

CHANGING ATTITUDES, CHANGING BEHAVIOR

At a sextortion roundtable in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a police official drew a comparison to the local situation a decade earlier, when similar discussions were held about domestic violence. He observed that, at the time, there were no cases of domestic violence, and it wasn't perceived as a problem.

Today, there are about 20 cases per year. It wasn't that domestic violence didn't exist 10 years ago, but only that people weren't aware of the problem and didn't perceive a remedy. He expressed the hope that initiating discussion about sextortion would achieve a similar result.

It is important to break the silence that makes it so easy for sextortion to continue unchallenged. The personal and social costs of that silence are great, and, in countries where HIV is prevalent, silence can even be fatal. In one case, the sextortion was exposed only after an entire office of about ten women had been infected. No case was ever brought, as the perpetrator and his victims all succumbed to the disease.

BREAKING THE SILENCE STARTS WITH EACH OF US.



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Stopping the Abuse of Power through Sexual Exploitation:

Naming, Shaming, and Ending Sextortion



WHAT IS SEXTORTION?

The New York Times, April 14, 2010
Immigration Officer Guilty in Sexual Coercion Case
By Nina Bernstein—A federal immigration officer who was caught on tape demanding sex in exchange for a green card pleaded guilty to all the charges against him in Supreme Court in Queens on Wednesday in expectation of a prison sentence of one and a half to four and a half years.

SEXTORTION IS THE ABUSE OF POWER TO OBTAIN A SEXUAL BENEFIT OR ADVANTAGE.

People who occupy positions of authority and public trust sometimes abuse their power and seek to take advantage of those who are dependent on their favor. When the abuse of power involves a demand for sexual favors, we are naming it "sextortion." In effect, sextortion is a form of corruption in which sex, rather than money, is the currency of the bribe.

What distinguishes sextortion is that it has both a sexual component *and* a corruption component.

Sex + Corruption = Sextortion

SEXUAL COMPONENT

Sextortion involves a request – whether explicit or implicit – to engage in sexual activity. It need not involve sexual intercourse or even physical touching, but could be any form of unwanted sexual activity, such as exposing private body parts or posing for sexual photographs.

CORRUPTION COMPONENT

To constitute sextortion, there must also be a corruption component: The perpetrator must abuse his position of authority by endeavoring to exact, or by accepting, a sexual favor in exchange for exercise of the power entrusted to him. Sextortion involves both official corruption and corruption in the broader sense of the word: people who exercise the authority entrusted to them for personal benefit rather than with the integrity, fairness, and impartiality expected of their position.

ABUSE OF AUTHORITY

Authority can be vested by law, codes of professional responsibility, or community expectations. When those entrusted with authority use it to obtain a personal benefit rather than in the manner and for the purposes it was entrusted, they abuse their authority.

- A government official charged with granting or denying applications – for a work permit, visa, license, etc. – is required to do so in accordance with the criteria established by law, not based on sexual favors from the applicant.
- Doctors, lawyers, and other professionals are subject to codes of conduct or ethics that require them to behave as professionals, not as private profiteers for sexual bribes.
- The community entrusts its teachers with authority to grade a student's work, not to make that grade dependent on sexual favors rather than academic achievement.

ABUSE OF "ENTRUSTED POWER" TAKES MANY FORMS

Person Entrusted with Power	Quid Pro Quo	Sextortion Victim
Judge	Grant Asylum → Secret Affair ←	Refugee
Teacher	Good Grade → Sexual Favor ←	Student
Police Officer	Decline To Charge → Expose Breasts ←	Driver
Supervisor	Promotion → Sexual Relationship ←	Employee
Government Official	Work Permit → Oral Sex ←	Immigrant

The Citizen (Dar es Salaam), 31 December 2009

Tanzania: Man Arraigned for ‘Soliciting Sexual Bribe’

By Rosina John—The Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau yesterday charged a security guard with soliciting bribes in the form of sexual favours.

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According to PCCB prosecutor Sophia Gura, the security guard allegedly demanded sexual favours from a woman (name withheld), promising to find her a job at St. Mary’s Schools or elsewhere.

QUID PRO QUO EXCHANGE

Abuse of authority to obtain a sexual favor implies an exchange or quid pro quo (a Latin phrase meaning “this for that”). In the employment context, quid pro quo sexual harassment occurs when an employment benefit or detriment is conditioned on the employee’s response to a sexual request. Sextortion involves the same kind of exchange, but is not limited to the workplace.

Whether explicit or implicit, it is the “this-for-that” exchange – a sexual favor in exchange for some benefit that the person in authority is empowered to withhold or confer – that is central to the corruption component of sextortion.

National Post (Canada), July 29, 2010

Steve Ellis sentenced to 18 months for seeking sexual favours

By Shannon Kari — Steve Ellis shook his lawyer’s hand and mouthed brief words of goodbye to his family as he was led to jail on Thursday – the final fall from grace for a once powerful man who held a position of “prestige, privilege and power.” Ellis, a former immigration adjudicator and one time Toronto city councillor, was jailed 18 months for breach of trust. In attendance was . . . the South Korean woman from whom he sought sexual favours in exchange for a favorable immigration ruling.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COERCION RATHER THAN PHYSICAL FORCE

Sextortion relies on the coercive power of authority rather than physical force to obtain sexual favours. The imbalance of power between perpetrator and victim is key. An immigration judge holds a victim’s entire future in his hands when he decides whether to grant her application for refugee status. Where the perpetrator’s power is great, and the victim vulnerable, no physical force is needed to extort sexual favours.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

• When I look on the Internet, I see other definitions of sextortion. Are those wrong?

The IAWJ coined the term “sextortion” – a word that combines sex and extortion – because it captures and conveys the essence of the abuse of authority to extort sex. You can find other terms – “sexual extortion” or “sexual bribery” – used to describe the abuse of authority to extort sex. However, it is precisely because there is no common vocabulary for this type of abuse that it is so important to give it a name: sextortion.

You can also find “sextortion” used as a catchy way to describe the attempt to extort money by revealing a sexual affair. That is an altogether different meaning of the word and should not be confused with cases in which it is sex, not money, being extorted.

• Are all victims of sextortion female?

While many victims are female and many perpetrators are male, males can also be victims of sextortion. A university football coach who runs a prestigious training camp is engaging in sextortion if he demands sex from a boy as a condition of remaining in the program and gaining access to prized athletic opportunities.

• If a woman receives money in exchange for sex, does that “quid pro quo” make it sextortion?

Not necessarily. A quid pro quo – sex in exchange for a benefit – is a key component of sextortion, but not the only requirement. To constitute sextortion, there must also be an abuse of authority. Thus, if a woman agrees to have sex with a stranger in exchange for money, it may be prostitution, but it is not sextortion.

Because the stranger does not occupy a position of authority vis-a-vis the woman, he is not abusing any position of authority by engaging in sex with her.

• What if a woman willingly offers a sexual favor in order to obtain something she wants from someone in a position of authority – is that sextortion?

If an official accepts a monetary bribe, it is no defense to say that he did not solicit the bribe. Nor is it a defense to say that the person paid it willingly. Whether the official solicits or merely accepts the bribe, it is still punishable as corruption. It is no different when the currency of the bribe is sex rather than money. It is still corruption and an abuse of power to accept a sexual favor in exchange for exercising official authority in a way that will benefit the person who offered the sexual favor.

Whether the person who offered the bribe also deserves punishment is a separate question. The law may treat those who are coerced into paying a bribe differently from those who initiate the bribe.

• Where can I go to find out more about sextortion?

Additional information about sextortion is available on the IAWJ website at www.iawj.org

The Epoch Times, August 21, 2009

70-year-old Professor Confesses to Taking Sexual Bribe

By Xue Fei — A 70-year-old professor from Beijing’s prestigious Central Conservatory of Music confessed on August 18 to accepting sexual and monetary bribes from a prospective female student. The case led to a flurry of comments from Chinese netizens and the loss of the professor’s teaching privileges.



FIVE THINGS YOU CAN DO TO NAME, SHAME, AND END SEXTORTION

• Talk about sextortion.

Sextortion thrives on silence; spread knowledge. Talk to two people and ask them to spread the word to two more. Keep the chain going.

• Get the WORD out.

Without a name – SEXTORTION – it is difficult to lift an abuse out of the realm of bad things we know happen and passively accept as the way of the world, and into the realm of things we will no longer tolerate and actively seek to change.

• Learn more about sextortion.

Once you become aware of sextortion, you see how pervasive it is. Gather and share information about sextortion.

• Examine your existing legal framework.

Assess the adequacy of your country’s legal framework for prosecuting sextortion. Do sexual harassment laws cover non-employment cases? Do corruption laws cover non-financial injury or favours? Do rape laws cover coercion that does not involve physical force?

• Mainstream gender concerns into anti-corruption efforts – and vice versa.

Whether you work on women’s rights or anti-corruption efforts, focus on the interface between sexual abuse and corruption/bribery – this is the area where sextortion flourishes.