

Sextortion: Experiences of 1,631 Victims

THE 31ST ANNUAL SAN DIEGO INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON CHILD AND FAMILY MALTREATMENT
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In partnership with Thorn

Sextortion: A Survey of Victims

- This research was conducted in partnership with Thorn (www.wearethorn.org), a non-profit dedicated to driving technological innovation to fight child sexual exploitation.
- *We are grateful to the many respondents who provided heartfelt descriptions of their experiences, Leah Treitman of Thorn who assisted with all aspects of the research, Facebook, Thorn's Technology Task Force and the Online Survey Advisory Board.*

Sextortion: Research Methods

Conducted an online survey

We recruited persons ages 18—25 who had been targets of threats to expose sexual images

90% of respondents (Rs) were recruited by advertisements on Facebook

Telephone interviews



Thorn

Sponsored ·

If a person has tried to make you do something by threatening to show a sexual image of you to someone or post it online, please help by taking this anonymous survey. We want to stop this crime!



Has someone threatened to show sexual images of you?

Take our anonymous survey and help other victims of sextortion.

WWW.WEARETHORN.ORG

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What is Sextortion?

“Has someone threatened to show a sexual image of you to another person or post it online in order to make you do something? By sexual image, we mean a picture or video (real or fake) that showed you nude, only partly clothed or in a sexual pose.”

Sextortion: Research Methods

- Convenience sample
- No information about prevalence
 - The survey asked about personal characteristics; how Rs knew perpetrators; sexual images; technology use; nature of threats; whether threats were carried out; responses to threats; disclosure and reporting; advice to victims
 - The survey included resources at both its introduction and its end for Rs who needed legal help or emotional support.

Characteristics of Rs (n=1,631)

GENDER

- 83% female
- 14% male
- 2% unspecified

AGE

- 39% were 18
- 35% were 19—21
- 23% were 22—25

HISPANIC, LATINO/A

- 13%

RACE

- 78% White
- 4% Black
- 3% Asian
- 7% Multi-racial/other
- 9% Declined to answer

Ages During Sextortion Incidents

- 46% of Rs were minors when incidents began
 - 3% 13 or younger
 - 10% 14-15
 - 33% 16-17
- 28% were older teens (ages 18 or 19)
- 16% were 20—22
- 6% were 23—25

Timing of Sextortion Incidents

- Most incidents happened in 2014 or 2015
 - 44% of incidents happened in 2015
 - 26% in 2014
- 15% in 2013
- 12% 2012 or earlier

67% of Rs said incidents had ended

- Incidents were ongoing for 11%
- 20% did not know if incident had ended

Two Contexts of Sextortion

Face-to-face (f2f) relationships—59% of cases, n=968

- Rs knew perpetrators in person

Online relationships—41% of cases, n=663

- Rs met perpetrators (Ps) online and did not know them in person

These two contexts showed substantial differences in dynamics, such as the speed at which incidents unfolded, the nature of threats, and how situations were, or were not, resolved.

Contexts of Sextortion

Both contexts mostly involved romantic attachments or sexual encounters with female victims and male perpetrators, but there was notable diversity

- Some Rs were male (14%)
- Demands were not always sexual
- Some perpetrators used deceptions to acquire images and threaten Rs

Contexts of Sextortion

"I was in a controlling, emotionally abusive relationship and when I finally had the strength to break away I was still trapped by his threats to put my nude pictures that were for his eyes only onto the internet for everyone to see." Female, f2f

Contexts of Sextortion

"The guy who had posted [the pictures] was constantly ... telling me that I was a terrible person for what I did to him – I supposedly led him on and made him think we would date after multiple years of friendship. I was completely unaware of his intentions and that he had gotten nudes from my cell phone without my permission."

Female, f2f

Contexts of Sextortion

"He messaged me, flirting with me. The boy in his profile picture was really hot, so I flirted back. Eventually I sent him nudes. An hour passed without a response from him, and then he revealed he was nothing he claimed to be. I asked him what he wanted and he said he wanted [sexual] favors. I told him to leave me alone and blocked him. He knew about another account I had however, and sent me more threats there... including an address to a motel near my house."

Male, online

Contexts of Sextortion

"He was choking a cat [on a video chat site] and told me if I didn't do as he said he would kill the cat. So I showed him my breast and he stopped hurting the cat. He then showed me the video he had of me showing my breast and said that if I leave he knows where I live and will post it to my Facebook page."

Female, online

Contexts of Sextortion

"A girl is jealous of me so she teamed up with my ex. She says he gave her my nudes. Then she said she was going to post them on the internet to embarrass me."

Female, online

How Ps Acquired Sexual Images

71% of Rs knowingly provided images to perpetrators

Of those

- 72% did so because they were in a wanted romantic or sexual relationship*
- 56% felt pressured, tricked, threatened or forced to provide images

*Multiple answers were possible

Wanted Romantic/sexual Relationship

- *"I was in love with him. We had been in a steady relationship for over a year." Female,, f2f*
- *"I was young, stupid, and horny. She seemed nice and offered to go on Skype and get naked." Male, online*
- *"I had sent the picture out when I just turned legal and thought the guy was a good guy. We never had sex or anything like that so I wanted to give him something to look at." Female, f2f*

Pressured, Tricked, Threatened

- *"My then-boyfriend demanded that I send nude photos of myself for him. He acted like I was crazy, prudish, and stupid for not sending photos and that it was my duty to send them."* *Female, f2f*
- *"I was desperate for friends and too naive to realize what I was doing. I didn't want to but I knew he would stop talking to me if I didn't."* *Female, online*
- *"I was younger and he was a college guy. I ... didn't want to seem like a baby."* *Male, f2f*

Other Ways Perpetrators Got Images

- Recorded webcam images without consent—18%*
- Recorded other ways without consent—12%
- Got images from other people—9%
 - Includes taking illicitly from cell phones
- Fabricated images—8%
- Hacked into devices or accounts—5%

*Multiple answers were possible

Content of Sexual Images

- 60% were sexually explicit
 - Sexual acts, like masturbation or with another person (29% of all Rs)
 - No sexual acts, but genitals (30%)
- No sexual acts or genitals but other nudity (22%)
- None of the above, but sexual poses in revealing clothing, like underwear (14%)

Content of Sexual Images

- *"He said he was going to post a video of me strip teasing". Female, online*
- *"I took my tank top off and let them see my bra."*
Female, online
- *"He made me send videos of myself masturbating."*
Female,, f2f
- *"There were photos of me sleeping...as well as videos of sexual intercourse that I wasn't aware of."*
Female, f2f

Origin and Nature of Sexual Images in Incident

	<u>All n=572 %</u>
R knowingly provided image to P	75
<u>R 1st gave sexual image to P because (n=431)</u>	
In a wanted romantic or sexual relationship with P	70
Pressured, tricked, threatened or forced to provide images	67
Expected to be paid for images	3
Thought would be used for modeling or acting ^c	2
<u>Other ways Ps acquired images</u>	
Recorded image of R without consent	23
Someone else gave image of R to P	11
Created a fake image	9
Hacked into a device or online account to acquire image	4
None of the above	50
<u>Image R was threatened with showed</u>	
Sexual acts, like masturbation or with another person	21
No sexual acts, but genitals	33
No sexual acts or genitals, but other nudity	23
Sexual poses in revealing clothing, like underwear	18

What Perpetrators Wanted

- Additional sexual images from R – 51%*
- For R to stay in/ return to a relationship – 42%
- Tell R how to look or what to do in images – 28%
- Meet R in person (usually for sexual activity) – 26%
- Meet R online for sexual activity – 24%
- Tell R to hurt themselves – 10%
- Blackmail R for money – 9%

*Multiple answers were possible

What Perpetrators Wanted

- *"...[He] told me to get back together with him because he loved me. Then he told me to send him a nude video or he was going to post pictures I had already sent him on Facebook." Female, f2f*
- *"[He threatened] to Photoshop my face onto other naked women's bodies if I didn't get on webcam with him and show him my tits." Female, online*
- *"Via cell phone he informed me that he had recorded previous consensual sexual acts we had engaged in and threatened to put it on the internet and send to my family/friends if I did not give him money." Female, f2f*

What Ps Threatened To Do

- Post images online – 65% of all Rs*
- Send to R's friends, acquaintances, others – 59%
- Send to or tell R's family about images – 46%
- Include R's name with posted image – 37%
- Impersonate Rs with fake accounts or photos – 24%
- Post other personal information about R with an image – 15%

*Multiple answers were possible

Content of Threats

"You've got 5 minutes to be nice and go on cam or I'll be uploading you to motherless.com and linking your social networking friends... I don't like being let down." Female, online

"Let's make a deal, I won't post them if you jack me off." Female, f2f

"Honey, I love you. Don't do this. You don't want me to talk with your friends, right? You would hate for them to see you like that right?" Female, f2f

"I have some lovely pictures of you. That thong is wonderful. I bet your mom and dad would like it too... They deserve to know just how much of a slut their little girl is." Female, f2f

What Ps Threatened To Do

- Get R in trouble at work or school – 38%*
- Stalk R in person – 31%
- Beat, rape, kill or otherwise physically harm – 26%
- Harm the R's family, friends or pets – 15%

*Multiple answers were possible

Why and How Perpetrators Made Threats

	<u>All n=572 %</u>
<u>What P demanded from R</u>	
Sexual pictures or videos of R	66
For R to stay in or go back to relationship with P	42
To look a certain way or do certain things in pictures	36
To meet R in person	22
To meet R online for sex	30
For R to hurt her- or himself	13
Sexual pictures or videos of someone else	7
Money	4
<u>R threats of online harm</u>	
Post sexual image of R online	65
Send or show image to friend or acquaintance of R or P	64
Send sexual image to R's family	47
Tag or include R's name with posted image	41
Create fake accounts or sexual images depicting R	26
Post other personal information about R with picture	14
<u>R threats of offline harm</u>	
Get R in trouble at school or work	40
Come after R or stalk R in person	34
Beat, rape, kill or otherwise physically hurt R	29
Harm R's family, friends or pets	14
None of the above	24

Duration of Threats

- Less than one week – 22%
- Between 1 and 2 weeks – 15%
- More than 2 weeks to 1 month – 13%
- More than 1 to 3 months – 14%
- More than 3 to 6 months – 9%
- More than 6 months – 22%

Duration of Threats

- *"...[A]t first I was scared and under his control. But then I owned up and said I would not be bothered if he leaked my nudes... and then after telling him I was calling the police... suddenly he backed down and stopped." Female, online*
- *"He got mad [after I refused to hook up with him] and said he would take the pictures to where I work... This was in 2014 and he stopped for about a year and 2 months and then [he] called me in the middle of the night and said the same thing." Female, online*
- *"After I ended it, he started stalking me both online and in person, and sending me threatening texts, calls, voicemails, messages, emails. This is still going on [two years later]." Female, f2f*

Ps carried out threats in 44% of cases.

Of those

- 62% stalked Rs with repeated, unwanted online or cell phone contact*
- 45% sent sexual images depicting R to people R knew
- 40% posted sexual images online
- 26% posted personal information about R with images
- 24% hacked into online accounts that belonged to R
- 15% created fake accounts that appeared to belong to Rs or fake photos that appeared to portray them

*Multiple answers were possible

Exposing Sexual Images

"[The images] were released to a porn site that specializes in photos of 'slutty girls' in your area code." Female, online

"[He] finally sent [the pictures] to people at my school, my dad, and my principal at school." Female, f2f

"He posted my nude photo on... Instagram and made me talk to him before he took it down. Then he kept reposting it on Instagram because I kept ignoring him." Male, f2f

"He posted sexual photos of me on a site that degrades exes and had random people message me on my Facebook asking for sexual favors. He posted my real name and age on the photos. Co-workers and friends were sent links." Female, online

Ps carried out threats in 44% of cases.

Of Perpetrators who carried out threats

- 41% stalked or harassed Rs in person*
- 37% got them in trouble at work or school or tried to
- 33% beat, raped or physically hurt them or tried to
- 12% harmed family, friends or pets or tried to
- 11% extorted money or tried to

*Multiple answers were possible

Violence

24% of all Rs said perpetrators committed acts of violence or tried to

"He was going to send [pictures of me] to all my friends and my family if I didn't agree to kiss him. We were in his car at night and he made me have sex with him. He was a lot bigger than me and I cried the whole time, but he yelled at me if I stopped kissing him while he was raping me. Then after it happened he used the pictures to keep me quiet, and he continued to threaten me." Female, f2f

Violence

In some cases, threats to expose images were part of an array of both threats and acts of violence

"When I tried to leave he would threaten to post unauthorized nude photos of me or he would kidnap my dog or threaten to call my boss and get me fired. He would key my car and punch windows. He tried to beat down my door when I would not let him into my apartment." Female, f2f

Consequences of Sextortion

"It was a very dark time. I almost didn't make it through it. It felt like I was being raped through a phone." Female, online

"It was humiliating, degrading. Well it's hard to explain. Heart wrenching? Like someone sucker punched you in the gut and twisted your organs in a blender?" Unspecified, f2f

"...I have my guard up with every guy I meet and talk to now... I get flashbacks of the guys in our class staring at me and grabbing my ass, boobs and thighs." Female, f2f

Consequences of Sextortion

- 41% of Rs lost a relationship with a friend, family member or partner*
- 24% saw a mental health or medical practitioner
- 12% moved to a new neighborhood, community or town
- 10% left/changed schools or had school problems
- 8% left or changed jobs or had job problems
- 34% had none of the above

*Multiple answers were possible

How Often Threats Were Carried Out

	<u>All n=572 %</u>
P carried out threats or otherwise harmed R	47
<u>How P carried out threats or harmed R online (n=270)</u>	
Stalked online (repeated unwanted online or cell phone contact)	72
Sent a sexual image of R to someone	49
Posted a sexual image of R online	38
Posted personal information about R online	26
Hacked into an account belonging to R	20
Created fake accounts or photos depicting R	17
Acquired personal information about R's family	13
None of the above	3
<u>How P carried out threats or harmed R offline (n=270)</u>	
Stalked or harassed R in-person	43
Got R in trouble at school or work	42
Beat, raped or physically hurt R	33
Harassed or harmed R's family, friends or pets	11
Extorted money from R's family or tried to	5.
None of the above	20

Impact on Respondents' Offline Life

All n=572 %

Lost relationship with friend or family member	46
Saw mental health or medical practitioner	29
Left or changed school or had school-related problem	14
Moved to new neighborhood, community, or town	10
Incurred financial costs	8
Left or changed job or had job-related problem	7

Sextortion in f2f relationships involved more serious threats/harms.

Threats lasting >6 months (26% versus 17%)*

Threats carried out (49% versus 37%)

- Online stalking (77% versus 60%)
- Offline stalking or harassment (52% versus 21%)
- Getting R in trouble at work/school (42% versus 26%)
- Physical harm or attempts (43% versus 13%)

*All significant at $p \leq .001$

F2f relationships involved more serious consequences.

Rs in f2f relationships were more likely to *

- Lose relationships (52% versus 25%)
- Move (16% versus 5%)
- Have problems at school (14% versus 5%)
- Have problems at work (11% versus 4%)

Rs in online relationships were more likely to have none of the consequences we asked about (47% versus 26%)

*All significant at $p \leq .001$

Case study 1: F2F force reconciliation (Female)

43

Meeting We were really close boyfriend and girlfriend. It was a great relationship until I told him we were going to break up because I just didn't feel the same and that's when he started threatening me. I would exchange pictures with him when we started going out. I didn't keep his and it didn't occur to me that he would do anything with them. I was okay with him having them because I trusted him. I felt very safe with him. Sometimes he was very possessive and tell me not to be friends with certain people.

Case study 1

44

Threats The threats went on for 2 or 3 weeks. I broke up with him and at first he threatened to kill himself. Then he started saying he would expose the images of me if I didn't go out with him or see him again. When I asked why he was doing his, he said because he loved me and he wanted me to be with him. He would just force me to hang out with him and I was so scared that he would expose them so that when we did spend time together, we were distant and he would get mad. I was upset and I thought my parents would be disappointed in me and I thought I wouldn't be accepted into a University. I was worried about how people would see me after seeing the images.

Case study 1

45

Disclosure Recently I opened up to a friend about it and then I decided to do this survey. She was telling me about how she wants to break up with her boyfriend and was scared he would do something bad so I told her my situation. I felt relieved because I hadn't told anybody and it was a secret buried and it was good to open up to somebody and talk to her because I was so ashamed about it. I thought she would judge me about it and she didn't and told me she exchanged photos too and that made me feel better. [48]

F2F romantic – images to force reconciliation

Case study 2: Online – hook up culture

(Female)

46

Meeting I made a post indirectly indicating I was looking for someone to come over and hook up. He asked "If I were to come over what would we do?" It wasn't threatening at first. I was looking for a sexual encounter. I go on this app to meet with people for sexual encounters. We exchanged pictures and it was normal first. I send out pictures occasionally and even though I know it's dangerous I do it anyway.

Case study 2

47

Threats The messages went on for a few hours and then I changed my mind about wanting to do a hook up so that's what triggered the threat. He said he would post the photos publicly if we did not meet. Meetme had my legal name so he could find me on Facebook if he wanted to and he said he would find my friends and send them the images. I was polite about it and asked him to please not do that. Days later, he messaged me a few more times trying to be nice and I just ignored it. I was really nervous and scared because there's a lot of people I don't want to see pictures of me or knowing I'm taking pictures. Eventually I didn't hear from him again. It makes me nervous not knowing (if he followed through with threats) but I feel like I would have found out. It's nerve racking but I'm ok about it.

Case study 2

48

Disclosure About two weeks later, I told one of my best friends because I needed to talk to someone. This friend knows I'm part of a hook up culture and worries about me a lot. I felt better having somebody else know but after talking with him it made me feel really nervous again.

Reporting After I talked with my friend, I reported it to Meetme. I didn't get a response. I was frustrated a bit not hearing a response but I was able to ignore him. I didn't report it right away because I wanted to deal with the situation but also I thought he would get mad and then post the pictures on Facebook. I didn't want him to know that I had reported him so I waited. [24]

Disclosure to friends/family/others

52% of Rs disclosed the sextortion to family members or friends. Of those

- 55% told an adult friend (18 or older)*
- 37% told a parent
- 35% told a friend who was younger than 18
- 17% told another adult family member
- 7% told someone else, for example a romantic partner

54% of those who disclosed did so within 1 week of being threatened

*Multiple answers were possible

Disclosure: Positive responses

43% of disclosing Rs said that the person they told did something that “helped to end this situation or make it easier.”

Family and friends

- Provided emotional support
- Helped insure physical safety
- Directly or indirectly confronted perpetrators
- Assisted in interactions with authorities
- Gave technical assistance

Disclosure: Positive responses

"My mom told me it wouldn't be the end of the world if it did happen and we would get through it." Female, online

"[My sister] found his Twitter and Instagram. She posted his comments to me, the harassment Twitter and his Twitter and Instagram on her Tumblr. It was reblogged over 2,000 times, and there were droves of people supporting me and helping me to report his harassment to Twitter and to have the pictures removed." Female,, online

"[My cousin] helped me create new accounts and get rid of contact with the person all together." Female,, online

Disclosure: Positive responses

- "My manager... excused my call-offs, made sure I got out of the building safely (and not alone) and sat down and talked to some other employees who had accepted friend requests from the fake profile in my name with the obscene photo as the profile picture." Female, f2f*
- "[My friend] had a mutual friend [with the P] delete the images from his phone while he was in the restroom." Female, f2f*
- "My therapist... gave me exercises to do to help keep my emotions more in check." Female, online*

Disclosure: Negative responses

But 18% of Rs who disclosed said the people they told did something to make the situation worse

- Blamed R for what happened
- Did not take the situation seriously
- Gave bad advice or did things to escalate threats
- Invaded the R's privacy
- Spread gossip

Disclosure: Negative responses

- "[My parents] told me I was a whore for doing anything like that online in the first place." Female, online*
- "There was a lot of slut shaming. I had my phone taken away from me and was punished for sending the image. I was made to feel ashamed of my sexuality and it made me sort of give up on myself." Female, f2f*

Disclosure: Negative Responses

- *"[My parents] read through everything and looked at the pictures to make sure they had the full story and to make sure I wasn't lying. It was a huge invasion of privacy and I still feel horrible knowing my parent saw those photos."* *Female, online*
- *"My friends just secretly tried to find the pictures on the Internet."* *Female, f2f*
- *"[My] 'bff' told many girls in my grade and it ended up all over Twitter and everyone was talking about it at school. It was humiliating."* *Female, f2f*

Failure to disclose

45% of Rs did not go the family or friends for help. Of those

- 77% were too ashamed or embarrassed*
- 55% thought they might get into trouble
- 48% thought they could handle it by themselves
- 28% did not think it would be helpful
- 22% were afraid the perpetrator would find out
- 16% said threats stopped before it got to that point
- 7% said it did not occur to them

*Multiple answers were possible

Reporting: Websites/Apps

21% of Rs had reported sextortion incidents to websites or apps

- Primarily when images were posted online

Many reporters were unhappy with responses

- Complicated reporting procedures
- Policies that allowed Ps to post images despite a R's objections
- Failure to respond effectively to complaints of online harassment

Reporting: Websites/Apps

"[Facebook] told me that they can untag me, but could not take down the image because it did not show my whole face (no proof it was actually me) and because... my private parts [were covered]." Female, f2f

"[Kik] told me to block him – even though he was making multiple accounts." Female, f2f

"It took me 2 hours to find where I had to write the complaint [to Snapchat]... They refused to help me at all. All they said was to block him." Female, f2f

16% reported to police.

Barriers to police action

- *"I was told there was nothing that could be done because I was over 18 years old when the photos were taken and they weren't my personal property because they were taken by my ex-boyfriend himself." Female, f2f*
- *"Police were unable to investigate unless threats of violence were made." Female, f2f*
- *"They wouldn't charge him because he was not blackmailing me for money." Female, f2f*
- *"I attempted to file a restraining order against the person, however because no physical abuse was involved the police could not grant one." Female, f2f*
- *"Since he had only threatened and I willingly sent the photos, there was, allegedly, nothing they could do." Female, online*

Advice from Respondents

Be realistic about the possible consequences of sending images.

- *"When you send those videos/pictures, make sure you know that it's possible that they'll end up on the internet." Female, 21, online*

Collect evidence about any threats and take safety measures against online intrusions and offline violence.

- *"Make sure you document EVERYTHING, [take] screen shots, get print outs of your phone activity... Look up your state laws against 'revenge porn' crimes, beat down the doors of the police station, find a victim advocate. It's better to try and fail, than wonder if someone may have been able to help you legally." Female, 22, f2f*

Tell family and friends so they can help you.

- *"[Just] tell a very trusted friend or family member. Much preferably, tell someone with a sex positive attitude who will not shame you or make things worse." Female, 17, online*

Advice from Respondents

Respond assertively to perpetrators.

- *"The person who is extorting you is struggling for power over you. The more upset or startled you become, the more likely it is that they will continue." Female, 22, f2f*

Blame perpetrators, not yourself.

- *"You trusted someone and they let you down. Don't blame yourself." Female, 17, f2f*

Have perspective about the situation.

- *"Although everyone and everything screams this is the end of the world, it is not. There are plenty of nudes of other women floating around... Your image will be forgotten." Female, 18, online*

Protect others from being victimized.

- *"The lack of support for people affected by 'revenge porn' is absolutely disgusting and the laws need to be fixed accordingly. If we all speak out, we can change things." Female, 17, online*

Implications

- Education starting in MS about relationship abuse
 - Incorporation of content into EB programs
- Conventional warnings about sexual images may not work
 - Need focus group and teen initiatives
- Help to anticipate shame as key element and provide framework for overcoming it
- Special support for sexual minority youth
- Bystander education and empowerment
- Parent sensitization?

Implications

- Sensitivity training for police and counselors
 - Train about what can be done for victims
 - Abandon scare about child porn prosecution of teens
 - Encourage non-judgmental stance
 - Abandon “teen stupidity”, “adolescent brain” derogation
 - Sexual image exchange is here to stay
 - Has adaptive functions in courtship environment
 - Harm minimization approach

Implications

- Technology industry responsibilities
- More education and information sites
- Make reporting easy
- Provide rapid and in person response
- Clear information about what sites can do
- Collaboration across sites and platforms
- Will technology provide fix?

Law reform

many victims.

Sextortion

brookings.edu/sexortion

Sextortion is a new cybercrime that occurs when offenders use personal information—often images stolen from a computer or obtained by hacking into a webcam—to force victims to engage in some form of sexual activity. Offenders frequently target multiple victims, a majority of whom are children under the age of 18. And it's on the rise. A new study from the Brookings Institution, which examines 78 recent cases, indicates that new laws are needed to specifically target this crime.



Who Are The Victims?

- 71%** of cases involve only victims under the age of 18
- 14%** of cases involve a mix of minor and adult victims
- 12%** of cases involve only adult victims

Nearly all adult victims are female, but both minor girls and boys are victimized.

Who Are The Perpetrators?

Every single prosecuted perpetrator is male. They include college students, a State Department employee, even fathers and step-fathers of their victims.

Sextortionists tend to be prolific repeat offenders. Among the cases we studied:

25 cases involved at least	13 cases involved at least	13 cases involved more than
10 victims	20 victims	100 victims

How Are Victims Targeted?



91% Social media manipulation is used in 91 percent of cases involving minor victims



43% Computer hacking is used in 43 percent of cases involving adults

Major Disparities in Sentencing of Sextortion Cases

Sentencing is particularly light when all victims are adults and in cases prosecuted at the state level.

Average sextortion case sentences			
state level	federal level	adult victims	minor victims
7.3 years	29 years	3.2 years	31 years
(minor and adult victims)		(federal level only)	

What Can Be Done?

Congress should adopt a federal law that identifies sextortion as a specific criminal offense with a reasonable sentencing range.

Raise awareness among parents, teens, and society as a whole.

Data related to sextortion crimes was derived from original analyses of all prosecuted cases; all cases found to fit the definition of sextortion. For more on the parameters used to define sextortion, the research methodology, and findings, visit: SEXORTION.brookings.edu, transcripts, and sample sexual violence.



Law reform

Major Disparities in Sentencing of Sextortion Cases

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Average sextortion case sentences



What Can Be Done?

Congress should adopt a **federal law** that identifies sextortion as a specific criminal offense with a reasonable sentencing range.

Raise awareness among parents, teens, and society as a whole.

Implications

- Model for social science
 - Get beyond the narrative based on news media on emerging risks, problems
 - Reveal complexity
 - Many accounts, relatively cheaply
 - Partnering with technology companies

Important limitations

- Not representative
- Over-represents most serious cases and most harmed victims
- May under-represent those who had positive outcomes
- May be unfair to police or tech companies
- Not a good method for projecting scope

Caution

- Alarmism about technology
- Alarmism about teen sexuality
 - Sexual assault is declining
 - Teen pregnancy is down
 - Multiple sexual partners down
 - Age at first intercourse is up
 - Teen dating violence is down
 - Peer victimization, bullying down

Reminders about Benefits of Tech

- Help-summoning
- Bystander mobilizing
- Proof providing, substantiation
- Information access
- Adds a layer of behavioral insulation
- Substitution for real world risk taking

Bottom Line

- Support victims and minimize harm, but it's not about evils of technology or stupidity of youth

Sextortion: Findings from an Online Survey of 1,631 Victims

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