



CHILDREN DON'T MIGRATE,

they flee

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Cover Photo: Romina Alonso Lorenzo, 12, left, and Isabel Alonso Lorenzo, eight, at their aunt's home in Concepcion Chiquirichapa in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, in August 2014. Romina and Isabel are two of four orphan sisters; their 14-year old sister has recently fled to the United States where she works to help support their family. The other sisters live with their aunt in a crowded two-room home. Photo by Katie Orlinsky.

Children Don't Migrate, They Flee is a project of the Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking and Too Young to Wed.

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CHILDREN DON'T MIGRATE,
t h e y f l e e

Tens of thousands of unaccompanied children and families arrived at the U.S. border in 2014, illuminating a human rights crisis that plagues Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador in Central America's Northern Triangle.

Harrowing conditions – escalating rates of violence in the streets and at home, a widespread climate of impunity, high rates of corruption and public mismanagement, and widespread poverty – are at the root of this forced migration. And while the number of unaccompanied children and families arriving at the U.S. border has declined since the peak in 2014, the root causes have not subsided. Stepped-up border security in the United States and Mexico are keeping these vulnerable children and families away from our borders and sending them back to their countries with little or no due process to determine whether they deserve protection.

This exhibition includes photographs and commissioned assignments by award-winning photojournalists Katie Orlinsky, Kirsten Luce, Meredith Kohut, Estaban Felix, and Moises Castillo that portray the dire circumstances that compel unaccompanied children and families to flee. If they survive the harrowing journey, rife with violence, exploitation and trafficking into sex and labor, these children and families will face a future that is uncertain at best.



Photo by Meridith Kohut

Merlit Melissa Nuñez Rodriguez, 6, who is fleeing with her mother and father to escape gang violence in Olancho, Honduras, in May 2014, looks at a mural of popular routes through Mexico painted on a wall at the migrant shelter Los 72 in Tenosique, Mexico. This shelter provides mats to sleep on, secondhand clothes, meals, basic medical treatment, and help in applying for immigration visas and refugee status for people traveling north.



Photo by Katie Orlinsky

A river runs through the town of Los Duraznales in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, in August 2014. Quetzaltenango reports one of the highest levels of child migration in all of Guatemala. While lack of economic opportunity contributes to unaccompanied children and families fleeing their home countries, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and others report that violence has become a significant driver of forced migration of children and young people in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.¹



Photo by Katie Orlinsky

Paula, who does not attend school, works washing clothes with her female family members in the town of Los Duraznales in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, in August 2014. Deeply entrenched discrimination against women severely limits educational and employment opportunities for Guatemalan girls and women. The State Department reports a conviction rate of 1 to 2% for femicide, clear evidence that women and girls face a harsh climate of impunity with a government unwilling to offer protection from escalating violence.²



Photo by Katie Orlinsky

A four-year-old recent deportee stands outside her home in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, with her aunts in August 2014. Along with her mother, she attempted to migrate to the United States on August 7, 2014, but was apprehended in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Mexico. Family members said they were both imprisoned and abused before being deported back to Guatemala. The girl's mother continues to be unable to eat or speak after the experience.



Photo by Katie Orlinsky

Adonias, 13, sells garlic at El Mercado Terminal, the largest market in Guatemala City, Guatemala, in August 2014. For many children and youth in Guatemala, leaving home and risking the treacherous journey to the United States is perceived as the only chance for leading a dignified life free of violence and fear. According to a 2014 UNHCR study, 38 of 100 Guatemalan children interviewed after arriving in the United States expressed the need for international protection from societal violence – by gangs or other organized crime – or from family abuse.³



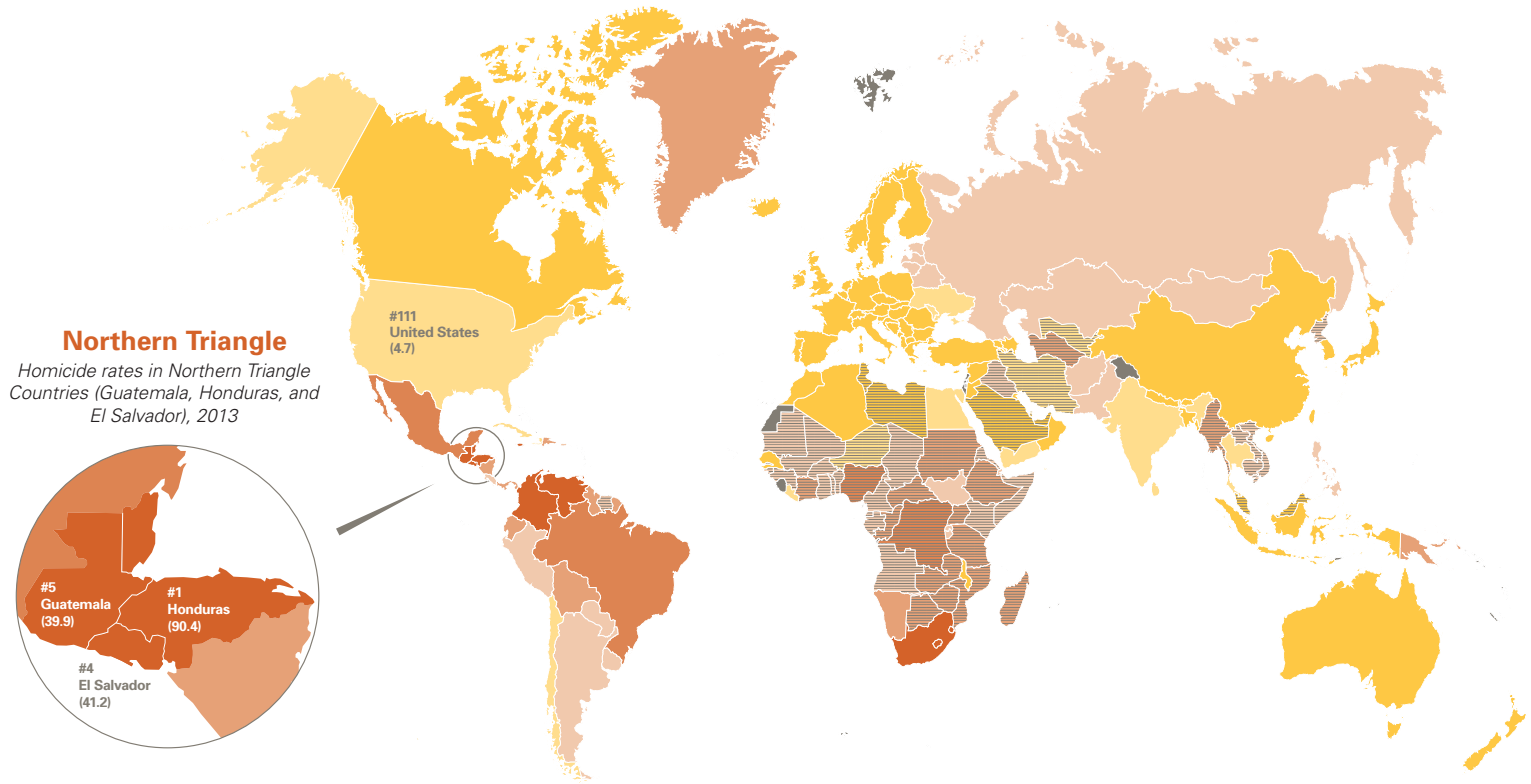
Photo by Katie Orlinsky

Jonathan, 13, works in the Guatemala City Cemetery cutting and arranging flowers for family members of the deceased in August 2014. Jonathan said he attends school in the afternoon. In 2011 alone, there were 437 children murdered in Guatemala. In neighboring Honduras, in 2013, the U.S. State Department reported 722 homicides of children, over 1,000 cases of rape, and 200 incidents of kidnapping or attempted kidnapping. Local NGOs suggest these statistics underestimate violent crimes against children.⁴

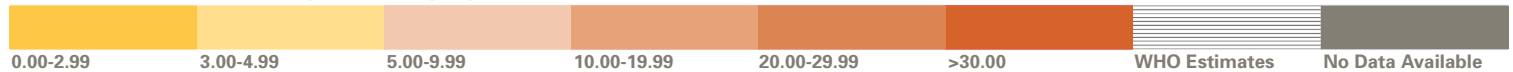
CHILDREN ARE FLEEING THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS COUNTRIES

Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador have seen nearly 63,000 children flee to the United States and other neighboring countries, and according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, asylum applications in neighboring countries – the United States, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize – have risen 712% since 2009.

Rates of violence in the Northern Triangle are among the highest in the world. Guatemala and El Salvador have a murder rate more than 800% higher than that of the United States. Meanwhile, the murder rate in Honduras is close to 1,900% higher than that of the United States. Family violence is hidden or met with impunity. These forms of violence are key drivers for children and young people fleeing.⁵



HOMICIDE RATE: Homicides per 100,000 people



Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dashed lines represent undetermined boundaries. Source: UNODC Homicide Statistics (2013)



Photo by Meridith Kohut

Family members show the clothes, laid on the bed of late seven-year-old Kenneth Alejandro Castellano Raudales, who was found tortured and murdered by the Mara-18 gang, according to local police. In the same week, the gang killed Kenneth's 12-year-old brother, Anthony Castellano. The family lives in the La Pradera neighborhood, a Mara-18 gang stronghold in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. The police report that seven children were murdered by Mara-18 gang members in this neighborhood in May 2014.



Photo by Meridith Kohut

The Raudales family is shown in this May 2014 photo in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. They mourn the loss of two young sons, ages seven and 12, murdered in the same week. Honduras has the world's highest murder rate, and San Pedro Sula, with a homicide rate of 171 per 100,000 people in 2014, is the world's most violent city.

IMPUNITY, CORRUPTION AND MISMANAGEMENT CREATE DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

From 2011 through 2013, 48,947 people were killed in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. During the same period, there were only 2,295 homicide convictions.

The rate of impunity is 95%.

There is evidence that government officials have been co-opted and corrupted by highly organized criminals in many areas, creating “zones of impunity.” Protection mechanisms are weak at best and often ineffective.⁶

Impunity, corruption, and mismanagement have a devastating effect on children and youth, who are disproportionately affected by high rates of gang-related violence and violence within families. Many children have no place to go for help and few options except to risk a journey to the United States or other neighboring countries.

Key

- One trial with impunity
- One conviction



Suchit Chavez, and Avalos, Jessica. "Countries That Do Not Mourn Their Dead," *La Prensa Graphica* 30 March 2014; Online.



Photo by Katie Orlinsky

A woman and child are seen on a bus in Los Duraznales, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, in August 2014. According to the U.S. State Department, migrants transiting Guatemala en route to Mexico and the United States are subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor in Mexico, the United States, or Guatemala. Police, military and elected officials have been investigated for protecting venues where trafficking occurs, yet the government failed to prosecute or convict any officials for complicity.⁷



Photo by Katie Orlinsky

Miriam Gonzalez Ramirez and her baby Carlos Jair Gonzalez Ramirez arrive in Mexico after crossing between Guatemala and the Mexico border by boat in April 2015. For women and girls in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, the dangerous journey north is a calculated risk compared to living in fear of gang violence, which is compounded by high levels of domestic and sexual violence and coercion. Girls face gender discrimination in the justice system, along with weak rule of law, corruption, and lack of access to services – all of which pose tremendous barriers to their safety and security.

GIRLS ON THE RUN

More child refugees from Central America are now girls. The number of girls arriving unaccompanied to the United States increased a striking 77% from FY 2013 to FY 2014, while the number of boys increased just 8%.

Guatemala

Guatemalan children, especially girls, experience high levels of violence within families, including incest. Between 2003 and 2012, family-related violence grew by more than 500%; the largest proportion of its victims were female.

Honduras

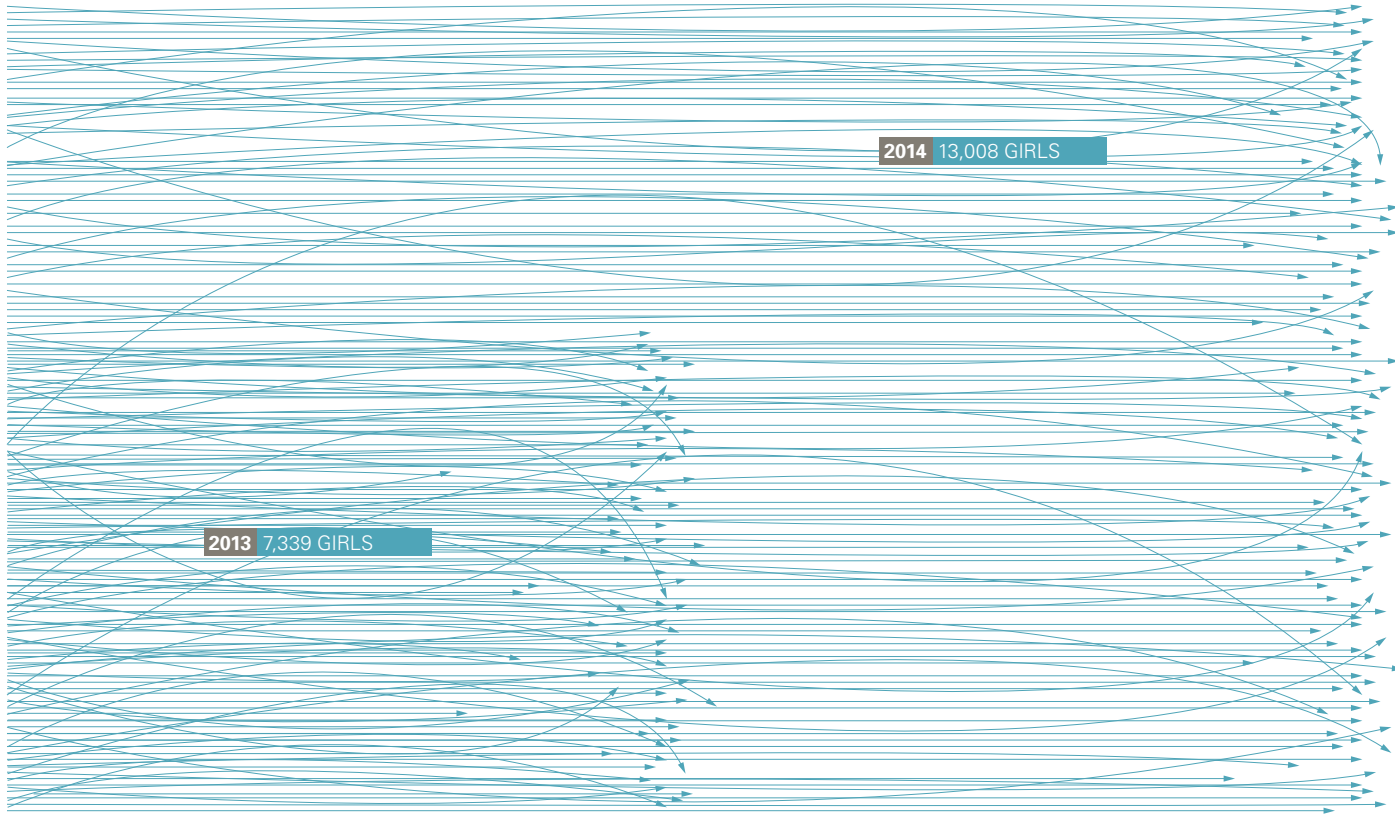
Between 2005 and 2013, there was a massive 263% increase in the number of gender-motivated killings of Honduran women and girls, many of whose bodies showed signs of sexual abuse or mutilation.

El Salvador

Girls in El Salvador endure frequent sexual abuse, much of it occurring within the home. Thirty-one percent of Salvadoran women ages 15 to 49 years old report that they had experienced physical abuse by another person before turning 18. Additionally, El Salvador has the world's highest rate of gender-related killings of women and girls. More than 25% of these killings are of girls under the age of 19.⁸

Key

→ 100 Girls



Childhood and Migration in Central and North America: Causes, Policies, Practices and Challenges, Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, University of California Hastings College of the Law and Justice and Human Rights Center, National University of Lanús, Argentina (2015)



Photo by Meridith Kohut

Two sisters and a friend from Honduras, ages 13, 14, and 16, arrive at a cattle ranch along the border between Guatemala and Mexico in July 2014, with their coyote, who is smuggling them to the United States to be reunited with their parents in Texas and California. The sisters have not seen their parents for six years, and their friend has not seen her parents for 12 years. While reunification with family members is a factor for many youth risking the dangerous journey to the United States, domestic violence, sexual violence, and other forms of gender-based violence – in addition to impunity for these crimes – are influencing the decision to flee.



Photo by Katie Orlinsky

Men, women, and children journeying through Mexico are shown at the Los 72 shelter in Tenosique, Mexico, in April 2015. This shelter, run by Catholic priests and volunteers, provides mats to sleep on, second-hand clothes, meals, basic medical treatment, and help in applying for immigration visas and refugee status for men, women, and children traveling north.



Photo by Kirsten Luce

The Anzalduas bridge in Mission, Texas, one of several legal crossing points over the Rio Grande and into Reynosa, Mexico, is shown in this June 2014 photo. The bridge is raised and the land underneath is a heavily popular crossing place for foot traffic. The border police consistently patrol this area, and there are several sensors installed to monitor activity. Nearby is Anzalduas park, a well-known meeting place for transporting people and drugs. The United States has stepped up border enforcement and supported Mexico to increase border security on their end. Treating this humanitarian crisis as an immigration and border issue diminished the number of unaccompanied children and families reaching our border since the peak in 2014 – but has not diminished the danger and vulnerability experienced by the children and families fleeing violence in their home countries.



Photo by Katie Orlinsky

Dayana Lizet Maldonado, 14, is shown in the Central American migrant shelter Los 72 in Tenosique, Mexico, in April 2015. If Dayana survives the treacherous journey, refuge is not guaranteed. The U.S. Border Patrol reports that approximately 84,000 children were apprehended at the Southwest border during the 2014 fiscal year and the first six months of the 2015 fiscal year. The nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute estimates that as of June 2015, over 15,000 of those children had been ordered removed.⁹



Photo by Kirsten Luce

Border Patrol agent Christopher Hamer waits with apprehended migrants for transport vehicles on a ranch in Brooks County, Texas. Migrants walking here are avoiding the checkpoint in Falfurrias, Texas, along Rt. 281 North (background) to San Antonio in February 2015.



Photo by Kirsten Luce

Men, women, and children are processed at the immigration processing center in Brooks County, Texas, in March 2015. Most migrants are from Central America and will eventually be deported to their home countries. The flow of unaccompanied children arriving at U.S. migration processing centers peaked in 2014. While many fewer children and families are arriving at these centers now, this does not mean fewer are fleeing danger in their home countries; instead, the lower numbers reflect the investment that the United States and Mexico have made in ensuring that refugees do not make it to our border.



Photo by Kirsten Luce

Women and children from Central America are apprehended just after crossing the Rio Grande into Texas, in June 2014. The vast majority had fled from Honduras. During the height of the humanitarian crisis in the Northern Triangle, thousands of women and children presented themselves to Border Patrol in hopes of gaining protection in the United States.



Photo by Kirsten Luce

Women and children from Central America are apprehended just after crossing the Rio Grande into Texas, in June 2014. In July 2014, Mexico's National Migration Institute began to intensify interdiction efforts in southern Mexico by carrying out more mobile highway checkpoints and raids. Human rights advocates have documented the use of brutal tactics by Mexican authorities in enforcement operations, including pushing individuals off moving trains.



Photo by Kirsten Luce

A woman sleeps in the processing center in Brooks County, Texas, in March 2015. Most detainees are from Central America, and most will eventually be deported. Casa Alianza, a Honduran non-profit organization that has been working with street children for more than two decades, operates the nation's only intake center for deported minors. The organization has documented many disturbing stories of children who were deported after attempting to flee Honduras, including one of a 14-year-old boy who was killed two weeks after he was returned to his community, and a girl who was shunned and excluded by teachers and neighbors because of the assumption that she was sexually promiscuous during her journey out of Honduras.



Photo by Kirsten Luce

A suspected migrant runs back to Miguel Aleman, Mexico, after being pursued by agents near Roma, Texas, in October 2014. This is called a "turnback." U.S. Border Patrol and other law enforcement cannot pursue migrants or smugglers back into Mexico.

Photo by Katie Orlinsky

Donovan Binicio Pineda Mendoza, 17, poses for a portrait at a migrant shelter in Mexico City, in April 2015. Donovan fled his hometown of Guatemala City, Guatemala, in February 2015.



“We had to leave because our lives were at risk. We were paying money to stop [the gangs] from killing us, and we could no longer pay. My mother, brother, and sister had to run for their lives. If I don’t receive refugee status I will have to stay here [in Mexico City] illegally; if I go back they will kill me, and force me to tell them where my family is and then they will kill them.”

Photo by Katie Orlinsky

Ana poses for a portrait at the Central American migrant shelter Los 72 in Tenosique, Mexico, in April 2015. Ana fled Honduras as an unaccompanied child. In Honduras, Ana was homeless and working on her own (as a clown) to support herself. Ana shared that she was recruited as a lookout for gangs and had to flee the country because of the gang's interest in her, and her inability to support herself.



Photo by Katie Orlinsky

Isaura Ortega and her baby Cafemin pose for a portrait at a migrant shelter in Mexico City, in April 2015. Isaura was forced to flee her home in Guatemala City because of threats of extreme violence. Isaura's family owned a grocery store in Guatemala City, and in 2008 criminals began to threaten the family. Gangs killed Isaura's sister and brother – and kidnapped another sister – because the family refused to pay an extortion fee. When family members fled to Mexico, Isaura stayed behind because she was pregnant, but she soon decided it was too dangerous and made the journey to join her family.



If these children and families survive the harrowing journey north, rife with violence, exploitation and trafficking into sex and labor, they will face a future that is uncertain at best.

Instead of battling a perceived immigration crisis at our border, the U.S. government should address the forced migration of children by investing in stronger child protection systems, by strengthening rule of law to reduce the climate of impunity for perpetrators of gang and family violence, and by fostering regional solutions that address the root causes of violence and insecurity driving children from their homes.

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Children on the Run*, UNHCR (2014).
- 2 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014*, U.S. Department of State (2015).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 *Children on the Run*, UNHCR (2014).
- 6 *Forced Displacement and Protection Needs produced by new forms of Violence and Criminality in Central America*, UNHCR (2012).
- 7 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, U.S. Department of State (2015).
- 8 *Childhood and Migration in Central and North America: Causes, Policies, Practices and Challenges*, Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, University of California Hastings College of Law and Justice and Human Rights Center, National University of Lanús, Argentina (2015).
- 9 Robbins, Liz. "Immigration Crisis Shifts from Border to Courts." *New York Times* 24 August 2015: A13. Print.

Children Don't Migrate, They Flee is a project of the Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking (ATEST) and Too Young to Wed (TYTW).

The Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking is a U.S.-based coalition that advocates for solutions to prevent and end all forms of human trafficking and modern slavery around the world. ATEST member organizations include: Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST), Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), ECPAT-USA, Free the Slaves, Futures Without Violence (FUTURES), International Justice Mission, National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA), National Network for Youth (NN4Y), Polaris, Safe Horizon, Solidarity Center, Verité, and Vital Voices Global Partnership. ATEST is a project of Humanity United. Learn more at endslaveryandtrafficking.org.

By providing visual evidence of the human rights challenges faced by women and girls around the world Too Young to Wed aims to amplify their courageous voices and build a global community dedicated to ending child, early, and forced marriage and supporting positive change for these girls. Learn more at tooyoungtowed.org.

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