



# **“Then ‘she’ took a screenshot and it all began”**

**A report on financial sextortion  
of children, with particular focus on  
the vulnerability of boys**

@ECPATSverige  
 Garvargatan 20  
 SE-112 21 Stockholm  
 +46 (0) 8 598 920 00  
 info@ecpat.se  
 www.ecpat.se  
 www.dittecpat.se  
 www.ecpat.se/hotline  
 www.ecpat.se/vuxenstod  
 ECPAT Sweden, 2023

#### Authors

Jonas Karlsson, Researcher, ECPAT Sweden  
 Nelly Corneteg, Child Rights Legal Officer, ECPAT Sweden

#### Research

Caroline Karlsson, Advisor, ECPAT Sweden

#### Layout

Anna Frödell, Graphic Designer, ECPAT Sweden

The images in this report are genre images, and the individuals pictured have no connection to the content or quotes in the report.

This report was translated with funding from Svenska Postkodlotteriet.



#### ECPAT Sweden

ECPAT Sweden is a children's rights organisation working to combat the sexual exploitation of children. We disseminate knowledge and take measures to prevent children and young people from being sexually abused. We conduct awareness-raising efforts and advocacy work directed at those in power, and we collaborate with public authorities, the business community and other organisations. Our operations are divided into three parts: the ECPAT Hotline, a website for the reporting of suspected sexual exploitation of children; Ditt ECPAT (Your ECPAT), a helpline for children and young people; and ECPAT Vuxenstöd (ECPAT Adult Support), a helpline for parents and other adults close to children.

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Our method and activities</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>What does the law say?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Financial sextortion of children – internationally and in Sweden</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The extent of financial sextortion of children</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Financial sextortion of boys</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Financial sextortion of girls</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Comparison of the vulnerability of boys and girls</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Children's voices</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Children with their own experiences</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Consequences for children who are victimised</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>The platforms' responsibility</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>The responsibility of financial institutions</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Analysis</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>ECPAT demands</b>	<b>34</b>

## Keywords

Sextortion

Sexual abuse

Financial sextortion

Financial sextortion of boys

Financially motivated sextortion

Sextortion

Extortion, threats, children and young people

# Foreword

**IN ECPAT SWEDEN'S (ECPAT)** work to combat the sexual exploitation of children, we have seen how an increasingly large proportion of the crimes have moved to the internet. In recent years, we have noted the emergence of a new type of crime that is largely targeted at teenage boys. It differs from the typical sexual crimes against children that we encounter in that the primary motive is financial gain for the perpetrator.

We have chosen to call this type of crime financial sextortion. The perpetrators often belong to organised crime, and children are now their new victims.

This report is based on experiences and knowledge gained from contacts with children via our helpline Ditt ECPAT, as well as the information that children and young people have shared with us in our annual online survey "Nude Online". In the 2022 edition of the survey, we included questions to children regarding financial sextortion.

Children and young people describe for us how the perpetrators are skilled at adapting their approach in order to both reach them and then manipulate them to send sexualised material. It is this material that then forms the basis for the extortion. By pretending to be girls of the same age, the perpetrators are able to persuade boys to send nude photos or videos of themselves. They then threaten to spread the photos or videos to the boys' contact network if they don't pay them money. The amounts can vary from one thousand to tens of thousands of Swedish kronor. We see that a different approach is employed when girls are targeted, whereby the perpetrators do not pressure the girls for money but rather sell the child sexual abuse material that has been documented.

In both cases, the perpetrators are aware of the children's sense of shame and fear when it comes to involving the adult world, which is a prerequisite for not being discovered.

When it comes to financial sextortion, the majority of the victims are boys. We can see

that the vulnerability of boys runs the risk of being marginalised or overlooked, as there is often a perception that only girls are victimised. There needs to be a norm shift when we talk about sexual crimes against children. The adult world's treatment and response – towards both boys and girls – needs to be characterised by respect, empathy and attentiveness, and we need to be inquisitive about what is happening in their everyday lives online. It is also important that we are clear about where the blame lies if something has happened, which is never with the child.

The whole of society also needs to take its responsibility to protect children from being subjected to this type of crime. Together, financial institutions, platforms and the judicial system have the tools required to protect children from financial sextortion. The internet must not be allowed to be a forum where there is freedom from liability and where perpetrators can subject children to crime without risk of consequences for their actions.

It is our hope that this report will serve to highlight the vulnerability of boys and girls to financial sextortion. We would like to thank all the children and young people who participated in our "Nude Online" survey in 2022 and who not only bravely shared their own experiences but also provided advice to other children who may encounter situations in which they are subjected to sextortion. You have made it possible for us to highlight the type of crime to which many children and young people are exposed, so that we can work to prevent more children from falling victim to this crime.



*A K B*

Anna Karin Hildingson Boqvist  
Secretary-General of ECPAT Sweden

**IN 2013, MEDIA REPORTS DREW attention to a 17-year-old boy in Great Britain who met what he thought was a girl of the same age online. They began a relationship, and the boy sent nude photos and videos of himself. The boy then received a message that his photos and videos would be made public if he did not pay money into an account. Less than an hour after the message was sent, the boy committed suicide. The British children's rights organisation NSPCC stated in connection with this incident that it was the first time they had heard of sextortion of a young person on the internet.<sup>1</sup> Since then, the sextortion of children for financial gain has increased and has led to the death of more children by way of suicide.**

<sup>1</sup> BBC, Teenager's death sparks cyber blackmailing probe, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-23712000> (retrieved 16/06/2023).

# Summary

**IN RECENT YEARS**, the internet has become a natural part of children's everyday life. This change has meant that children's lives online and offline largely lack clear boundaries. This means, among other things, that aspects regarded by an older generation as being part of non-digital life are not necessarily separated in the same way by children. This applies not least in the sphere of flirting, relationships, love and sex, where a digital contact can play a significant role in the life of a child. This also means that, these days, many aspects of children's sexual exploration have moved online. This change is generally perceived as positive by the children themselves, but it also entails new risks, not least the risk of children being exposed to crime when perpetrators spread nude images. The threat of spreading photos or videos, and the shaming and blaming that follows, means that nude images have become a potential weapon that can be used against children. We are now seeing a growing type of crime where this weapon is not used primarily for sexual purposes but rather to provide the perpetrator with financial gain.

This report is based on children's accounts of having been subjected to financial sextortion, by which we mean incidents of sexualised material depicting children being used to get the child to perform acts that provide the perpetrator with financial gain. It could be a case of extorting money from a child or subjecting a child to sexual abuse that is documented and then sold for profit. The main focus of this report is on situations in which a perpetrator gains access to nude images and then threatens to spread the images unless the child pays a sum of money to the extortionist. We have chosen to focus on this form of financial sextortion due to the fact that an increasing number of children have told us about their exposure to this specific type of crime via our Ditt ECPAT helpline and in our "Nude Online" survey. There is much to suggest that there has been a significant increase in this type of crime in recent years. We will also comparatively touch on other forms of sextortion

where the perpetrator has a financial incentive, but where girls are victimised to a greater extent than boys.

The cases of financial sextortion where a perpetrator extorts money from a child primarily involve boys, and this type of crime has increased in recent years. We have seen this both in our own contacts with children and in international reports. We are also seeing that the victims of such crime are getting younger and younger, sometimes as young as ten-year-olds. The extortionist demands payment from the child of thousands of Swedish kronor, and in a number of cases the boys who are blackmailed have suffered substantial financial losses and psychological suffering. In the United States and Great Britain, a number of suicides have also been linked to this type of crime, a development that has led to organisations such as the FBI and the Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P) drawing attention to children's exposure to this crime and warning potential victims.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the increase in the number of cases and the serious consequences, the vulnerability of boys to this crime is often overlooked or marginalised in the public debate, where focus is often placed on the vulnerability of girls. A question that the adult world should ask itself is why boys who are victims of sexual crimes are treated differently than girls. We see a similar tendency in children's responses, where boys are accused to a greater degree than girls of having played a part in their victimisation. In our report "Girls need to stop sending pictures"<sup>3</sup> from 2022, which focused on boys' behaviour on the internet, it emerged that there was a strong norm that boys were expected to be in control and that victimised boys were therefore viewed as "unmanly". This norm is mirrored by the adult world and creates a high threshold for boys to seek support. When they do, they often encounter an adult world that is lacking in understanding. This runs the risk of making victimised boys invisible and worsening their wellbeing.



**Despite the increase in the number of cases and the serious consequences, the vulnerability of boys to this crime is often overlooked or marginalised in the public debate, where focus is often placed on the vulnerability of girls.**

Financial sextortion is often initiated via the major social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram, where the perpetrators can reach a large number of children and map the children's contact network. The profits from the crimes are also often funnelled through financial institutions such as banks without being detected. It is clear that not enough is being done to protect children, which results in the crime being able to proceed. Platforms have a responsibility to protect children who use their services and to prevent and detect situations

in which their services are used to commit crimes against children. Financial institutions are also responsible for ensuring that their services are not misused, especially in relation to cases of financially motivated sextortion.

<sup>2</sup> See Canadian Centre for Child Protection, *An Analysis of Financial Sextortion Victim Posts Published on r/Sextortion*, 2022, p. 12, and Federal Bureau of Investigation, *FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes*, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes* – FBI, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> ECPAT Sweden, "Girls need to stop sending pictures" – A report on boys, nude images, relationships and age differences, 2021.

# Our method and activities

IN 2022, ECPAT CARRIED OUT a survey, Nude Online, aimed at children in order to examine children's perceptions and experiences of nude images, grey areas and sexual crimes online and offline. Children were directed to the survey through an information campaign on Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram for a few days in the spring of 2022. The participants in the survey were between 10 and 17 years old (children aged 10–12 use social media even though the age limit for these platforms is 13). The survey consisted of a number of vignettes or stories for the children to consider. The stories were based on real events that other children had told us about. When the children took the survey, they were randomly directed to different stories, and a total of 1,297 children aged 13–17 responded to the story of a boy who was subjected to sextortion. Of these respondents, 704 were girls and 593 were boys. In this report we have looked at the responses, experiences and advice that the children shared, and the quotes that appear in the report come from the survey responses to this story. The children were also given the opportunity to share their own experiences via free-form text responses, which a large number of children chose to do.<sup>4</sup>

We also collected information from our Ditt ECPAT helpline. Children under the age of 18 can contact Ditt ECPAT via chat, email or telephone in matters relating to sexual abuse and exploitation. The helpline is manned exclusively by qualified advisors, and the children have the right to remain anonymous. This right of anonymity means that we do not know who the child is unless he or she voluntarily shares such information. However, the children are informed that certain parts of what they tell us may be used in other contexts, with the aim of making a positive difference to other children who find themselves in similar situations. No quotes or conversations from the helpline have been used in this report, only trends or patterns that our advisors have identified in relation to this type of crime.

When we use the term “nude images” in this report, we are referring to photos or videos that depict



completely or partially naked children, or sexualised photos or videos that children have taken of themselves either voluntarily or under threat and coercion. The term “nude images” thus includes both still images (e.g. photos) and moving images (e.g. videos).

The “Swedish Financial Coalition against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children” was started in 2007, and ECPAT took over the coordination responsibility from the Swedish Bankers’ Association in 2020. The purpose of the coalition is to jointly contribute to the impediment and prevention of payments relating to documented sexual abuse of children. In the work behind the production of this report, we sent questions regarding financial sextortion to fourteen of the coalition members. The aim was to obtain more information about how they work to protect children who use their payment services. Two out of fourteen chose to answer our questions anonymously.

We also sent questions to all social media platforms where we have seen that children have been subjected to financial sextortion. One platform responded. Neither the platform nor the financial institutions wanted to participate in this report by name.

<sup>4</sup> For more information about our questionnaire-based survey “Nude Online”, please see ECPAT Sweden’s method handbook. Link: [ECPAT’s Method Handbook: “Children as experts” – ECPAT Sweden.](#)

# What does the law say?

A child who has been subjected to sextortion has not committed a crime when the child chose to send a nude image of himself or herself in a context of consent. Threatening or blackmailing another person with the threat of spreading their naked images without consent is, however, unlawful. In this section we address the crimes that may be applicable in connection with the sextortion of children. Please note that the explanations provided below represent a non-exhaustive summary of various crimes relating to sextortion. All crimes described below include imprisonment in the range of potential punishment.

## Making an unlawful threat

(chapter 4, section 5 of the Swedish Criminal Code)

Making an unlawful threat is a crime that involves someone behaving threateningly in a manner that causes the threatened person to fear for their own or someone else’s life or safety. It must involve a threat to commit a crime. Threatening someone with the spreading of their images is an example of an act that may constitute the crime of making an unlawful threat.

We have also spoken to children who have told us that the perpetrator has said that they will hurt or kill a family member if the child tells the police, for example, which is also an example of an act that may constitute the crime of making an unlawful threat.

## Unlawful coercion

(chapter 4, section 4 of the Swedish Criminal Code)

The crime of unlawful coercion involves forcing a person to do something, or to refrain from doing something, by means of abuse or the threat of committing another crime. It can also involve a threat to indict or report someone for a crime without the existence of grounds for such indictment or report.

Coercing a person to perform acts under the threat of spreading their images is an

example of an act that may constitute the crime of unlawful coercion. The same applies to the act of threatening to spread the person’s images if he or she does not send more images.

## Extortion

(chapter 9, section 4 of the Swedish Criminal Code)

The crime of extortion involves the use of unlawful coercion to get another person to do something or refrain from doing something. This must lead to financial gain for the perpetrator and loss/damage for the victim.

Forcing someone to make payment by threatening to spread their naked images unless they do so, and where the victim does actually make payment, is an example of an act that may constitute the crime of extortion.

## Exploitation of a child for sexual posing

(chapter 6, section 8 of the Swedish Criminal Code)

The crime of exploiting a child for sexual posing involves a person promoting the performance of or participation in sexual posing by a child, or exploiting (watching is sufficient to constitute exploitation) the performance of or participation in sexual posing by a child. If the child is over 15 years of age, it is a requirement that

the act is likely to harm the child’s health or development, which is typically the case if the act is performed in exchange for payment. Getting a child to send a nude image is an example of an act that may constitute the crime of exploitation of a child for sexual posing.

## Child pornography offence

(chapter 16, section 10 a of the Swedish Criminal Code)

In principle all acts involving the handling of child sexual abuse material – referred to in the Swedish Penal Code as child pornography – are unlawful. This means that it is illegal to, for example, produce, possess, disseminate or look at such material. In this context the term “material” includes photographs and videos, while the term “child” refers to a person whose pubertal development is not complete, or where it is apparent from the image or video and the circumstances surrounding it that the person is under the age of 18. Material is considered to be documented sexual abuse (child pornographic material) if, for example, it depicts sexual abuse of a child, has a focus on a child’s genitalia or otherwise has a sexual theme.

Downloading and possessing documented sexual abuse of a child is an example of an act that may constitute a child pornography offence.





# Financial sextortion of children

## – internationally and in Sweden

In order to gain an understanding of financial sextortion of boys, our aim with this part of the report, based on previous research, international reporting and our contacts with children, is to shed light on the prevalence of this type of crime, what the perpetrators' approach looks like, and how the vulnerability to such crime differs between boys and girls.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. J. Wolak, J.D., D. Finkelhor, Ph.D., W. Walsh, Ph.D., and L. Treitman, Sextortion of Minors: Characteristics and Dynamics, 2017, and C. Cross, K. Holt & R. L. O'Malley, "If U Don't Pay they will Share the Pics": Explor-

ing Sextortion in the Context of Romance Fraud, 2022.  
<sup>6</sup> J. W. Patchin & S. Hinduja, Sextortion Among Adolescents: Results from a National Survey of U.S. Youth, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Centre for Child Protection, An Analysis of Financial Sextortion Victim Posts Published on r/Sextortion, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Reddit.com/r/Sextortion.

## The extent of financial sextortion of children

**THE EXISTING RESEARCH** on sextortion is limited, especially with regard to children as the victims. Some research was done in the mid-2010s, but for the purposes of this report it is too outdated to be relevant given that the presence and behaviour of children on the internet is constantly changing. This also applies to the approach adopted by perpetrators when they subject children to abuse online. The research that exists is in most cases based on adults' experiences of having been subjected to sextortion as children or as adults.<sup>5</sup> In a report by Justin W. Patchin and Sameer Hinduja based on a survey conducted in 2016 with young people in the United States, it emerged that sex-

ortion mainly occurred in a context of existing friendships or existing romantic relationships. An exception was the cases concerning financial sextortion, which mainly involved men and where the perpetrator was more often unknown to the victim.<sup>6</sup> This is confirmed by surveys concerning sextortion for sexual purposes that were carried out later.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection (C3P) released a report on financially motivated sextortion in November 2022.<sup>7</sup> In the report, they analysed one of the largest discussions about sextortion (referred to as sextortion in the discussion thread) on the forum Reddit.<sup>8</sup>



**In research there is also some support for the finding that perpetrators who have previously engaged in romance scams have changed their approach and are using financially motivated sextortion as an additional element.**

C3P coded official threads published from July 2022 to September 2022 and used these to obtain data on aspects such as the types of platforms and payment methods that were used. They also looked at 478 narrative stories from victims, which were published on the forum between 10 June 2022 and 10 August 2022. These were coded manually to obtain data on demographics, platforms and the approach used by the extortionist. The posts were analysed qualitatively, which provided further insight into financially motivated sextortion.<sup>9</sup> From the material, C3P was able to see that, in the cases where the gender and age of the victim were identifiable, boys and young men were significantly overrepresented and 40 percent were children under the age of 18.<sup>10</sup>

In December 2022, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Homeland Security Investigation (HSI) and the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) issued a national alert in the United States regarding an increase in crimes against children and young people where they are extorted for money in order to prevent their nude images from being spread. Until mid-December 2022 there had been around 7,000 reports filed with American police authorities concerning financial sextortion of minors. These 7,000 reports resulted in around 3,000 victims of crime. Of these victims, more than a dozen had committed suicide. The FBI describes the cases in the same way as C3P does in its report. The vast majority of the victims were boys between the ages of 14 and 17, but the FBI interviewed victims as

young as 10. Other than age, the FBI does not provide any additional information on which boys are subjected to this type of crime.<sup>11</sup>

The FBI states that these crimes are increasing drastically, but that there may be a significant dark figure of crime due to the fact that many victims either do not want to or are afraid to reveal what they have experienced. The FBI sees that these crimes take place on social media, gaming sites or chat sites where children and young people feel safe and comfortable. The perpetrators create fake accounts on these sites, where they pretend to be girls or women in order to then target boys.<sup>12</sup>

In a survey based on perpetrators who had committed sextortion, four types of perpetrators could be identified. One of these categories consists of perpetrators who target boys or young men and have financial gain as the motive for the extortion. These perpetrators have links to international organised crime.<sup>13</sup> Internationally we are seeing more and more reports of an increase in this type of perpetrator. In these cases, the perpetrators have been able to be traced to internationally organised leagues based in countries such as Ivory Coast, Morocco, the Philippines and Nigeria.<sup>14</sup> In research there is also some support for the finding that perpetrators who have previously engaged in romance scams have changed their approach and are using financially motivated sextortion.<sup>15</sup> Romance scams are scams in which a perpetrator initiates a romantic relationship with someone with the aim of deceiving that person for monetary gain.



A common factor between the crimes of romance scams and financially motivated sextortion is the approach employed, whereby the perpetrators use manipulation to gain the victim's trust before commencing to exploit the victim for financial gain. In the case of romance scams the international aspect is also apparent, as the perpetrators and victims are usually in different countries.

The nude images that the perpetrators send to the victim do not necessarily have to be nude images of real children. Perpetrators may use more or less technically developed tools such as manipulating images by combining a child's face with a naked

body, or through the use of artificial intelligence (AI). With the help of AI, perpetrators have been able to use normal images of the victim to re-generate them into sexualised material.<sup>16</sup> This entails a shift in the approach employed, as perpetrators who use this method do not need to gain the victim's trust in order to obtain images that can be used for extortion at a later stage. Via the ECPAT Hotline, which is a website where members of the public can submit tips about all forms of sexual exploitation of children, we have been able to see an increase in the prevalence of AI-generated material. Even in these cases, real children have been used in the generation of the images.

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Centre for Child Protection, An Analysis of Financial Sextortion Victim Posts Published on r/ Sextortion, 2022, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Canadian Centre for Child Protection, An Analysis of Financial Sextortion Victim Posts Published on r/ Sextortion, 2022, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI and Partners

Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes – FBI, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes, Federal Bureau of Investigation,

FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes – FBI, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> R. L. O'Malley & K. Holt, Cyber Sextortion: An Exploratory Analysis of Different Perpetrators Engaging in a Similar Crime. 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial

Sextortion Schemes, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes – FBI, 2022, and European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, Online Sexual Coercion and Extortion as a form of Crime Affecting Children – Law Enforcement

Perspective, 2017, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. M. Whitty, The Scammers Persuasive Techniques Model: Development of a stage model to explain the online dating romance scam, 2013, and C. Cross, K. Holt & R. L. O'Malley, "If U Don't Pay they will Share the Pics": Exploring Sextortion in the Context of

Romance Fraud, 2022.

<sup>16</sup> See Federal Bureau of Investigation, Malicious Actors Manipulating Photos and Videos to Create Explicit Content and Sextortion Schemes, Malicious Actors Manipulating Photos and Videos to Create Explicit Content and Sextortion Schemes (ic3.gov), 2023.





**One thing that is apparent from our contact with boys via our helpline is that things often proceed quickly from the initiation of the first contact to the commencement of the extortion. We also see that, prior to the crime, the boys had a high level of confidence in their own ability to assess the profile as “genuine”, and that they viewed the sending of nude images of themselves as low risk.**

## Financial sextortion of boys

**WHEN IT COMES TO** sextortion of boys, we have been able to see via our Ditt ECPAT helpline that the most common motive is financial gain. The boys who fall victim to this type of crime are threatened with the dissemination of nude photos or videos if the boy does not pay the perpetrator. Since our helpline started in 2020, we have had contact with a number of boys and young men who have been subjected to financially motivated sextortion. Apart from age there do not seem to be any common denominators between boys who are subjected to this type of crime. This suggests that the perpetrators make contact with many children rather than seeking out children who are perceived as particularly vulnerable to this type of crime. However, the approach employed by the perpetrators does show a greater degree of commonality than what we see in relation to other sexual crimes against children on the internet.

One thing that is apparent from our contact with boys via our helpline is that things often proceed quickly from the initiation of the first contact to the commencement of the extortion. We also see that, prior to the crime, the boys had a high

level of confidence in their own ability to assess the profile as “genuine”, and that they viewed the sending of nude images of themselves as low risk. They generally seem to have a greater propensity for risk-taking than girls of the same age who send similar material. Boys rarely anonymise the images and often send images shortly after a first contact.

Upon initial contact, the boys say that they are often instructed to make a payment of between one thousand and three thousand Swedish kronor. If the boys pay, new demands for payment follow, and we have encountered boys who have paid tens of thousands of Swedish kronor to the perpetrators. In cases where the boys state that they are unable to pay the original amount, the perpetrators sometimes lower their demands. Based on what the boys tell us, we can see that, in many cases, the perpetrators use international payment methods, and in the cases where we know the language in which the communication takes place, it is often English. This provides an indication that the perpetrators are not domestic (i.e. based in Sweden) in these cases, which is consistent with international reports.

# Financial sextortion of boys

The timeline below is based on boys' descriptions of the process involved when they have been subjected to financial sextortion.

**1** The first contact occurs on one of the major social media platforms, usually Snapchat or Instagram.



**3** The conversation takes place in English.

**5** The perpetrator persuades the boy to move the communication to another platform.



**4** The perpetrator appears to be sexually interested in the boy. Encourages the exchange of facial images.



**6** At an early stage, the perpetrator sends nude material depicting a girl, young woman or boy that matches the images on the social media platform.

**7** After sending this material, the perpetrator begins to persuade the boy to send nude images of himself. The boys describe this part of the process in terms of the perpetrators often nagging and really pressuring the boys to send the images, even though, from a purely legal perspective, the boys send the images voluntarily.



**8** Once the boy has sent the requested material, the perpetrator immediately sends a message in which it is stated that the perpetrator will send the material to the boy's contacts on the platform on which the perpetrator initiated the contact, if the boy does not pay a sum of money. Screenshots of contact lists are often attached to reinforce the threat. In cases where the boy and the perpetrator are of the same gender and the child has not told his family and friends that he is gay, this is also used as a means of coercion to get the child to pay.

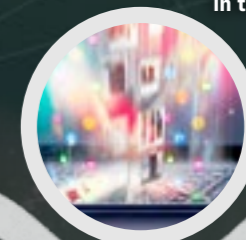
**9** The boy is instructed to make payment via gift vouchers on e.g. Amazon, via payment services such as PayPal or with cryptocurrency. It is often stated that the transfer must be made very quickly to avoid dissemination of the images.



**10** If the boy pays the requested amount, new demands for payment are sent. The children receive demands totalling thousands of Swedish kronor.



**11** If the boy does not pay – or is eventually unable to pay any more – the images are often spread in the manner threatened.



## Financial sextortion of girls

**A NUMBER OF GIRLS** have been subjected to financial sextortion. The girls are between the ages of 13 and 17. The majority of girls who contact our Ditt ECPAT helpline are being subjected to extortion for reasons other than financial gain for the perpetrator. In the girls' cases, the perpetrator wants more (and more explicit) sexual material or sexual encounters. Girls and women are also subjected to sextortion to a greater extent by former partners, whose motive for the sextortion is a desire for control over the victim.<sup>17</sup> Other motives for the sextortion may include revenge, gossip or a desire to gain a higher status among other guys.

The girls who have been subjected to financial sextortion have to a greater degree been subjected to this crime by people they already knew. In our contacts with girls it has emerged, for example, that they have been contacted both on the internet and outdoors by men who have asked if they would like to work as models. Like the boys, the girls state that the people who contact them often communicate in English and are very persuasive. The girls are offered payment of amounts ranging from a couple of thousand Swedish kronor up to ten thousand per occasion. When the girls have accepted the offer and have received payment and it is time for them to be photographed, it emerges that the contact person has promised one or more perpetrators the opportunity to exploit the girls sexually and that the abuse will be documented. The images will then be sold on the internet via special sites. The girls often receive large amounts of money in payment, as much as hundreds of thousands of Swedish kronor, and the girls who have agreed to participate need to sign a "contract" with the man/men who contacted them.

Via our helpline the girls describe how, when they arrive for the actual recording session or photo shoot, there have been elements of violence and

coercion, and it has turned out that there are a number of male perpetrators who intend to exploit the girl sexually on the same occasion. When the girls say that they want to stop, they are pressured by the man/men who contacted them with reference to the contract and the claim that it would be illegal for the girls to breach the contract. The man/men also threaten the girls and the girls' family with violence and say that there are people in the United States who will make sure that the threats are carried out if the girls report the matter to the police. Girls who have been subjected to this type of abuse and sextortion are often afraid and do not want to report the matter to the police, partly out of fear that the threats will be carried out, and partly because they are ashamed of having signed the modelling contract and do not want their parents to find out about it.

There are also girls who contact us because they have been gang raped by members of criminal gangs, who have then used the gang rape as a means of coercion to get the girls to hide drugs or perform other services. It is not always entirely clear what connection the perpetrators actually have with criminal gangs, and an alleged association with a criminal gang is used to intimidate the victim into silence. In cases involving drugs, however, the gang connection is clear. The coercion used in these cases often involves threats of new incidents of abuse or that the first incident of abuse has been documented and the material will be spread if the girls refuse. These girls state that they are afraid and do not want to report the matter to the police due to fear of reprisals from the gang that is blackmailing them. We have also received information from the police that boys are tricked into sending nude images to girls or women who are in the gang environment, and that threats of spreading the images are then made in order to persuade the boys to perform the same type of services for the gangs as the victimised girls.

**The girls who have been subjected to financial sextortion have to a greater degree been subjected to this crime by people they already knew.**

"THEN 'SHE' TOOK A SCREENSHOT AND IT ALL BEGAN"



<sup>17</sup> R. L. O'Malley & K. Holt, *Cyber Sextortion: An Exploratory Analysis of Different Perpetrators Engaging in a Similar Crime*, 2020.

## Comparison of the vulnerability of boys and girls

Through our contacts with children, we can see that there are certain similarities when it comes to sextortion of boys and girls. For example, the children are contacted by a person who pretends to be someone they are not, and the perpetrator uses child sexual abuse material or sexualised material depicting the child in order to obtain financial gain.

We also see that the sense of shame felt by the children entails a high threshold that prevents them from telling others about their experiences or seeking support.

**ONE DIFFERENCE IN THE** vulnerability of boys and girls in relation to financial sextortion has to do with the issue of where the financial gain occurs. In the case of the boys, it is the children themselves who pay money to the extortionist in an attempt to prevent nude images of themselves being spread to their parents, partner (where applicable), friends and classmates. In the case of the girls, it is often physical abuse that is documented, after which the material is sold to others. Even though the perpetrators may not have their own sexual interest in material depicting abuse of the girls, they are motivated

by the fact that others have such an interest and are prepared to pay for the material. The victimised girls may also receive threats of dissemination of the material, although in such cases the threats are not made for the purpose of extorting money from them but rather to get them to participate in new incidents of abuse that are documented, with subsequent sale of the new material to others. In the case of both the girls and the boys, they have been subjected to a sexual crime that has been documented in different ways and is now used as a weapon with which to threaten the child. When it comes to the girls, the extortionists also use

threats of violence against them or their family members, in order to force them to produce more material and/or to ensure that they don't tell anyone about the crime to which they have been subjected. We have seen that if the boys do not comply with the extortionists' demands, the threats may be carried out, something that has not come to our knowledge in the case of the girls. In some cases, it seems that the material depicting the boys is also sold to others and thus reaches a wider dissemination on the internet than merely the boys' own network, which also entails a risk of these boys being subjected to new crimes.

In some of the contacts it has also emerged that there may be links to organised crime in Sweden or internationally. We also see that the sense of shame felt by the children entails a high threshold that prevents them from telling others about their experiences or seeking support. The extortionists manipulate the children into feeling that they have played a part in their victimisation, and this adds an additional layer of shame and guilt. It is often even more difficult to get the children to shed themselves of these negative perceptions when they have been subjected to financial sextortion than is the case for other types of online sexual crime.

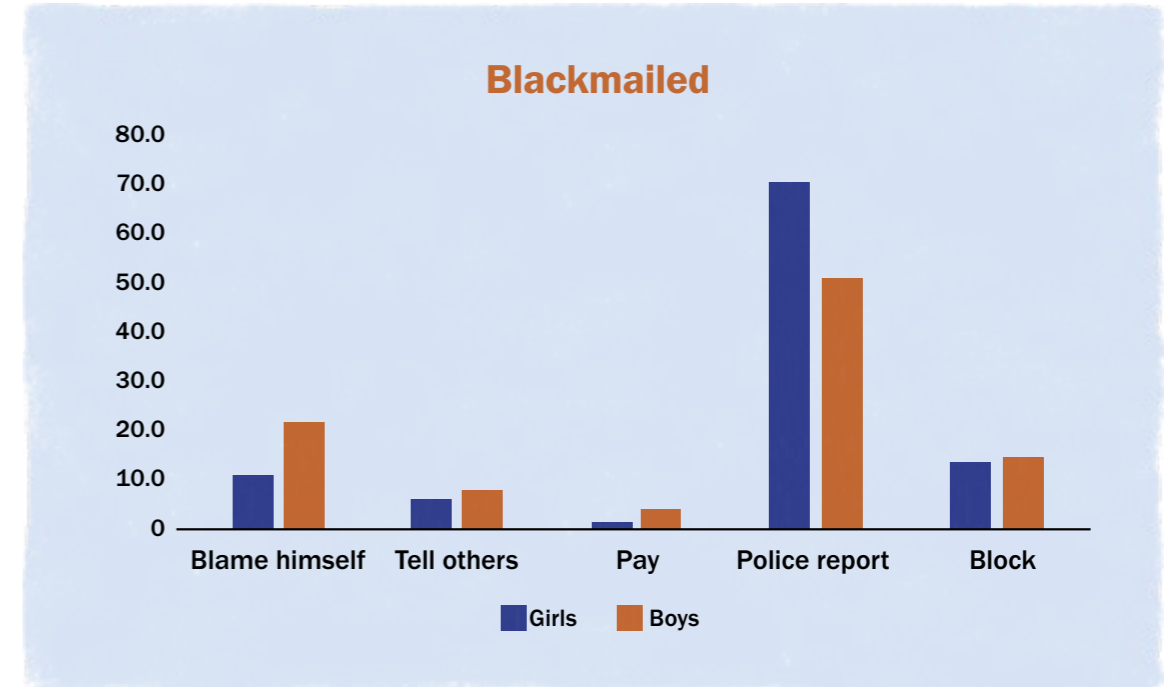
# Children's voices

**BOYS ACCOUNT FOR** a large majority of the children we encounter in the course of our activities who have been subjected to financial sextortion. In 2022, in order to gain more insight into the vulnerability of boys to this type of sexual crime, we chose to create a vignette on this theme in our annual survey "Nude Online". The vignette consisted of a short anonymised story that was inspired by the contacts we had with children concerning financial sextortion. The purpose of the vignette was partly to find out how many children in the survey had experienced similar situations, and partly to explore children's attitudes to this type of crime. We also wanted to find out which strategies the children would suggest and obtain more knowledge about children's vulnerability to crime via any free-form text responses that the children may choose to provide. The children, who were between the ages of 13 and 17, were then asked to state whether they had experienced anything that reminded them of the story in the vignette. The vignette, along with the response options provided in the survey, are presented below.



**Isak is 16, and one evening a girl adds him on Snap (Snapchat). They start chatting with each other, and she seems nice. She asks Isak what his name is and if she can receive a picture of his face. After a while she also asks if he could send nudes. Isak thinks that it sounds quite exciting to do this with what seems to be a nice girl. Isak doesn't have time at the moment but he answers "maybe". She then sends a nude of herself and asks again a number of times, and finally he sends a picture. She compliments Isak on his picture and asks him to send more, which he does. Suddenly she becomes threatening. It turns out that she has saved everything that Isak has sent, even though he didn't receive any notifications. She sends him screenshots of the pictures, and the worst thing is that his clothes in the facial picture are the same as in a nude. She says that she will send the pictures to everyone on his contact list if he doesn't pay her 3,000 kronor.**

- 1** I think he's only got himself to blame for not realising that something is dodgy if an unknown girl adds him and then sends nudes straight away.
- 2** I think it's a terrible situation and that he has to tell everyone what has happened. Embarrassing, but not much that can be done about it.
- 3** I think it's probably best that he pays if he has the money. At least he will have learnt a lesson for the future.
- 4** I think he has to report it to the police. The picture might get spread, but it's still the best thing he can do.
- 5** I think it's just an empty threat. Block her and hope for the best!



**IF WE LOOK AT THE** children's responses, the most common response is that Isak should report the incident to the police, even if this means a risk of the picture being spread. Seven out of ten girls think that this is the best option, as opposed to every other boy. The second most common response among boys (just over one in five) is that Isak only has himself to blame for not realising that there was something strange about the contact. Less than one in ten girls think the same. Just over one in ten boys and girls think that Isak should block the contact and hope for the best. Few children think that Isak should tell others what has happened, and even fewer think that he should pay the blackmailer.

The thing that stands out in comparison to similar stories involving the extortion of girls for nude images or sex is that more boys feel that Isak only has himself to blame than is the case for girls in similar stories. In the free-form text responses it also becomes apparent that, while many of the children – both boys and girls – can agree that Isak should report the incident to the police, block the contact or tell others what has happened, at the same time they also feel that he bears part of the responsibility for having fallen victim to the scam. The main reason given by the children is that Isak

should have become suspicious when a girl took the initiative to share nude photos so shortly after the contact was established.

*"If I was in that situation, I'd probably feel like I should blame myself for ending up there after only snapping with the person for a short while. You should perhaps wait and see what sort of person you're dealing with. So I think Isak probably has to blame himself a little. However, I wouldn't pay – she'll still have the pictures and can then just demand more money. Better to just take the embarrassment and tell it like it is – at the end of the day she's the one who will look stupid when everyone has heard the full story!"* (Girl, 17)

As we can see from the quote below, the children place the blame on the victim by stating that if he had not sent the pictures then nothing would have happened to him.

*"If some random girl adds you and then suddenly wants to swap pictures, I'd think it was very dodgy. If they'd been chatting for longer and had then started swapping pictures it wouldn't have been as strange, but I think the incident should be reported to the police, but also that he needs to realise that you shouldn't send private pictures to strangers anyway. He's the victim in this, but he didn't need to be."* (Boy, 16)





It is also apparent that many children feel that it is pointless to pay the blackmailer, as there are no guarantees that the nude image will actually be deleted. In the quote below we can see that the girl believes that the blackmailer is a girl of the same age and that it does not have anything to do with organised crime.

*"You could pay the 3,000 if you want, but she could just take the money and then spread the nudes anyway, so the best option is to block her. You shouldn't believe all the girls you talk to. Never. They could be the worst people out there."* (Girl, 15)

In a number of responses, it is also apparent that there is a reluctance to involve the adult world in situations involving children's nude images. This may sometimes mean that crimes go unreported, even though the children do actually realise that this is not a good strategy.

**"The best thing you can do really is report it to the police, but I wouldn't have wanted anyone to see the pictures, especially not an adult."**

(GIRL, 16)

In some cases, the children only seek support from the adult world after they have tried to resolve the situation themselves.

*"First we tried to sort it out without involving adults or the police, but when that didn't work we went straight to the police."* (Boy, 17)

In the free-form text responses, some children make it clear that a child who has been the victim of a crime is never the one who should bear the shame or the guilt.

*"Hmmm. I wouldn't actually care all that much if the pictures were spread. I believe in being honest and that you shouldn't feel ashamed about being the victim of a crime, it's hardly something that is shameful or degrading."* (Boy, 16)

Other children, especially girls, also make it clear that it is the perpetrator who should be ashamed. We can also note from the quote below that children do not make the connection to organised crime.

*"There isn't much to say. You should never feel ashamed if your pictures get spread. Sure, you should always give a little extra thought to whether you really feel comfortable sending something to this person. But if you do and the person then spreads the pictures, he/she is the one who should be ashamed."* (Girl, 15)

## Children with their own experiences

**AT THE END OF THE VIGNETTE** there was also a question about whether the children had experienced a situation that reminded them of the situation described in the vignette. Here, 20 percent of the girls and 12 percent of the boys stated that they had experienced a similar situation. It is difficult to know how the children interpreted this question, but based on the free-form text responses it seems that the girls include situations in which they are not pressured to pay money but above all to send more nude images or meet with the extortionist, who subjects them to more (and more explicit) abuse that is documented. The boys also include situations in which they have experienced a contact that reminds them of the situation in the vignette, but where they have chosen not to send a nude image. The figures must therefore be interpreted cautiously when estimating the number of children who have been subjected to financial sextortion, but they do provide an indication that many children are at risk of falling victim to this type of crime.

A few of the victimised boys provided a brief description of what happened when they sent the photo. These descriptions show that nagging and

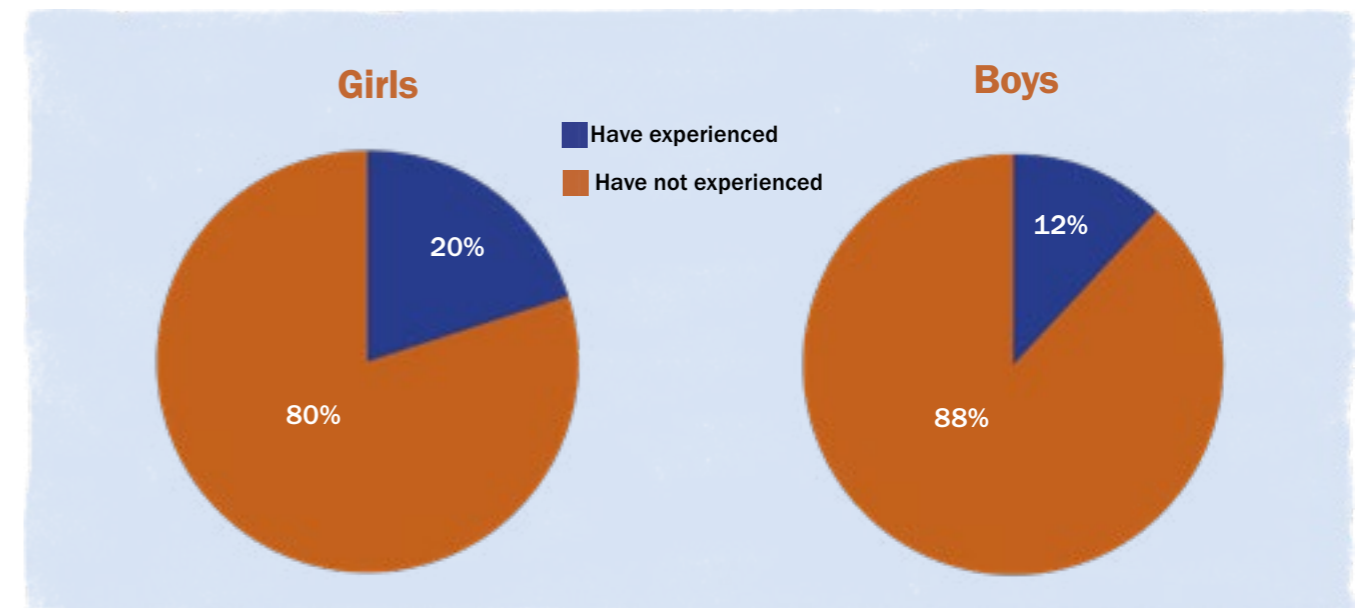
challenging the boys' self-image of what a real man should be like are strategies used by the extortionist to gain access to material.

*"A fake account added me and asked me to send nudes. 'She' kept on nagging until it drove me around the bend and I agreed to send a picture. Then 'she' took a screenshot and it all began."* (Boy, 15)

It is important to remember that, according to the children who have contacted our helpline, the extortionists are very skilled at building profiles that appear credible and acting in a way that gains the trust of the boys. In most cases the boys have taken a number of measures to try to protect themselves from falling victim to crime.

**"This 'girl' wanted me to send nude photos to prove that I was a man."**

(BOY, 16)



## Consequences for children who are victimised

**THE BOYS WE ENCOUNTER** via our helpline often contact us in an acute phase of the process – either when they are being pressured to pay money, or when the images have started to be spread. It is also common for them to feel that they themselves are to blame for ending up in such a situation. They are often convinced that those around them will blame them for sending a nude image, rather than viewing them as the victim of a crime. If they have a partner, they are afraid that the fact that they have sent nude images to someone they thought was another girl or woman – regardless of whether or not they have actually been victim to a crime – will spell the end of their relationship with their partner. They are also often worried that their parents will be disappointed in them for sending nude images to someone and also for allowing themselves to be deceived. For children who identify as LGBTQ, a complicating circumstance may be that they have not yet come out to their parents and therefore do not dare to tell them what has happened. This often leads to them paying, trying to placate the extortionist or trying to create a credible lie to explain how the image was spread, without admitting that they sent it to someone they didn't know. One boy states in a free-form text response in the survey that it is difficult to stick to rational strategies when you perceive an acute threat.

Overall, we see that children who are subjected to financial sextortion are affected in different ways. Among the children who contact us because their images have been spread, we can see that many suffer one or more of the following consequences:

- **Negative impact on relationships with friends, family and/or their partner**
- **Feelings of shame and suicidal thoughts**
- **Threats of suicide**
- **They stop going to school**
- **Mental illness**
- **Financial loss**

When it comes to financial loss, this can, for example, lead to children being forced to borrow money in various ways so that they can pay the extortionist. There are also cases where children's nude images are spread even though they have made one or more payments to the perpetrator. The children who contact us feel very bad and are under extreme pressure from the extortionist. Because the threats and coercion take place online, there is little or no possibility for the child to achieve effective protection from the perpetrator, and it is difficult for the child to find a way out of the situation. A number of children express thoughts of committing suicide, and in international reporting<sup>18</sup> we can see instances of this actually having happened.

**“It’s more common than you think, but people are put under so much pressure in these situations. Personally I’ve never experienced anything like this, so I can’t say with certainty what you should do or how I would react if I ended up in such a discussion.”**

(BOY, 17)

<sup>18</sup> See e.g. Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes – FBI, 2022.



## The platforms' responsibility

**WHEN IT COMES TO** , we see through our contacts with children that a common factor in an overwhelming majority of cases, regardless of the gender of the victim, is that the extortion takes place on the internet and often begins on the major social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat. These platforms' services are aimed at children and young people over the age of 13, and the platforms are responsible for ensuring that children are not subjected to crime when using their services. We therefore contacted Discord, Snapchat, Meta and TikTok to find out how they work to combat financial sextortion. One platform answered our questions.

The platform in question stated that they work in various ways to identify the behaviours of their users in order to detect if the service is being misused. They have developed reporting functions that the victim of a crime can use to get in touch with the platform, in which case the report is then forwarded to the police or some other relevant party. The platform's security measures and information

regarding safety and security are broadly aimed at inappropriate behaviour on the platform. There is, however, no clear information on the platform's website about how children should protect themselves from perpetrators who contact them with the intention of subjecting them to financial sextortion.

---

**When it comes to financial sextortion of children, we see through our contacts with children that a common factor in an overwhelming majority of cases, regardless of the gender of the victim, is that the extortion takes place on the internet and often begins on the major social media platforms such as Instagram and**

---

## The responsibility of financial institutions

**THE FINANCIAL ASPECT** is a prominent characteristic of financial sextortion of children, which means that a transaction must take place between the victim and the perpetrator. Despite the typical case of identified perpetrators having links to international organised crime<sup>19</sup>, the existence of perpetrators with links to national organised crime in Sweden cannot be ruled out. The payment methods in cases involving a domestic perpetrator can therefore be assumed to be linked to a Swedish financial institution, for example a Swedish bank.

Since 2007, ECPAT Sweden has been running a financial coalition together with around twenty financial institutions and the Swedish Police. The purpose of the coalition is to jointly contribute to the impediment and prevention of payments for child sexual abuse material. When we turned to the coalition members, two out of the fourteen we contacted chose to answer our questions. Those who responded state that they have come into contact with this type of crime in different ways and feel that it is difficult to detect children who are subjected to crime by perpetrators who are not domestic (i.e. not based in Sweden).

Two banks state that there are measures that can help detect crimes against children. For example, technology that already exists for the detection of abnormal patterns in customer transactions can be used. In addition, staff involved with the investigation of money laundering or terrorist



financing can receive further training in how to detect this type of crime. None of the banks that state that they have come into contact with this type of crime have easily accessible information on their websites directly aimed at children on how they can protect themselves if someone tries to extort money from them. The information that is available primarily concerns other types of fraud or crime, such as money laundering.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes – FBI, 2022, and European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, Online Sexual Coercion and Extortion as a form of Crime Affecting Children – Law Enforcement Perspective, 2017, p. 17.



# Analysis

**THERE IS MUCH TO SUGGEST** that financial sextortion of children, boys in particular, is increasing rapidly and that the victims of this crime are getting younger and younger. It is also apparent that the perpetrators are adapting and changing their approach quickly to make it more difficult for children to find effective protection strategies. The adult world needs to listen to children and understand what is happening in their digital world, and in this way identify new threats and offer support to children if something happens. It is important to be clear about where the blame belongs, i.e. never with the victimised child.

---

**We also need to realise that the threat means that international organised crime has found a new source of income in the form of criminality targeted at children and young people.**

---

We also need to realise that the threat means that international organised crime has found a new source of income in the form of children and young people. Children describe how the perpetrators are often very skilled at building trust and getting them to cross boundaries in a manner they did not think was possible. When the perpetrator has received the material, the children are subjected to threats, manipulation and persuasion, often under extreme pressure timewise, to meet the extortionist's demands. The perpetrators are well aware that the children are afraid to tell others

about the situation they find themselves in, and they take full advantage of this fear. They are also aware that the children are at an age at which it can be difficult to talk to members of the adult world about sexual relationships – long-term or short-term online. It is also important that the adult world and society do not place the responsibility for dealing with this crime on the child or blame the child for allowing himself or herself to be manipulated.

The rapid increase in financial sexual exploitation of boys needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. The major social media platforms are often the forum where the crime is initiated, and they therefore have a particular responsibility in relation to this issue. It is not reasonable that a company which invites children to use its services is not able to protect them from perpetrators who use the platforms' own functions to find, threaten and blackmail children. The platforms must be clear about how they will deal with the problem. A particular responsibility also rests with the financial institutions that facilitate transactions from systematic criminal activities targeted at children. Possibilities must be created to monitor these transactions and hold the perpetrators accountable. In the digital world we have created for children, we must seriously ask ourselves if it is reasonable that they, to such a large extent, lack both protection and the possibility of redress when they are subjected to crime.

It is also high time that the adult world addresses the norms that cause us to treat boys differently than girls when they are subjected to a crime. In ECPAT's contacts with children, we see that boys perceive the sending of nude images to a new contact as low risk.

---

**In the digital world we have created for children, we must seriously ask ourselves if it is reasonable that they, to such a large extent, lack both protection and the possibility of redress when they are subjected to crime.**

---

It is reasonable to assume that this is partly due to the fact that boys are rarely perceived as being vulnerable in sexual contacts with girls or women. In a previous report we were able to identify that there is also a norm among many boys that they should be forward, take the initiative in sexual interactions and be in control online, which makes it more likely that they do not believe that they can fall victim to crime. This norm may also lead to victimised boys running the risk of being judged more harshly by those around them and being viewed as having a part to play in the crimes to which they are subjected. We know that parents often worry more about girls being victimised, and that they find it more difficult to talk to boys about risks both online and offline. In addition to talking to boys about risks, we must be prepared to discuss the norms that put boys at risk of being victimised but also prevent them from seeking support from the adult world. The hope is that this could eventually lead to meaningful change whereby boys dare to report crimes and seek support without fear.

---

**We know that parents often worry more about girls being victimised, and that they find it more difficult to talk to boys about risks both online and offline. In addition to talking to boys about risks, we must be prepared to discuss the norms that put boys at risk of being victimised but also prevent them from seeking support from the adult world.**

---

# ECPAT demands

## Implementation of initiatives to increase knowledge of financial sextortion of boys

Financial sextortion of boys most often involves boys in their early teens. The teenage years are a time when children explore their sexuality, and these days a large part of children's sexual exploration has moved online. This change is largely perceived as positive by the children themselves, but it also entails new risks. In the absence of adults' knowledge of the new way of having sexual relations online, most children have developed strategies to protect themselves from exposure to sexual crime. In this report we have seen that most of the victims have tried to protect themselves, but that the perpetrator has pretended, in a credible manner, to be a contact of the same age. Norms about masculinity lead to boys feeling pressured into sending images. Shaming and blaming of boys in relation to their sexuality makes it difficult for the child to ask for help when the extortionist threatens to spread nude images to the child's contacts. In the new digital world we adults have created for children and invited them

**Norms about masculinity lead to boys feeling pressured into sending images, and shaming and blaming of boys in relation to their sexuality makes it difficult for the child to ask for help when the extortionist threatens to spread nude images to the child's contacts.**

to join, we must seriously ask ourselves if it is reasonable that they, to such a large extent, lack both protection and the possibility of redress when they are subjected to crime. At a political level it is necessary to implement initiatives where important social actors such as schools, the social services, the judicial system and civil society work together to increase knowledge and ensure that the measures taken protect boys from this type of crime in an effective manner. Adequate resources must be allocated to this work, and resources must also be set aside for research into financial sextortion of boys.

## Services aimed at children must be safe for children

It is not acceptable that companies offering services to children are unable to protect them and combat the crime to which the children are subjected. The services provided by social media platforms are misused to create fake accounts in order to find, threaten and blackmail children to a large extent. Here, the platforms must clearly inform children and young people who use their services about the type of crime

that occurs on their platforms, the approach that is usually employed by the perpetrators, and how they can report the perpetrator in a simple manner. The platforms must also work preventively to prevent the possibility of creating fake accounts that contact multiple children for sexual purposes in a short space of time, and they must act to block the account before nude images of the child are spread to the child's contacts. In this context there is a need for legislation at EU level that clarifies and sharpens the responsibility of internet companies to prevent and combat child sexual abuse. The developments we are seeing at EU level with regard to internet companies' liability for illegal content on their services are a step in the right direction. The voluntary measures that several platforms have hitherto taken to stop the spread of child sexual abuse material are important but insufficient; to stop the spread of such material it is necessary that all internet companies whose services can be misused to commit child sexual abuse take their responsibility.

A particular responsibility also rests with the financial institutions that are obligated by law to detect perpetrators who subject children to crime by monitoring transactions based on known approaches. When it comes to this type of systematic financial crime, there are indicators that are common to the cases we are aware of, such as the fact that the crime is directed at boys of a particular age and involves tens of thousands of Swedish kronor.

**Children who have been subjected to sexual crimes online report the matter to the police on repeated occasions and see how the report is usually dismissed, and eventually they give up.**

## Collaboration is required to stop financial sextortion of children

To prevent and stop financial sextortion of children, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach and establish collaboration between all relevant actors at all levels. ECPAT Sweden's coalitions are an example of how civil society, police and the business community can work together to prevent and combat sexual exploitation of children. Without collaboration we

are unable to gain sufficient knowledge about the phenomenon of financial sextortion of children, nor can we develop the tools required to prevent and combat it. It is of the utmost importance that everyone involved prioritises and allocates resources to the collaborative work so that it can make a real difference to all children and young people. It is also important that all actors inform children, and their guardians, about financial sextortion of boys.

## Prioritisation of investigations concerning sexual crimes against children

Society must prioritise sexual crimes against children, both online and offline. Children who have been subjected to sexual crimes online report the matter to the police on repeated occasions and see how the report is usually dismissed, and eventually they give up. The children whose experiences we learn about via our helpline Ditt ECPAT and our survey "Nude Online" all share the same perception that society does not prioritise their vulnerability to sexual crime. The police must have sufficient resources to enable this serious crime to be investigated and proven. Boys who are subjected to financial sextortion report the crime to the police to a low extent. They know that these crimes are not prioritised. The images continue to be spread online, regardless of whether or not the boy has paid the extortionist.

## References:

BBC, *Teenager's death sparks cyber blackmailing probe*, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-ed-inburgh-east-fife-23712000>

Canadian Centre for Child Protection, *An Analysis of Financial Sextortion Victim Posts Published on r/ Sextortion*, 2022

C. Cross, K. Holt & R. Liggett O'Malley, *"If U Don't Pay they will Share the Pics": Exploring Sextortion in the Context of Romance Fraud*, 2022

ECPAT Sweden, *"Girls need to stop sending pictures" – A report on*

*boys, nude images, relationships and age differences*, 2021

European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, *Online Sexual Coercion and Extortion as a form of Crime Affecting Children – Law Enforcement Perspective*, 2017

Federal Bureau of Investigation, *FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes*, Federal Bureau of Investigation, [FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes – FBI](#), 2022

Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Malicious Actors Manipulating Photos and Videos to Create Explicit Content and Sextortion Schemes*, [Malicious Actors Manipulating Photos and Videos to Create Explicit Content and Sextortion Schemes](#) ([ic3.gov](https://ic3.gov)), 2023

J. Wolak, J.D., D. Finkelhor, Ph.D., W. Walsh, Ph.D., and L. Treitman, *Sextortion of Minors: Characteristics and Dynamics*, 2017

J. W. Patchin & S. Hinduja, *Sextortion Among Adolescents: Results from a National Survey of U.S. Youth*, 2018

M. Whitty, *The Scammers Persuasive Techniques Model: Development of a stage model to explain the online dating romance scam*, 2013

R. L. O'Malley & K. Holt, *Cyber Sextortion: An Exploratory Analysis of Different Perpetrators Engaging in a Similar Crime*, 2020

[Reddit.com/r/Sextortion](https://www.reddit.com/r/Sextortion)

@ECPATSverige

+46 (0)8 598 920 00  
info@ecpat.se

www.ecpat.se  
www.ecpat.se/hotline  
www.dittecpat.se

Bankgiro: 903-4349

