



VOLUME TO VOICES

Volume To Voices: Plugging the Data Gap on Survivors of Sexual Violence *and using this data to support survivors of Black/African descent*

With consultancy from Creative Treaty:



On 18th September 2020 the body of Blessing Olusegun, a 21 year old woman of West African descent, was discovered on a beach in West Sussex. Her body was found alone, surrounded by a few of her belongings.

Blessing's death was ruled "unexplained" by Sussex Police and a postmortem determined that she had died from drowning. However, due to large gaps in the timeline of when she was last seen alive and the discovery of her body, questions still surround her death. Blessing's mother, Esther Abe, and campaigners have criticised Sussex Police claiming there has not been a full investigation into Blessing's death. Esther is working relentlessly with a legal team to ensure further clarity into how and why Blessing died.

Blessing's body was found six months before Sarah Everard, a 33 year old woman of British descent, who was kidnapped and murdered by a Metropolitan Police Officer on the evening of 3rd March 2021. In the days that Sarah was missing her disappearance received huge press coverage and a public search was coordinated in the bid to find her. The circumstances of Sarah's death were soon apparent and 'resolved' via the British justice system. Country-wide vigils were held to commemorate Sarah's life, as well as highlight the sex based harassment and sexual violence women are too often victim to.

Both women's deaths are undeniably tragic and there appears to be failures in policing in each case, with these failures being particularly egregious for Sarah - who was murdered by an acting police officer. Nevertheless, the law enforcement failures in Blessing's cases may have left several unanswered questions surrounding the circumstances of her death. There has been no further investigation beyond her initial postmortem, and Blessing's disappearance and subsequent discovery only came to mainstream attention when campaigners spotlighted the glaring apathy in media and judicial response.

Robyn D'Arcy, a Senior Strategic Insights Lead at an advertising agency based in London has extensive expertise in pooling data from social media and Google to collate pertinent information on various subject matter, including social justice issues. In 2021 she used this skill to quantify the media's indifference to Blessing's case and discovered that Blessing received 2100x less mentions in the media than Sarah:



Armed with this statistic, as well as further research that elucidated law enforcement's mistreatment of survivors of sexual trauma and sex based crimes, Robyn has begun to structure Volume to Voices. Volume to Voices is a global study focused on filling the significant data gap around survivors of sexual violence. It is predominantly a trauma-informed survey, designed by and for survivors, augmented with data from social media and Google search. **Volume to Voices will begin data collation from May 2021, surveying the public for a period of 3-6 months and publish the study later in the year, making the results immediately available.**

Volume to Voices will be dedicated to telling survivors' stories: previously data surrounding sexual violence has predominantly been faceless and emotionless, with focus on the violence rather than the survivors themselves, as well as lacking in actionable strategy. Volume to Voices will collect and cut data by demographic to understand groups least catered for and most at risk. I have attached an introduction to the study, which details how information will be sourced and areas of focus.

On 8th March 2021, Robyn met with UK based human rights organisation, Creative Treaty, for human rights consultancy and to source any areas, angles or questions that could be particularly useful for nongovernmental organisations delivering programmes to groups that experience marginalisation. When Robyn shared her findings on the media response to Blessing and Sarah's cases, we emphasised that though Blessing was not a victim of sexual violence, her death and its lacklustre media reporting brings to fore the imperativeness of collating specific demographic data. Accurately aggregating data will allow NGOs to examine any key or patterned ways that sexual trauma impacts specific survivors, like women of African descent, and highlight stark contrasts in media, police and judicial approach.

When meeting with Robyn we stated the importance of categorisation when structuring the survey that will be made available to members of the public - including separate categories for gender and sex, and detailed racial and ethnic group classifications that recognise cultural differences (e.g. ethnic subcategories for Black/African, Asian, Mixed and Middle Eastern racial groupings).

Robyn incorporated this guidance, as well as other suggestions that we proffered. Volume to Voices will collect and cut data by demographic, which means that once the study is published NGOs working with people of African descent will have key information on how survivors of sexual trauma from this group navigate the justice system, we will also have insight on their treatment by law enforcement in the aftermath of assault. This information is critical as often Black/African survivors of crime experience mistreatment and an abject lack of care by British police systems, despite being victims.

Moreover, Volume to Voices will not just collate demographic information on law enforcement, but on other public institutions with a duty of care to the public, including the National Health Service (NHS). The NHS is the publicly funded healthcare service in England, which is often statistically and anecdotally cited as failing to properly support patients of African descent in comparison to their British/white counterparts.

In the course of her work, Robyn has communicated with the NHS on their support systems for survivors of sexual trauma and has been continually told that there is currently no extensive data on survivors and health; how to treat survivors, both from a practical and empathetic point of view and adequate training is not available for doctors. As a result, research, quality and quantity of treatment and services for survivors - from any demographic, is extremely limited. Volume to Voices aims to implement pragmatic change using the results of the study to directly inform improvement in this area. A pivotal outcome will be creating an accredited learning platform for medical professionals on how to support survivors, including those of African descent, navigating healthcare. Robyn has sourced and secured funding for this outcome, which is now in the pipeline.

Volume to Voices aims to put numbers, and therefore weight, behind challenging misconceptions, understanding survivors' wants needs and experiences, and empowering their voices - especially those within groups who have been overlooked and ignored. Robyn and Creative Treaty believes this will drive direct and long term change. Furthermore, the study has 15 areas of focus, including broader societal/cultural awareness. This means when surveyed survivors will be asked about their awareness of trauma responses in the short and long term aftermath of assault, what they believe to be the most harmful myths about sexual violence, experiences dealing with police, and how they feel about #MeToo 5 years on.

A study like Volume to Voices is several decades overdue, and Robyn is doing brilliant work to publish a comprehensive study that will provide key data on survivors of sexual trauma across demographic. Creative Treaty will continue to provide consultation for the study, as well as put Robyn in touch with other NGOs that work with people of African descent across the globe to assess any data they would like extracted which could be useful in the course of their work.

Volume to Voice aims to provide a broader representative light on the day-to-day realities of living as a survivor, dispelling myths about the 'perfect victim' and what's 'normal'.