

Sexual Extortion

DEFINITION

Sexual Extortion*

Sexual extortion, also called 'sextortion', is the blackmailing of a person with the help of (self-generated) images of that person in order to extort sexual favours, money, or other benefits from her/him under the threat of sharing the material beyond the consent of the depicted person (e.g. posting images on social media).

When carried out against children, sexual extortion involves a process whereby children or young people are coerced into continuing to produce sexual material and/or told to perform distressing acts under threat of exposure to others of the material. In some instances, the abuse spirals so out of control that victims have attempted to self-harm or commit suicide as the only way of escaping it.

*Definition derived from Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.

Criminal Offense

Sexual extortion is not explicitly criminalised in any of the relevant regional or international legal instruments on sexual exploitation of children.



However, article 21(1)(a-b) of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse criminalises the act of causing and coercing children to engage in 'child pornographic performances'. Article 23 of the same Convention covers the act of soliciting children to produce 'child pornography'. The act of engaging in sexual activities with a child is criminalised, where coercion, force or threats are present; when this person abuses a recognised position of trust, authority or influence over the child; or a particularly vulnerable situation of the child.

These articles could be interpreted to capture elements of sexual extortion.

In addition, the conventions that do criminalise the production, procuring, distribution or offering of child sexual abuse/exploitation material - i.e. CoE Convention on Cybercrime; CoE Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse; CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children (OPSC); African Union Cybercrime Convention -contain language that might capture elements of sexual extortion.

Offenders and Characteristics of Sexual Extortion

- Perpetrators often rely on a position of authority or a **perceived imbalance of power** rather than on physical violence or force to coerce a child into sexual favours or money or goods;
- The psychological coercion generally manifests with **threat of withholding certain benefits or threat of undesirable consequences** if demands are not met;
- The sexual component could involve a **perpetrator's demand** for any form of unwanted sexual activity, such as exposing private body parts, posing for sexual photographs, or submitting to sexual or physical abuse during a meeting offline;
- The sexual component can also be reflected in the **methods applied to obtain goods, services or money**. For example perpetrators gain access to self-generated sexual content** or compromising images of a victim and use this material to blackmail for money;
- Sexual extortion can involve the (threat of) dissemination of compromising images online or to peers. This in turn can result in **other negative consequences** like cyber bullying which further victimises or harms the child victim.

** Please see ECPAT SECO Manifestations factsheet - Sexting

What can you do?

- Advocate for stronger legal frameworks that specifically criminalise sexual extortion;
- Advocate for better resources for law enforcement to tackle the issue of sexual extortion;
- Advocate and cooperate with Internet Service Providers to prevent circulation of child sexual abuse/exploitation content online, to limit sexual extortion opportunities for perpetrators;
- Educate and raise awareness among children, parents and caregivers about the risks and potential consequences of sexual extortion.