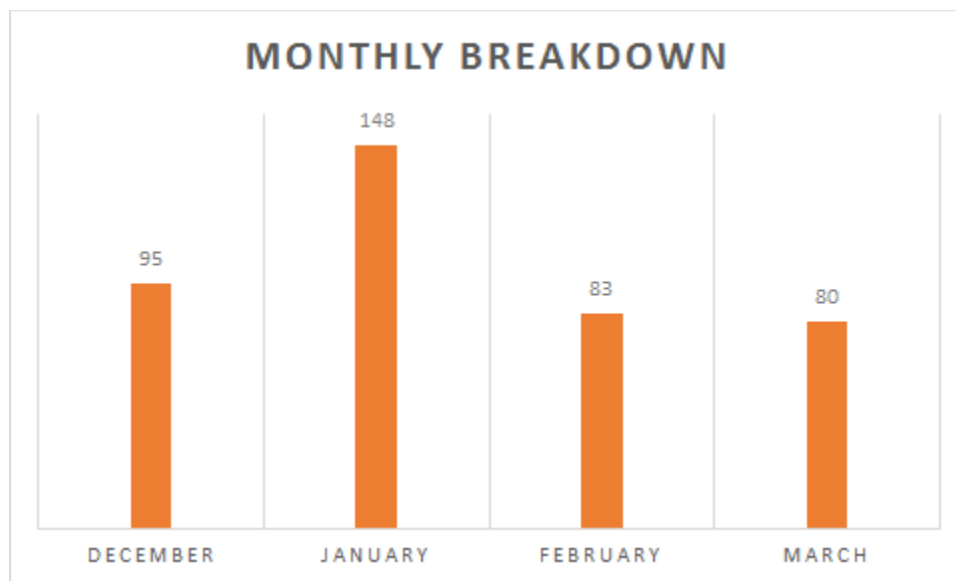


Out of a total number of **535 calls**, 406 were first time callers, whereas 116 were follow-ups from callers who were either updating their assigned officer about their case or seeking additional information.

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Total Number of Calls</b>            | 535 |
| <b>Total Number of Individual Cases</b> | 406 |
| <b>Total Number of Follow-Ups</b>       | 116 |

Discrepancy Margin= 13

The flow of calls within the 4 months was quite sustained, with a surge of calls in the month of January. The following is the monthly breakdown of total calls attended at the Helpline:

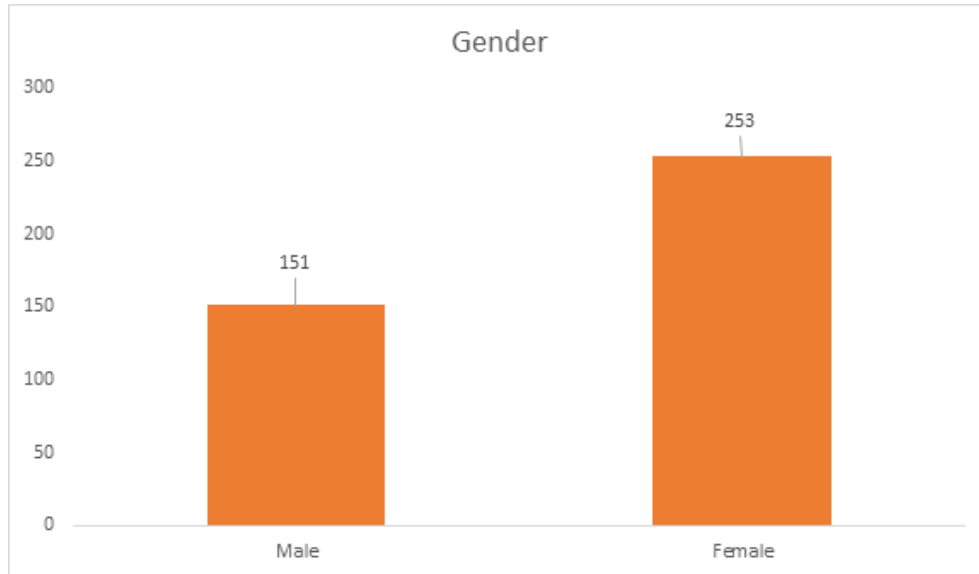


*Note: This data is based on the total number of calls attended, not number of individual cases.*

The Helpline Support Staff only collects information from the callers, and not through Facebook or email. For this reason, the rest of the analysis is based exclusively on calls which is the primary service provided by the Helpline.

## **Gender**

Given the gendered nature of harassment, most of the cases we deal with are reported by women (62%). A sizable chunk of our callers have also been men as well (37%) which is an encouraging trend as we want to encourage men to break stereotypes and open up about their own experiences of harassment.

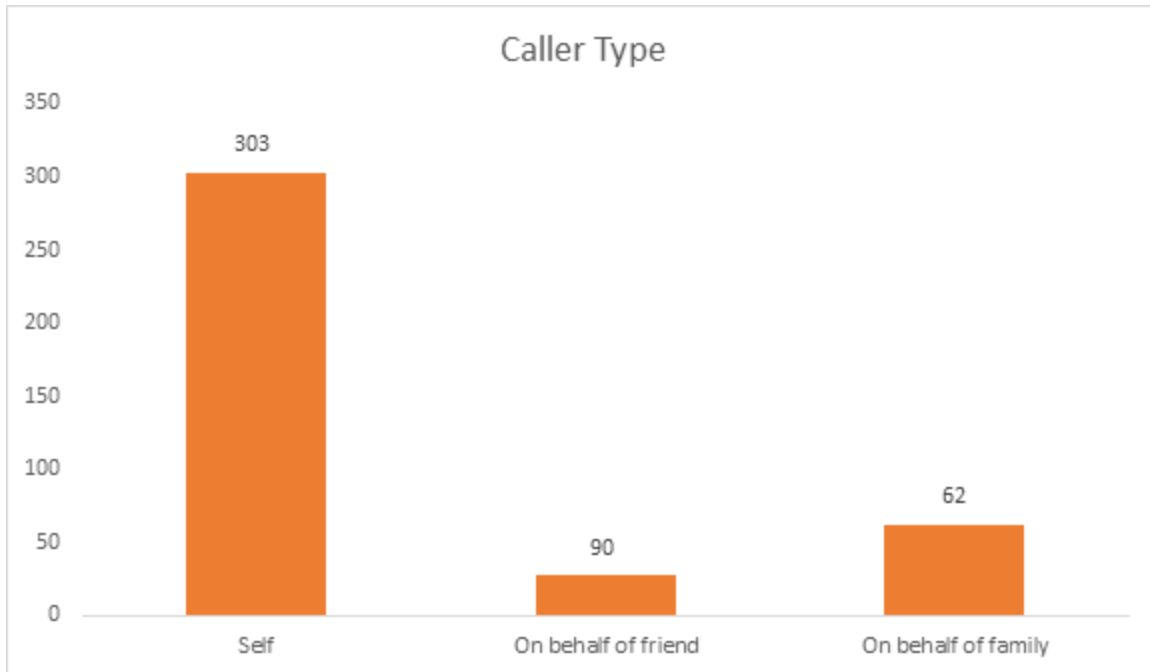


*Note: This data is derived from the total number of cases, not the total number of calls. A small discrepancy of 2 cases exists due to the inability to get gendered information given the sensitive nature of certain calls.*

### Caller Type

However these statistics do not necessarily reflect the proportion of cases dealing with harassment directly faced by men or women, it only records the gender of the caller. We have noticed that a number of men call on behalf of their female friends or family members, which perhaps reflects a reluctance on part of women to call the Helpline directly. This is a weakness that the Helpline team plans to consciously work on in the next quarter of its operations.

In order to fully analyse the data, we also break down the identity of our callers according to whether they are calling regarding harassment that has personally happened to them ("Self") or on behalf of someone they know ("on behalf of friend" and "on behalf of family"). Out of the total number of calls, 303 of the calls were classified as "Self".



*Note: This data is based on the total number of calls. There is a discrepancy of 80 calls where we were unable to collect the relevant information.*

## Types of Cases

In order to better analyse the needs of the Helpline as well as general trends of online harassment in Pakistan, we categorize the cases according to predetermined typologies. The following are definitions that we use to sort the cases:

**Information Seeking:** These are general inquiries that we receive regarding cyber harassment, digital security, Digital Rights Foundation and the work that we do. This category also includes inquiries that we get outside the realm of digital rights, in which case our Helpline Support Staff redirects the caller to the relevant authorities and organizations.

**Fake Profile:** Fake profile or impersonation is when someone's identity is appropriated without their permission. This manifests itself in profiles purporting to belong to someone on social media websites, and contacting people through texts or calls pretending to be someone else.

**Blackmailing:** This often involves using personal information or psychological manipulation to make threats and demands from the victim.

**Unsolicited Messages:** Unsolicited messages are unwanted and repeated contact with someone which may include spam, repeated requests for contact, personalised threats, blackmail or any unwanted messages that make the receiver feel uncomfortable.

**Hacking:** Gaining unauthorized access to someone's electronic system, data, account and devices.

**Federal Investigation Authority (FIA)-related Inquiry:** These are queries we get regarding the complaint procedure

of the National Response Centre for Cyber Crime (NR3C) of the FIA. These callers often want to file a formal, legal complaint. It also includes persons who are contacting the Helpline after they have dealt with the FIA, either to get advice on their case or to complain about the FIA officials or process.

**Non-Consensual Usage of Information:** This involves using, sharing, disseminating, and manipulating data such as photographs, phone numbers, contacts, and other personal information without consent and in violation of the privacy of a person.

**Online Stalking:** Online stalking is keeping track of someone's online activity in a way that it makes the subject of the stalking uncomfortable. For the purpose of this report, online stalking also refers to (repeatedly) contacting a person's friends and/or family.

**Doxxing:** Doxxing is the practice of leaking and publishing information of an individual that includes personally identifiable information. This information is meant to target, locate and contact an individual, usually through social media, discussion boards, chat rooms and the like; and more often than not, is accompanied by cyberbullying and cyberstalking.

**Gender-based Bullying:** Any actions, statements, and implications that targets a person based on their gender identity or sexual orientation. Evaluations for gender-based bullying take into account the overall connotations attached to actions and verbal communications within the larger system of gendered oppression and patterns of behaviour that signify abuse.

**Non-Consensual Pornographic Pictures:** This is obtaining, using, distributing or retaining pictures, videos or graphic representations without a person's consent that violate their personal dignity.

**Financial Fraud:** Intentional actions of deception perpetrated by a person for the purpose of financial gain and profit; this includes using someone's financial data to gain access to accounts and make purchases. For the purpose of our operations, we confine our definition to fraud conducted through electronic means.

**Stalking:** This category includes monitoring, physical following, and harassment that occurs outside of online spaces.

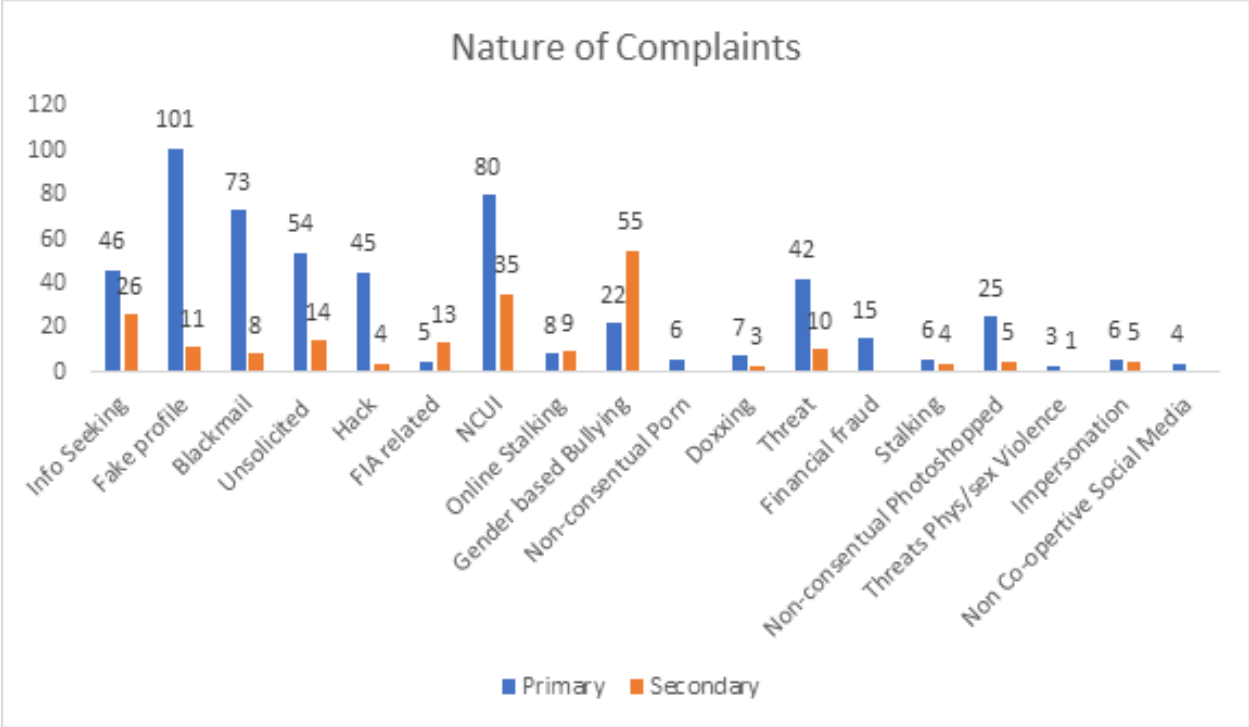
**Non-Consensual Photoshopped Pictures:** The manipulation, distortion or doctoring of images without the permission of the person to whom they belong. This is often accompanied by distribution and sharing of such pictures as well.

**Threats of Sexual/Physical Violence:** An action or verbal communication that results in the reasonable fear of sexual or physical attack.

**Non-Cooperation from Social Media Platforms:** These complaints refer to a situation when a person has reported a case of cyber harassment to the relevant social media team, but has not received a decision in their favor.

**Stolen Device:** Cases where personal information, digital safety or privacy is compromised as a result of theft or misplaced electronic device.

**Threats:** These are all threats directed at the victim of online harassment that do not fall under the category of gender-based threats or sexual/physical violence.

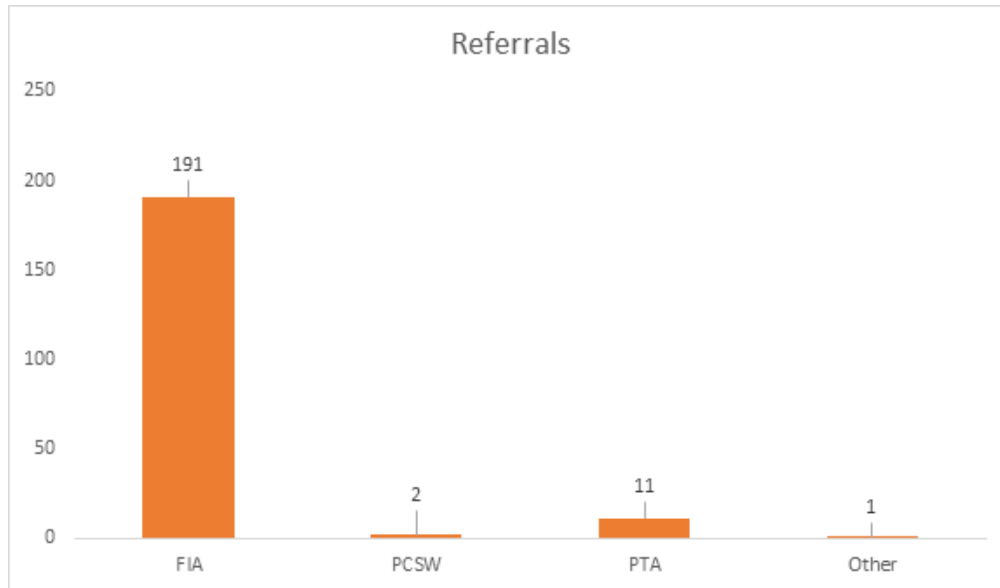


*Note: This data is based on the total number of cases. Keep in mind that some of callers reported more than one type of complaint. The Helpline Support Staff categorized the nature of the complaint as “secondary” and “primary” according to the facts of each individual case.*

### Referrals



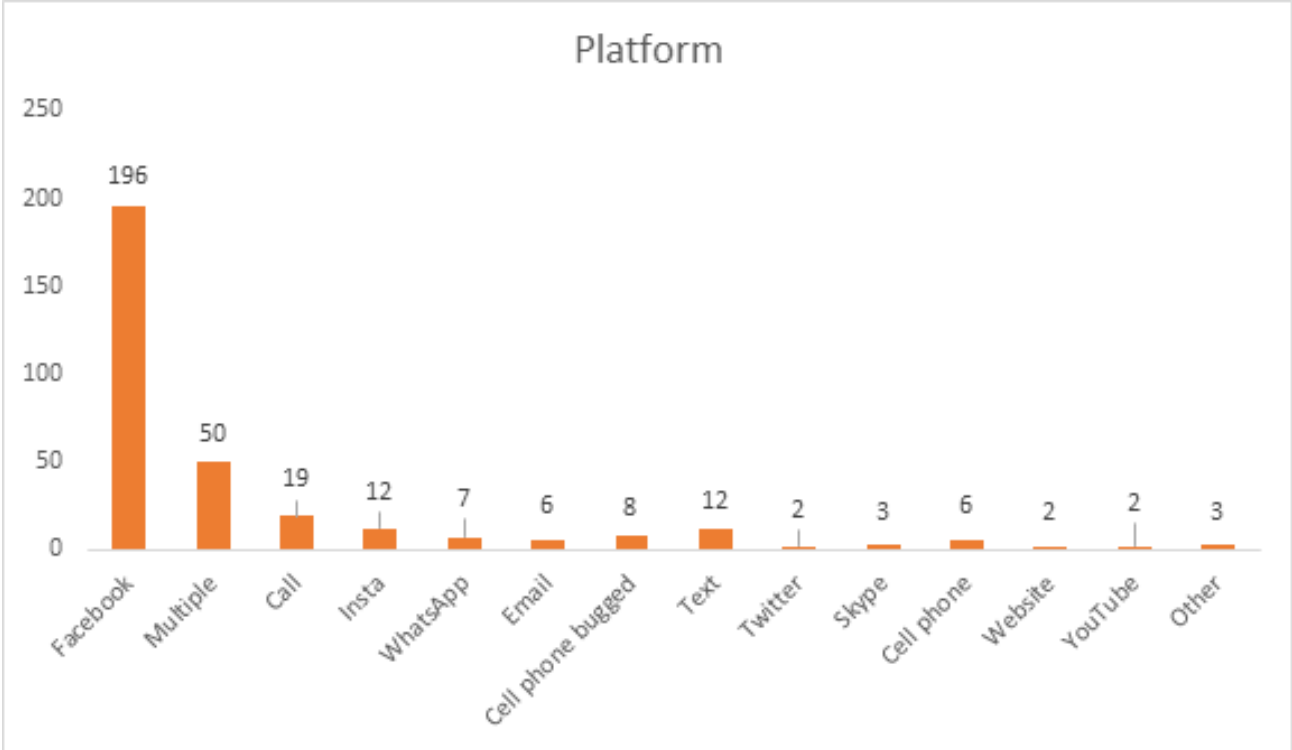
Given that Digital Rights Foundation is a non-governmental organization, there are certain limitations in our investigative powers. When a caller wants to pursue a formal legal case or investigate into the identity of their harasser, the Helpline Staff informs them about the National Response Centre for Cyber Crime (NR3C) of the FIA. Nevertheless, the final decision is with the caller whether they want to follow through on the referral. In cases of emergency, situations that require immediate action from Law Enforcement Authorities (LEAs) or when specialised services are needed, our Staff refers the case to other relevant government authorities or NGOs for assistance.



*Note: This data is based on the total number of individual cases, not number of total calls attended.*

## **Platform**

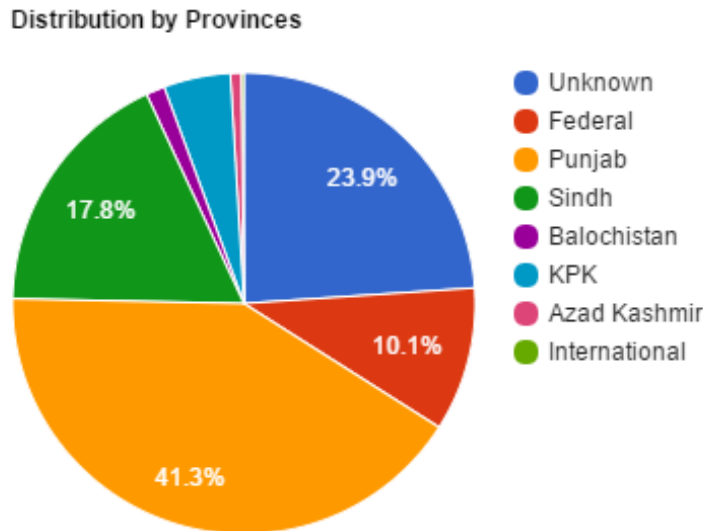
The Helpline deals with cases of harassment which occurs across multiple digital platforms and spaces. Within those spaces, we further identified various social media platforms that are the most common sites for harassment. The companies that own these platforms are diverse in their policies and mechanisms to address harassment. That is why we think it is useful to breakdown the data in order to identify the primary sites of online harassment.



*Note: This data is based on the total number of individual cases handled by the Helpline. There is a discrepancy of 78 cases as this category of data was not adequately and systematically obtained in the first month of operations (December).*

### **Geographical Distribution**

The caller data of the Cyber Harassment Helpline was also segregated by geographical location and collected from callers who felt comfortable with providing it. A majority of the cases received by the Helpline were from Punjab, the most populous province. However the fact that a significant portion of our cases were from the federal capital (10.1%) as compared to only 1.3% from the entire province of Balochistan shows a gap in our outreach strategies, an aspect we plan to address in the second quarter of operations.



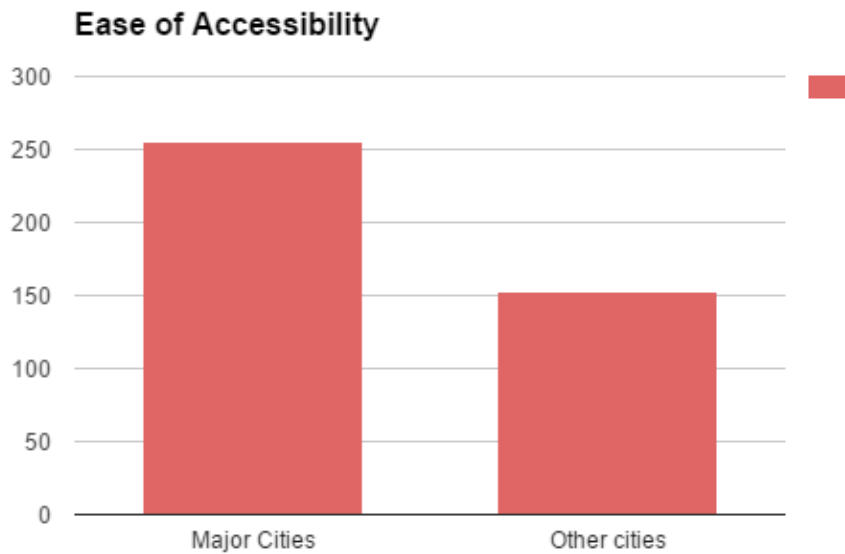
*Note: This distribution is based on the number of individual cases.*

| Provinces            | Percentage |
|----------------------|------------|
| Unknown/Not provided | 23.90%     |
| Federal Territory    | 10.10%     |
| Punjab               | 41.30%     |
| Sindh                | 17.80%     |
| Balochistan          | 1.30%      |
| KPK                  | 4.70%      |
| Azad Kashmir         | 0.70%      |
| International        | 0.20%      |

### **Accessibility of FIA’s Offices**

Ease of access to LEAs is one of the most important determinants to access to justice and reporting of crimes. The fact that the FIA’s National Response Centres for Cyber Crime are only located in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Quetta, Karachi and Lahore (6 major cities) is a great impediment to reporting cyber harassment, and cyber crime in general. The FIA’s procedure for reporting requires that the complainant travel to the NR3C’s office in person and register their case in order to commence legal proceedings. As mentioned above, 47% of the cases the Helpline receives come under the domain of the FIA.

The graphic below shows the number of calls received from cities with offices of the NR3C (“major cities”) in comparison to the number of calls from other cities and areas (“other cities”). The callers from “other cities” will have to travel to their nearest NR3C, located in a different city, in order to lodge a complaint. Furthermore, this journey will have to be made regularly if they chose to pursue the case. Around 150 cases came from areas with no offices of the NR3C, adding a layer to inaccessibility to the entire process.



## Promotion and Outreach

The soft launch of the Helpline was attended by 150 participants at the “Hamara Internet- Ending Online Violence Against Women” conference in November. Since then, the Helpline’s launch has been covered by most major English language newspapers across Pakistan (including [Dawn](#), [Pakistan Today](#), [The Nation](#), [Daily Times](#) and the [Express Tribune](#)) as well as on electronic media (Geo News, the state-run PTV, Capital TV, 24 News, Dawn News).



*Hamara Internet: Ending Online Violence Against Women*

Social Media campaigns to raise awareness about online harassment and the Helpline were launched during the UN 16 days of activism, which coincided with the launch of the Helpline. The Helpline Team has also collaborated with social media platforms such as Maati TV and prominent pages on social media to promote the Helpline in engaging and innovative ways.

DRF has also been participating in international dialogue and conversations around solutions for online harassment with reference to the Helpline. Given the unique nature of the Helpline, it’s operations have been greatly appreciated at [international forums](#) such as [Internet Governance Forum](#) (IGF), Internet Freedom Festival (IFF) and RightsCon 2017.

## **Future Plans**

The Helpline has met its quarterly goal of successfully launching its operations and sustaining a steady number of calls in its first 4 months. However through the data collected and our own experiences we also wish to identify gaps in the cybercrime law and the processes involved in reporting harassment to the LEAs.

## Challenges & Suggestions

- **Greater resource allocation to LEAs:** The FIA's NR3C, which handles cases of online harassment, is under-resourced with only 5 Investigation Officers for all 36 districts of Punjab. Given the extent of the problem and volume of cases, the lack of human resources leads to inordinate delays, especially in cyber harassment cases where sensitive information is misused or leaked and requires urgent action for redressal.
- **Training, Gender-sensitization and more Female Officers:** There is an urgent need for better trained Investigation Officers and gender-sensitization in the processes of the NR3C. Furthermore, there need to be more female officers handling cases around online harassment.
- **Better service delivery for citizens:** The FIA needs to provide a better service to the public and citizens who wish to contact them. The helpline number of the NR3C (9911) is often reported to be inactive and non-responsive, which discourages a lot of women from pursuing their complaint. The alternatives, NR3C office landline numbers, are also consistently busy or unavailable - accessibility to LEA goes hand in hand with proper enforcement of the law.
- **Shorter response time:** The NR3C response time needs to be improved through better case management and more resource allocation. Currently, there is a response lag of around 30-60 days between filling out the online complaint form of the NR3C and contact from the office about going forward with the complaint.
- **Privacy and Confidentiality:** The FIA needs to develop clear and public Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) privacy, confidentiality and protection of evidentiary data. We have seen that women are often reluctant to provide evidence in cases of cyber harassment given the lack of SOPs around sensitive and personal information. Evidentiary procedures often require women to submit physical, hard copies of pictures and conversations containing highly personal information.
- **Greater geographical access:** There is an urgent need for more and geographically accessible offices of the NR3C in order to facilitate women from smaller cities. Furthermore, the hours of operations need to be expanded to 24 hour services.
- **Awareness-raising:** Greater awareness regarding cyber harassment, privacy and data protection through public service messages by the FIA, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and the Ministry of Information Technology. Social media awareness campaign to promote awareness about PECA, repercussions and the procedure of filing a

complaint in easy and citizen-friendly ways.

- **Psychological needs:** Provision for psychological services at NR3C to help complainants deal with the psychological trauma and distress that they might experience due to online harassment and violence.
- **Case management and tracking system:** Complainants should be able to track and receive regular updates on the progress of their case through an accessible case management system.
- **Capacity-building for legal system:** Training and capacity-building for investigators, prosecutors and judges regarding the requirements of cyber crimes in terms of evidence laws and the technical aspects of cyber law.
- **Rules of Business:** The Rules of Business to be promulgated by the Ministry under s. 51 of PECA should be compatible with principles of free speech, data protection and safe spaces. The drafting of these rules should be a transparent, consultative and multi-stakeholder process.