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Sexual Extortion & Young People

Navigating Threats in Digital Environments

Research conducted by Thorn in partnership with Burson Insights, Data & Intelligence

THORN 

Burson

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Acknowledgments

Understanding the complex intersection of technology and child sexual abuse empowers us to safeguard kids from the ever-evolving threats they face online. Without direct insights from the young people encountering these issues every day, we risk falling behind in developing valuable resources for them to navigate the digital age safely.

Thank You

We are grateful to the participants who took the time to complete the survey and especially to those who provided detailed descriptions of their lived experiences. Without their gracious participation, we could not have developed the key insights shared in this report about their lived experiences with sexual extortion.

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Introduction

Since 2019, Thorn has focused on amplifying youth voices to better understand their digital lives, with particular attention to how they encounter and navigate technology-facilitated forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. Previous youth-centered research has explored topics such as child sexual abuse material (CSAM)¹ — including that which is self-generated (“SG-CSAM”) — nonconsensual resharing, online grooming, and the barriers young people face in disclosing or reporting negative experiences.

Since 2015, Thorn has researched the scale and impacts of sexual extortion, (or “sextortion”),² tracking how this threat has evolved and affected young people’s lives. Recent years have shown increases in financial sextortion, at times with dire consequences.^{3 4} The landscape continues to expand, with new forms centered on victim domination and self-harm breaking into the headlines.^{5 6} Ongoing research remains essential to accurately assess the current nature of sexual extortion and develop more effective protective strategies.

To better explore and contextualize apparent shifts in the dynamics of sexual extortion involving youth, Thorn incorporated a dedicated series of questions into its *Emerging Threats to Young People* survey. The overall focus of that survey is to examine emergent online risk areas to better

understand how current technologies create and/or exacerbate child safety vulnerabilities and to identify areas where solutions are needed. This report marks the third and final report within the series and sheds light on young people’s experiences with sexual extortion. Prior reports from the series address additional issues, including the emergence of deepfake nudes⁷ and the evolving nature of commodified sexual interactions involving minors.⁸

Drawing on responses from a survey of 1,200 young people aged 13–20, this report examines their lived experiences with sexual extortion as minors. Several key findings emerged from this research:

- 1. It is not uncommon for young people to be threatened with explicit images — either of themselves or with images people might believe are of them.** One in 5 (20%) teenage respondents reported having a lived experience with sextortion; 1 in 5 (21%) report knowing someone (not including themselves) with the experience.
- 2. The nature of demands differs between groups, with girls and LGBTQ+ youth most likely to face threats for additional sexual imagery while boys were most likely to be targeted for money.**

1 U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2024). *Key definitions*. Know2Protect. <https://www.dhs.gov/know2protect/key-definitions>. Under United States federal law CSAM is referred to as “child pornography.” See 18 U.S.C. § 2256(8); 18 U.S.C. § 1466A.

2 Based on updated recommendations from the *Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation And Sexual Abuse*, the term “sexual extortion” is primarily used in this report. “Sextortion” is commonly recognized vocabulary for this risk type and is used intermittently throughout this report to support comprehension while pursuing adoption of newer terminology. More can be found about the guidelines here: <https://ecpat.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Second-Edition-Terminology-Guidelines-final.pdf>

3 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/health-wellness/2025/02/25/teenage-boys-mental-health-suicide-sextortion-scams/78258882007/>

4 <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/two-nigerians-sentenced-years-sextortion-case-led-michigan-teens-rca169730>

5 <https://www.wired.com/story/richard-densmore-sentencing-764/>

6 <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/leaders-764-arrested-and-charged-operating-global-child-exploitation-enterprise>

7 Thorn. (2025). *Deepfake nudes & young people: Navigating a new frontier in technology-facilitated nonconsensual sexual abuse and exploitation*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_DeepfakeNudes&YoungPeople_Mar2025.pdf

8 Thorn. (2025). *Commodified sexual interactions involving minors: New data on evolving dynamics in technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_CommodifiedSexualInteractionsInvolvingMinors_Apr2025.pdf

3. One in 3 victims of sexual extortion reported they knew their perpetrator offline. This statistic is predominantly driven by experiences involving current or former romantic partners (52%) or friends/people from school (47%), but can also involve trusted adults (10%) or even family members (6%).

4. The risk of online sexual extortion is increasing. The rise is at least in part driven by increasing rates of financially motivated sexual extortion, with roughly 1 in 5 victims reporting being extorted for money.

5. Technology plays a central role in sexual extortion. Respondents overwhelmingly (61%) knew their sextortionists exclusively online; nearly all (94%) of the threats made toward the victims were in digital forums, predominantly via social media or direct messaging services.

Methods & Research Design

Research into the online experiences of young people — and how those experiences intersect with the potential for harmful sexual interactions — presents unique and ever-evolving challenges. Some of these challenges and their corresponding mitigation strategies are outlined below.

Challenges

CHALLENGE: The topics covered in this research represent complex and evolving online risk areas for young people.

Mitigation: This research provides preliminary insights into emerging threat areas impacting young people, with particular attention given to how technology misuse facilitates and exacerbates child sexual exploitation and abuse. Dedicated, in-depth survey instruments should be developed for each topic individually to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of each threat. Therefore, the findings presented in this report are intended as foundational perspectives, highlighting areas for further investigation and encouraging deeper exploration into young people's experiences.

CHALLENGE: Nuance exists across demographics and among those with different lived experiences.

Mitigation: This research aimed to identify trends among young people overall and within some significant demographic categories — such as age and gender. A secondary objective was to understand how participant experiences may manifest differently across other

demographics. To this end, survey recruitment incorporated enhanced quotas of some demographic subgroups to ensure base sizes that were large enough for analysis.⁹ Nevertheless, given sample size limitations, some data points within subgroups are most appropriately viewed as starting points for additional research.

CHALLENGE: Entrenched stigma and sensitivity surrounding these topics may lead to an undercounting of their scale and frequency.

Mitigation: Asking individuals — especially young people — to open up about delicate subjects like taking and sharing nude photos of themselves or creating nude photos of others likely activates self-report bias. Reluctance to self-report may be especially pronounced among participants who have had negative sexual experiences and/or have been victimized as a result of child sexual abuse.¹⁰ It is critical, then, to design related survey instruments that are safe and supportive. The sequence of questions was important in our research instrument. Each sensitive question was prefaced with a note acknowledging the potential difficulty of discussing the topic, reiterating the anonymity of the responses, and reinforcing that the participant was never to blame for what may have happened to them. Some questions were written in a manner that allowed individuals to answer generally about “people they know” instead of asking point-blank about their own online experiences. Resources for additional information and referrals for real-time support were highlighted alongside every question. Expert clinicians also reviewed the final survey instrument to evaluate its flow and substance for participant safety.

⁹ See more about this in the Research Design section.

¹⁰ Hébert, M., Tourigny, M., Cyr, M., McDuff, P., & Joly, J. (2009). Prevalence of childhood sexual abuse and timing of disclosure in a representative sample of adults from Quebec. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 54(9), 631–636. <https://doi.org/10.1177/070674370905400908>

CHALLENGE: Comparing research samples on technology-facilitated sexual harms is inherently difficult due to significant variability in sample composition, definitions of harm, data collection timeframes, methodologies, and cultural contexts.

Mitigation: Achieving comparability across studies on technology-facilitated sexual abuse and exploitation requires transparency in methodologies and research instruments. Differences in findings can arise from variations in study design and sample characteristics, which means that distinct studies are not always directly comparable. The next section of this report includes detailed research design information to ensure clarity and meaningful comparison. For any additional questions related to the methods used in this research, please contact research@thorn.org.

Research Design

The research supporting this report focused on young people aged 13–20 in the United States.¹¹ Research methods were designed to identify respondents' perceptions and experiences related to three specific online risk vectors: deepfake nude imagery, online solicitations, and sextortion.

PHASE 1 – EXPLORATORY INTERVIEWS WITH SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

The first phase of this research was dedicated to gathering exploratory information to help orient and frame the subsequent focus of the more in-depth survey instrument.

In total, 16 subject matter experts from across the child safety ecosystem were identified and consulted during this phase. Information consultations included a diverse range of backgrounds and areas of expertise,

¹¹ In the context of this report, the term “young people” refers to the full survey sample of respondents aged 13–20. The term “teens” specifies respondents aged 13–17, while “young adults” refers to those aged 18–20.

including academics, civil society researchers, industry trust and safety professionals, law enforcement, and victim and survivor advocacy professionals. The insights generated during Phase 1 helped to scope and focus the subsequent development of the survey instrument in Phase 2.

PHASE 2 – QUANTITATIVE ONLINE SURVEY

In total, 1,200 young people from across the United States participated in an 18-minute online survey from September 27, 2024, to October 7, 2024. To ensure a nationwide representative sample was obtained, data was weighted by age, gender, race, and geography based on U.S. Census data. This research also incorporated an increased recruitment of participants who identified as persons of color (POC).

Specifically, the survey's sample makeup included:

Total surveyed (n = 1200)

Age	Ages 13–17	64%
	13	12%
	14	12%
	15	12%
	16	13%
	17	15%
	Ages 18–20	36%
	18	12%
	19	12%
	20	12%
Gender	Male	48%
	Female	48%
	Gender Minority	6%
Sexual Orientation	LGBTQ+	19%
	Non-LGBTQ+	79%
Race & Ethnicity	African American/Black/Caribbean American	19%
	Hispanic/Latinx	25%
	Other POC	9%
	White	52%

“Gender minority” includes respondents who identified as transgender, genderqueer, nonbinary or other. “Other POC” includes respondents who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American or American Indian, Middle Eastern, or other. Respondents who selected “prefer not to say” for sex/gender and/or sexual orientation (n=10) or identified as either male or female and identified their sexual orientation as “questioning/not sure” (n=10) or as both “straight” and “queer/other” (n=4) were not included in the either the LGBTQ+ or non-LGBTQ+ groupings.

Given the unique risks that gender minority youth face, gender minorities are not disambiguated into the gender dichotomy analysis featured throughout this report. Among the gender minority cluster (n = 55) within the full sample, 22 respondents identified as trans-male, 5 respondents identified as trans-female, 6 respondents identified as trans-other, and 29 respondents identified as non-binary, genderqueer, or other.¹²

Results and Reporting

Due to rounding, some of the figures included in this report may have columns or rows that do not add up to exactly 100%. Some questions, which have been noted, featured multiple select response options.

Privacy and Safety

Ensuring the privacy and safety of those participating in this research was paramount. All participant responses were anonymized. Minor participants (aged 13-17) were recruited directly through caregivers. Caregiver consent was required for minors to participate. Adult participants (aged 18-20) provided direct consent. Help resources were provided to all participants in the event that they wanted to learn more about the survey topics or needed professional support to talk about these issues.

¹² Some respondents identified with multiple gender identities.

Navigating Risks in Online Environments

Technology is interwoven into everyday life for most young people in the United States. A recent report from the Pew Research Center found nearly all (96%) teens were online daily.¹³ Another survey from Common Sense Media reported that nearly 1 in 4 kids had a personal cell phone by the age of 8.¹⁴ Kids are growing up connected to their classmates, family, and a far wider world via technology at an early age, opening opportunities for learning, connection, and discovery.

Unfortunately, this expanded digital world has brought with it novel risks and challenges. Young people are also exposed to mature content at earlier ages and without the knowledge of safe adults to help them interpret and navigate such experiences. At times this is driven by innocent curiosity, with many kids sharing they had accessed age-gated sites intended for romantic interactions or pornography. As found in Thorn's recent report on commodified sexual interactions, 1 in 5 (22%) teens had accessed an adult dating site while slightly more (23%) had visited a pornography site.¹⁵ Prior research has also documented that sharing intimate imagery is not wholly uncommon among young people: 1 in 4 individuals aged 9-17 reported in a 2023 survey that they believed sharing nudes with peers their age was normal.¹⁶

At times, however, exposure to mature or explicit content can happen as a result of unwanted or unsolicited interactions. Even interactions that begin consensually may later become coercive, or they may have been the result of deception or manipulation from the beginning.

Sexual extortion – threatening to expose sexual content depicting someone if the individual does not yield to demands – is a form of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation that can result in severe harm to victims. Like other forms of abuse, there is no one way that sextortion occurs. However, across extortion tactics, technology is regularly used to facilitate the abuse.

Technology is used in procuring explicit imagery (through manipulation, coercion, or at times consensual romantic exchange) or, as seen with AI-generated deepfake nudes, to fabricate it without their consent or participation. Technology is used to harass, intimidate, and extort victims, often into continuous cycles of compliance and exploitation. Finally, technology may be used to non-consensually share these images, prolonging and expanding a victim's abuse.

Perpetrators may know victims offline, or they may only be known to them online. In scenarios where the victim only knows their extortionist online, the perpetrator may have presented themselves as their real identity or misrepresented themselves through catfishing.¹⁷ Within offline capacities, the sextortionist may be a current or former romantic partner, or someone else within the child's community, such as but not limited to school friends, family members, or neighbors.

While the demands made may vary from demanding money, demanding the production of more sexual images, and/or demanding the victim stay in or return to a romantic relationship, extortionists focus on the leak of

¹³ <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2024/12/12/teens-social-media-and-technology-2024/>

¹⁴ Mann, S., Calvin, A., Lenhart, A., & Robb, M.B. (2025). The Common Sense census: Media use by kids zero to eight, 2025. Common Sense Media.

¹⁵ Thorn. (2025). *Commodified sexual interactions involving minors: New data on evolving dynamics in technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_CommodifiedSexualInteractionsInvolvingMinors_Apr2025.pdf

¹⁶ Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_23_YouthMonitoring_Report.pdf

¹⁷ Catfishing is defined as "[W]hen someone sets up a fake online identity and uses it to trick and control others. Often they do it to scam people out of money, blackmail them or harm them in some other way." eSafety Commissioner. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/young-people/catfishing>

imagery leading to life-altering consequences and harm, intentionally exploiting a victim's sense of shame and fear to encourage compliance and isolation.

While sexual extortion can happen to anyone at any age, this research focuses on its impact on minors. Earlier sextortion research portrayed it as a crime predominantly affecting young girls and frequently associated with an existing or previous romantic relationship.¹⁸ However, newer research has uncovered an alarming rise in financially motivated sextortion schemes that primarily targets teen boys.¹⁹ Prior research also shows clear use of sexual extortion as a tactic among those looking to procure, distribute, and/or consume child sexual abuse material (CSAM).^{20 21}

Victim disclosure is frequently inhibited by intense feelings of shame, fear of exposure, and a false belief that they are to blame.²² As a result, sexual extortion incidents likely remain vastly underreported – leaving victims in isolation without support and law enforcement without the

information necessary to pursue effective investigations. Further, evidence demonstrates that reporting or disclosing does not always stop the threat and can result in unintended outcomes: responses have at times reinforced victim blaming narratives²³; aggressors have continued to harass victims online despite use of platform reporting and blocking²⁴; and investigative and prosecutorial challenges have delayed or impeded arrests.²⁵

What is clear is that sexual extortion poses a significant threat to young people as technology evolves, demanding improvements to how we safeguard against threats and combat those perpetuating the abuse. Conducting more research directly involving young people with lived experiences of sexual extortion is critical to addressing this issue. By understanding the full range of experiences and impacts, we become better equipped to respond to this escalating crisis.

18 Wolak, J., Finkelhor, D., Walsh, W., & Treitman, L. (2018). Sextortion of minors: Characteristics and dynamics. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 62(1):72-79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.08.014> Note: Sampling methods are different from the current study and as such it should not be considered a like-for-like comparison.

19 Thorn & National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). (2024). *Trends in financial sextortion: An investigation of sextortion reports in NCMEC CyberTipline data*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_TrendsInFinancialSextortion_June2024.pdf

20 <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/scams-and-safety/common-frauds-and-scams/sextortion>

21 Ray, A., & Henry, N. (2025). Sextortion: A scoping review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 26(1), 138-155.

22 Wolak, J., & Finkelhor, D. (2016). Sextortion: Keys findings from an online survey of 1631 victims. Crime Against Children Research Center.

23 Wolak, J., & Finkelhor, D. (2016). Sextortion: Keys findings from an online survey of 1631 victims. Crime Against Children Research Center.

24 Thorn. (2023). *Responding to online threats: Minors' perspectives on disclosing, reporting, and blocking in 2021*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_ROT_Monitoring_2021.pdf

25 <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/us-extradites-nigerians-sextortion-linked-suicide-michigan-teen-rcna99795>

Lived Experiences & Victimization

In 2023, as part of Thorn's annual youth monitoring survey, minors aged 9-17 were asked if they had ever experienced someone threatening to show a sexual image of them to another person or post it online to make them do something. Among the 1,040 respondents to that survey, 6% reported they had experienced this.²⁶ This initial finding was consistent with other research that found between 3.5% and 5% of people are believed to have experienced sexual extortion before adulthood.

Significant reporting in the last several years has pointed to a concerning increase in experiences of sexual extortion, particularly that which is financially motivated. A 2024 study involving more than 16,000 participants across 10 countries found much higher rates of sexual extortion, with roughly 1 in 7 adults having experienced it with younger adults significantly more likely to report having this experience. In this survey, slightly more than 1 in 5 (22%) 18-24 year olds reported experiencing sexual extortion.²⁷

While historical research²⁸ has found that girls are more likely to be victimized by this form of exploitation – with demands most frequently being sexual or relational in nature – recent research has highlighted an increase in financial forms of sexual extortion, particularly targeting boys.²⁹ What remains evident across the available research is that sexual extortion experiences are likely underestimated and on the rise.

The following data examines recent experiences and attitudes among young people concerning sexual extortion.

Awareness

Many young people are aware of the risk of sexual extortion. Overall, 1 in 3 (33%) teens surveyed indicated they had heard of the term "sextortion." Awareness levels remained relatively consistent across age and gender characteristics (Figure 1).

Fig 1 | Awareness of sextortion

QS1. Have you ever heard of the term "sextortion"?

		Yes	Not sure	No
All Respondents	n=1200	32%	10%	58%
Men & boys	n=547	31%	8%	60%
Women & girls	n=595	31%	10%	58%
LGBTQ+	n=224	35%	11%	54%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=952	31%	9%	60%
Ages 13-17	n=724	33%	9%	58%
Boys	n=373	34%	8%	58%
Girls	n=335	33%	9%	58%
LGBTQ+	n=77*	35%	4%	61%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=633	33%	9%	58%
Ages 18-20	n=476	30%	11%	59%
Men	n=174	26%	8%	65%
Women	n=260	29%	12%	59%
LGBTQ+	n=147	35%	16%	49%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=319	28%	9%	63%

*Base size <100

26 See Fig. 7A & 7B, pg. 15 in Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_23_YouthMonitoring_Report.pdf

27 Henry, N., & Umbach, R. (2024). Sextortion: Prevalence and correlates in 10 countries. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 158, 108298. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563224001663>

28 Thorn. (2017). *Sextortion: Summary findings from a 2017 survey of 2,097 survivors*. https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Sextortion_Wave2Report_121919.pdf

29 Thorn & National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). (2024). *Trends in financial sextortion: An investigation of sextortion reports in NCMEC CyberTipline data*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_TrendsInFinancialSextortion_June2024.pdf

Fig 2 | Awareness of minors with sextortion experiences

QS3. As you may already know, sextortion is threatening to expose sexual images of someone if they don't do what the person threatening them wants them to do. Do you know anyone (not including yourself) who has had this experience while they were under the age of 18? By sexual image, we mean a picture or video (real or fake) that shows the person nude or mostly nude.

		Yes	Not sure	No
All Respondents	n=1200	26%	6%	69%
Men & boys	n=547	20%	4%	75%
Women & girls	n=595	29%	6%	65%
LGBTQ+	n=224	36%	8%	57%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=952	24%	5%	71%
Ages 13-17	n=724	21%	5%	74%
Boys	n=373	15%	5%	80%
Girls	n=335	26%	5%	69%
LGBTQ+	n=77*	39%	5%	56%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=633	19%	5%	76%
Ages 18-20	n=476	33%	7%	60%
Men	n=174	30%	3%	66%
Women	n=260	35%	8%	57%
LGBTQ+	n=147	33%	10%	57%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=319	33%	6%	61%

*Base size <100

After being provided with a definition of the term,³⁰ 1 in 4 (26%) young people indicated they knew of someone (not including themselves) who had experienced sexual extortion while under the age of 18, including 1 in 5 (21%) teens and 1 in 3 (33%) young adults (Figure 2).

While there was limited variability across gender and sexual identity/orientation demographics among young adults, among the teen cohort,

more notable differences were identified. LGBTQ+ teens (39%) were twice as likely to know someone with a sexual extortion experience while under the age of 18 compared to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts (19%); similarly, teen girls (26%) were considerably more likely than teen boys (15%) to know someone who had experienced sexual extortion. Awareness of someone who had experienced sexual extortion grew considerably with age for both boys and girls, most significantly among boys, where the rate doubled.

Prevalence

Overall, 1 in 4 (24%) young people surveyed indicated they had personally been the victim of sexual extortion while under the age of 18, including 1 in 5 (20%) respondents who were teens at the time of the survey (Figure 3a).³¹

This prevalence is meaningfully higher than what was found in the 2023 youth monitoring survey,³² wherein 6% reported experiences of sexual extortion, a prevalence consistent with estimates over the last several years.^{33 34} Given this distinct jump, additional analysis was conducted to assess any contributing factors. Three determinations were reached:

- Margin of error may close the gap slightly.
- The question occurred at the end of the monitoring survey (compared

1 in 4

young people reported experiencing sexual extortion as a minor.

2x

LGBTQ+ teens were twice as likely as their non-LGBTQ+ peers to know someone who had experienced sexual extortion as a minor.

2x

Awareness of someone who had experienced sexual extortion roughly doubled between men/boys in the teen and young adult cohorts.

30 Defined as "threatening to expose sexual images of someone if they don't do what the person threatening them wants them to do. [...] By sexual image, we mean a picture or video (real or fake) that shows the person nude or mostly nude."

31 To ensure clarity throughout this report, all sexual extortion related data represents the experiences of minors. Respondents aged 18-20 were specifically asked about sexual extortion experiences they had while under the age of 18.

32 Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_23_YouthMonitoring_Report.pdf

33 Patchin, J. & Hinduja, S. (2020). "Sextortion among adolescents: Results from a national survey of U.S. youth." *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* 32: 30 - 54.

34 Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., & Colburn, D. (2022). Prevalence of online sexual offenses against children in the US. *JAMA Network Open*, 5(10):e2234471. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.34471>

to near the start of this survey), potentially leading to a narrower view of sexual extortion or less engagement from participants.

- Prevalence of sexual extortion has grown.

Research conducted after the 2023 youth monitoring survey has found higher rates, more consistent with this most recent data. For example, a survey conducted among Australian adolescents found 11% have experienced sexual extortion in their lifetime.³⁵ In a 2023 survey of more than 16,000 adults globally, prevalence among those aged 18-24 was 23%.³⁶ This supports concerns of growing rates of sexual extortion; however, additional research is needed to determine more specifically if these increases reflect higher prevalence (versus awareness or reporting).

Rates generally increased with age, with 1 in 5 teenage participants reporting an experience of sexual extortion compared to nearly 1 in 3 (31%) 18-20-year-old respondents. LGBTQ+ teens were unique in this regard, with much less increase seen with age.

Among teens, no notable gender differences were identified; however, LGBTQ+ teens (36%) were twice as likely to have experienced sexual extortion compared to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts (18%). In young adult respondents (aged 18-20), a gendered aspect was seen, with women (36%) reporting higher rates of experience compared to men (24%). Notably, no racial differences were seen (Figure 3b).

2x
LGBTQ+ teens were twice as likely to have a sextortion experience compared to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts.

Respondents who did not identify experiencing sexual extortion as a minor (n = 809) were asked additional questions to understand if they thought it was possible they could be targeted and, depending on their

35 Wolbers, H., Cubitt, T., Napier, S., Cahill, M., Nicholas, M., Burton, M. & Giunta, K. (2025). Sexual extortion of Australian adolescents: Results from a national survey. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 712. Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti77819>
36 Henry, N., & Umbach, R. (2024). Sextortion: Prevalence and correlates in 10 countries. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 158, 108298.

Fig 3a | **Percentage of respondents who've experienced sextortion as minors**

QB1. [IF 18-20: While you were under the age of 18, had; IF 13-17: Has] anyone ever threatened to share a sexual image of you with 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 shows you nude or mostly nude.

		Yes	Prefer not to say	No
All Respondents	n=1200	24%	2%	74%
Men & boys	n=547	20%	2%	78%
Women & girls	n=595	26%	2%	72%
LGBTQ+	n=224	38%	3%	59%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=952	21%	2%	77%
Ages 13-17	n=724	20%	1%	78%
Boys	n=373	19%	1%	80%
Girls	n=335	21%	2%	78%
LGBTQ+	n=77*	36%	3%	61%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=633	18%	1%	81%
Ages 18-20	n=476	31%	3%	66%
Men	n=174	24%	2%	74%
Women	n=260	36%	4%	61%
LGBTQ+	n=147	39%	3%	58%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=319	28%	3%	70%

This question closely matches a question we ask minors in our Youth Monitoring research (see Fig. 7A in Thorn. (2024). Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023). *Base size <100

Fig 3b | **Percentage of respondents who've experienced sextortion as minors**

QB1. [IF 18-20: While you were under the age of 18, had; IF 13-17: Has] anyone ever threatened to share a sexual image of you with 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 shows you nude or mostly nude.

		Yes	Prefer not to say	No
All Respondents	n=1200	24%	2%	74%
African American	n=281	21%	1%	78%
Hispanic/Latinx	n=250	25%	3%	72%
Other POC	n=171	25%	4%	71%
White	n=550	25%	2%	73%

This question closely matches a question we ask minors in our Youth Monitoring research (see Fig. 7A in Thorn. (2024). Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023).

response, why they felt this was the case. For those who thought it was possible, responses frequently mentioned understanding sexual extortion could happen to anyone, acknowledging that they had shared intimate images previously that could be used against them in the future, or recognizing that they personally knew someone who had been targeted.

Because it can happen to anyone.

18, MALE, AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK/CARIBBEAN AMERICAN, MIDWEST

Because of the widespread availability of technology that can create realistic deepfakes.

15, MALE, WHITE, SOUTH

It happened to my friend.

16, FEMALE, WHITE, WEST

A very creepy guy was talking to me and said he did it to someone else so he could do it to me to[o].

14, FEMALE, WHITE, MIDWEST

For those who did not believe it could have happened to them, reasons included believing they took adequate precautions online, like not sharing personal information or suggestive imagery; feeling a firm sense of trust with the people they interact with (e.g., only interacting with people they know offline); or expressing a general denial that they would likely be a victim (e.g., males are not targeted, or they do not interact with old men or “weird people”).

I don't think males are often the target of this.

17, MALE, MULTIRACIAL, MIDWEST

I don't go on sites where this can happen.

13, MALE, AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK/CARIBBEAN AMERICAN, MIDWEST

Because I am NOT stupid.

15, FEMALE, WHITE, MIDWEST

Because I only sent a pic to one person and she isn't like that. I trust her.

14, MALE, AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK/CARIBBEAN AMERICAN, NORTHEAST

...there was a kid that played on the game with me and one day his voice changed and it was a grown man. I try to be very careful now.

16, MALE, WHITE, SOUTH

I was taught by my mom early about these things and how to avoid them.

14, TRANSGENDER/NON-BINARY, MIDDLE EASTERN, WEST

I have never even taken a naughty picture of myself. So no one would have one to threaten me with.

13, MALE, WHITE, MIDWEST

The contrast between young people's reasons for believing they could be victims of sextortion and those who believe they could not reveals a critical gap between perceived and actual risk. Many young people feel safe because they follow basic precautions, trust their contacts, or avoid sharing explicit images. However, the lived experiences of victims show that sexual extortion often occurs even in these supposedly safe contexts — such as within romantic relationships, through disappearing messages that feel more secure, and even with fabricated or manipulated content.

Victim & Perpetrator Profiles

Historically, sexual extortion was believed to impact more girls than boys, involve a male perpetrator, and be relatively split between online and offline origins.³⁷ However, recent reporting signals these profiles may be evolving.^{38 39} This section explores both victim and perpetrator profiles, along with how the victim first came in contact with the person threatening them.

Victim Profile

Among sexual extortion victims (n = 285), an overwhelming majority (84%) reported their first (and possibly only) experience with sexual extortion⁴⁰ as occurring during their teen years, with half (53%) identifying they were between the ages of 13 and 15 when they first experienced it (Figure 4). Alarming, 1 in 6 (17%) young people reported they were first sextorted while aged 12 or younger.

1 in 6
victims of sexual
extortion said it
happened when they
were 12 or younger.

Extortionist Profile⁴¹

Gender of Extortionist

Although a clear majority of victims (63%) identified their extortionist as male, there were notable gender differences (Figure 5). Among boy victims, they almost equally identified their extortionists as male (43%) and female (38%); however, girl and LGBTQ+ victims overwhelmingly identified their extortionist as male (76% and 73%, respectively).

Fig 4 | **Age of first sextortion experience**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS4a. Earlier, you responded "yes" to a question asking if someone had ever threatened to share a sexual image of you with another person or post it online to get you to do something. Thinking of when this has happened to you [IF 18-20: before you turned 18], how old were you **the first time** this happened to you?

		12 or younger	...9 or younger	...10-12	Teens (13-17)	...13-15	...16-17
All Respondents	n=285	16%	2%	14%	84%	53%	31%
Men & boys	n=105	17%	4%	12%	83%	45%	39%
Women & girls	n=161	16%	2%	15%	84%	57%	27%
LGBTQ+	n=78*	19%	3%	16%	81%	57%	24%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=202	14%	3%	12%	86%	52%	34%
Ages 13-17	n=140	20%	3%	17%	80%	60%	20%
Ages 18-20	n=145	12%	2%	10%	88%	45%	43%

*Base size <100

Fig 5 | **Perceived gender of the sextortionist**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS16. To the best of your knowledge, what was the gender of the person who threatened to share a sexual photo or video of you?

		Male	Female	Transgender/ Non-binary	Not sure
All Respondents	n=285	63%	22%	6%	9%
Men & boys	n=105	43%	38%	9%	11%
Women & girls	n=161	76%	14%	3%	7%
LGBTQ+	n=78*	73%	8%	13%	6%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=202	59%	29%	3%	10%

*Base size <100

37 Wolak, J., Finkelhor, D., Walsh, W., & Treitman, L. (2018). Sextortion of Minors: Characteristics and Dynamics.. The Journal of adolescent health : official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine, 62 1, 72-79 . <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.08.014>.

38 <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/security/financial-sex-tortion-often-targets-teen-boys-instagram-according-new-d-rna157790>

39 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2025/05/01/764-global-child-exploitation-enterprise/83378660007/>

40 In acknowledgment of some victims having multiple sexual extortion experiences, all subsequent survey questions were framed in the context of asking respondents about their first experience. The precise survey framing was, "If you have received threats to share a sexual photo or video of yourself to get you to do something more than once, please answer the remaining questions based on the first time this happened to you while you were under the age of 18."

41 In acknowledgment of some victims having sextortion experiences that involve multiple sextortionists, related survey questions were framed in the context of asking respondents about the person who was most responsible for threatening them. The precise survey framing was, "If more than one person was involved, think of the person who was most responsible for threatening you."

Age of Extortionist

Victims reported they had been sexually extorted by people who were across a spectrum of ages, including both minors (38%) and adults (44%) (Figure 6a). Around 1 in 5 (19%) reported they did not know the extortionist's age. There was limited variation observed among gender and sexual identity/orientation.

Younger victims were more likely to describe an adult extortionist compared to older victims. Roughly half (52%) of victims aged 12 or younger and those aged 13-15 (47%) indicated the extortionist was an adult, compared to 1 in 3 (34%) victims aged 16-17 at the time of the experience (Figure 6b). In addition, for older teens, the rates of extortionists being another minor compared to an adult were similar.

By comparison, respondents who experienced sexual extortion before age 16 were more likely to describe an adult extortionist rather than another minor. Generally, among victims who indicated their extortionist was another minor, it tended to be a similarly aged peer.

Relationship to Extortionist

Online vs. Offline Connections

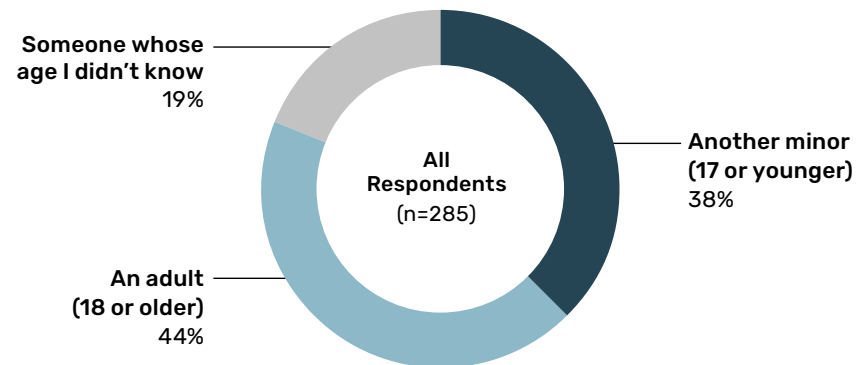
Approximately 1 in 3 (36%) victims of sexual extortion indicated they knew their sextortionist within an offline context (that is, they knew them in person), leaving a majority (61%) of victims who exclusively knew their sextortionist

1 in 3
victims of sexual
extortion said they
knew the person
threatening them
offline.

Fig 6a | **Perceived age of the sextortionist**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS4c. Thinking about **the first time** this happened to you [If 18-20: while you were under the age of 18], to the best of your knowledge, what was the age of the person who was threatening you? If more than one person was involved, think of the person who was most responsible for threatening you.



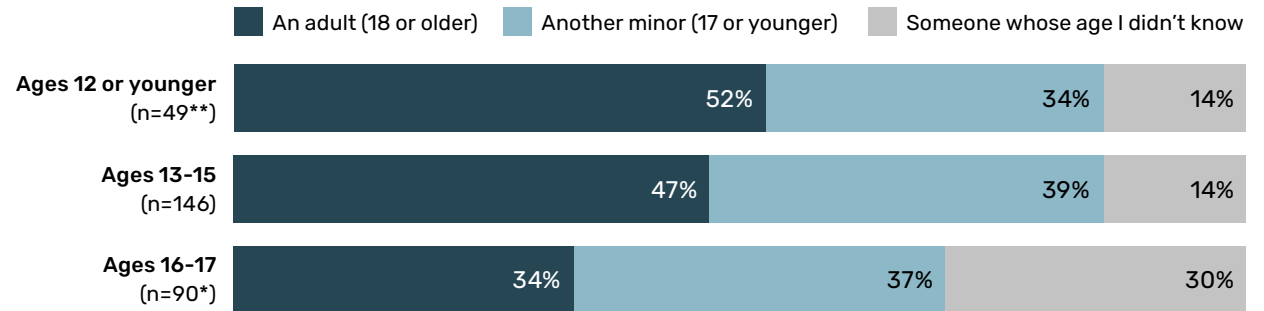
		Another minor (17 or younger)	...12 or younger	...13 to 14	...15 to 17	Young adult (18-24)	...18 to 20	...21 to 24	Older adult (25 or older)	...25 to 29	...30 or older	Someone whose age I didn't know
All Respondents	n=285	38%	4%	12%	22%	29%	18%	11%	15%	9%	6%	19%
Men & boys	n=105	40%	5%	8%	27%	24%	13%	12%	17%	13%	4%	18%
Women & girls	n=161	35%	1%	18%	16%	34%	23%	11%	12%	5%	7%	18%
LGBTQ+	n=78*	42%	4%	9%	28%	31%	16%	15%	16%	14%	2%	12%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=202	36%	4%	13%	20%	29%	19%	10%	14%	7%	7%	21%

*Base size <100

Fig 6b | **Perceived age of the sextortionist, by age of respondent at the time of the experience**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS4c. Thinking about **the first time** this happened to you [IF 18-20: while you were under the age of 18], to the best of your knowledge, what was the age of the person who was threatening you? If more than one person was involved, think of the person who was most responsible for threatening you.



		Another minor (17 or younger)	...12 or younger	...13 to 14	...15 to 17	Young adult (18-24)	...18 to 20	...21 to 24	Older adult (25 or older)	...25 to 29	...30 or older	Someone whose age I didn't know
All Respondents	n=285	38%	4%	12%	22%	29%	18%	11%	15%	9%	6%	19%
12 or younger	n=49**	34%	17%	11%	6%	37%	18%	20%	15%	11%	4%	14%
13-15	n=146	39%	1%	18%	20%	30%	19%	11%	17%	10%	7%	14%
16-17	n=90*	37%	2%	1%	34%	23%	16%	8%	10%	6%	4%	30%

*Base size <100, **Base size <50

online (Figure 7a).⁴² This number is consistent with other recent survey findings⁴³ and represents a shift in the distribution of online versus offline perpetrators from several historical surveys of sexual extortion survivors,^{44 45} indicating increasing rates of online perpetrators.

This distribution remained relatively consistent within gender and sexual identity/orientation demographics. Variation was seen, however, based on the victim's age at the time of the event. Younger victims were more likely to indicate they were sexually extorted by someone they knew offline (Figure 7b).⁴⁶

Those sexually extorted by someone they knew offline were considerably more likely to describe the person as another minor than as an adult. More than half (54%) of those extorted by someone they knew offline described the person as another minor compared to slightly more than one-third (38%) who described the extortionist as an adult (Figure 8). The opposite was true for those who were sexually extorted by someone they only knew online. Slightly less than one-third (30%) of those respondents extorted by an online contact described the person as another minor, compared to nearly half (47%) who believed the person was an adult.

42 Four percent of victims selected "prefer not to say." Given the subsequent small base size this percentage represents (n = 9), all related analyses that examine this as a key variable exclude further breakdowns of this group.

43 Wolbers, H., Cubitt, T., Napier, S., Cahill, M., Nicholas, M., Burton, M., & Giunta, K. (2025). Sexual extortion of Australian adolescents: Results from a national survey. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 712. <https://doi.org/10.52922/ti77819>

44 Wolak, J., Finkelhor, D., Walsh, W. A., & Treitman, L. (2018). Sextortion of minors: Characteristics and dynamics. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 62(1), 72-79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2017.08.014>

45 Patchin, J., & Hinduja, S. (2024). The nature and extent of youth sextortion: Legal implications and directions for future research. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsl.2667>

46 This is consistent with other research finding younger victims of child sexual abuse are more likely than older victims to be offended against by a family member. Seto, M., Buckman, C., Dwyer, R., & Quayle, E. (2025). *Production and Active Trading of Child Sexual Exploitation Images Depicting Identified Victims*. https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Production-and-Active-Trading-of-CSAM_FullReport_FINAL.pdf

Fig 7a | **Context of familiarity between victim and sextortionist**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS13. To the best of your knowledge, was the person who threatened to share a sexual photo or video of you someone you knew in-person? That is, you knew him or her offline before it happened.

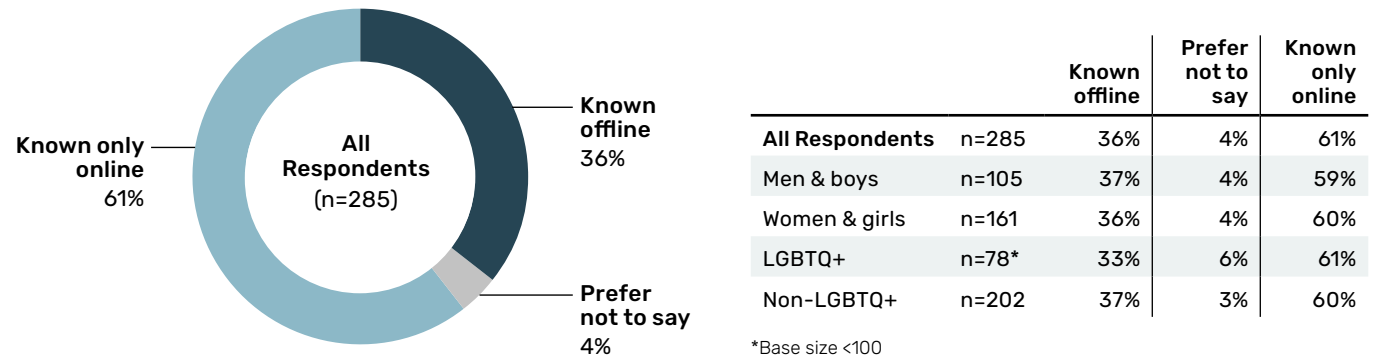
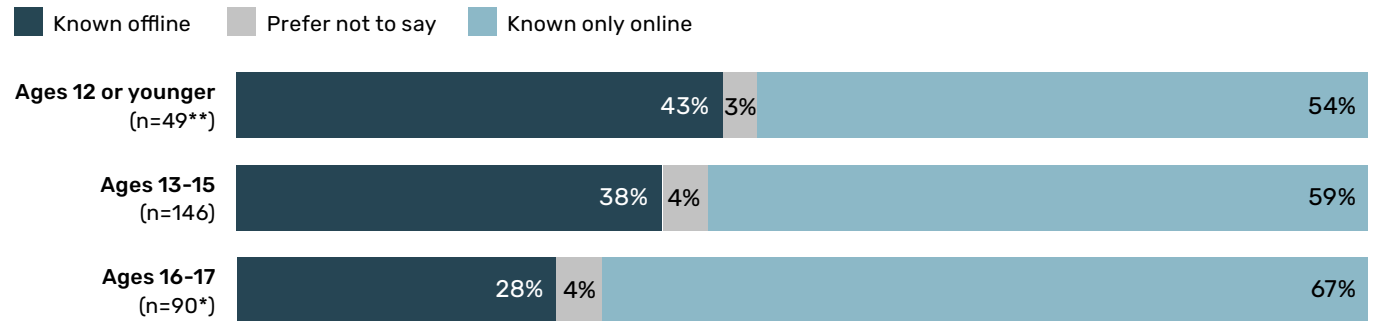


Fig 7b | **Context of familiarity between victim and sextortionist, by age of respondent at the time of the experience**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS13. To the best of your knowledge, was the person who threatened to share a sexual photo or video of you someone you knew in-person? That is, you knew him or her offline before it happened.



Role of Catfishing

Catfishing was a concept many respondents were familiar with, with half (53%) of all young people surveyed believing someone online had used a fake or misleading persona (like a fake profile or lying about their identity) to trick them into connecting or interacting with them, including half (50%) of teens (Figure 9). These respondents described a number of different purposes for which they believed the person was attempting to catfish them, including trying to scam them, play a joke on them, or to get them to send explicit imagery.

They wanted me to like them and they sent me a picture of their private part.

14, FEMALE, WHITE, SOUTH

Perverted individual wanted to see me in person.

13, MALE, ASIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER, WEST

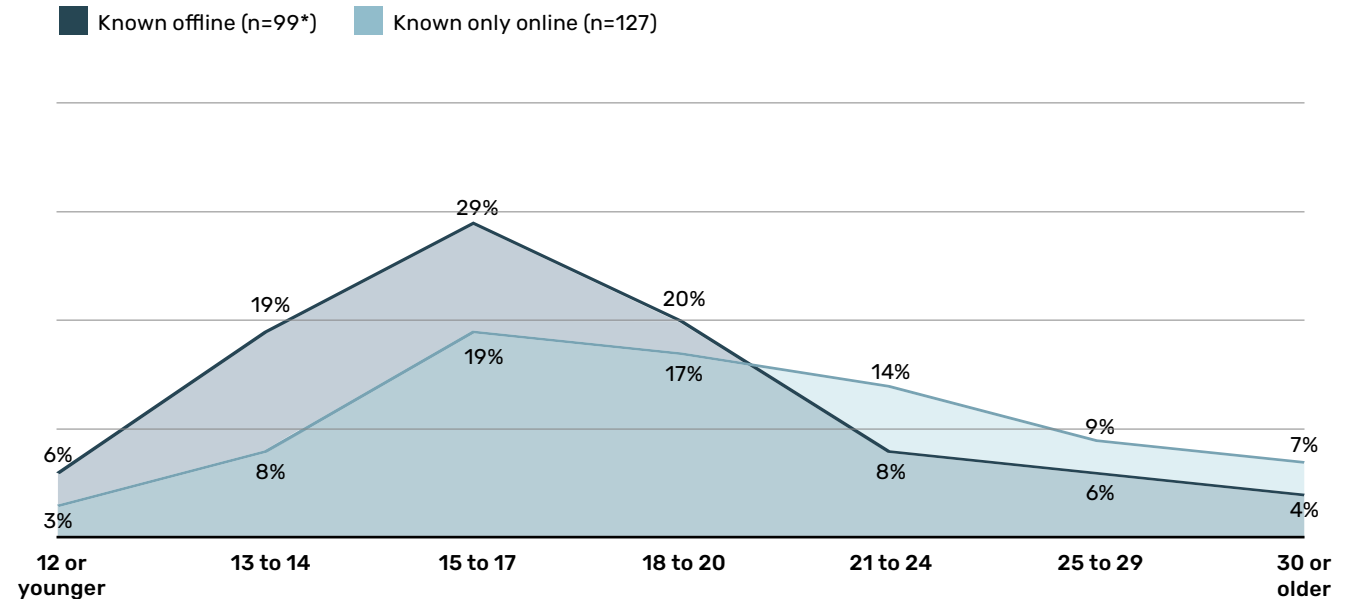
They wanted to stalk my pages.

18, FEMALE, WHITE, MIDWEST

Fig 8 | **Perceived age of the sextortionist, by context of familiarity**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS4c. Thinking about **the first time** this happened to you [IF 18-20: while you were under the age of 18], to the best of your knowledge, what was the age of the person who was threatening you? If more than one person was involved, think of the person who was most responsible for threatening you.



The response option 'Someone whose age I didn't know' was not included in this figure. *Base size <100

Fig 9 | **Perceived experiences with catfishing**

Q01. Do you think someone online has ever used a fake or misleading online persona (such as a fake profile or lying about their age, location, or identity) to trick you into connecting and/or interacting with them online (this is also referred to as "catfishing")?

		Yes	Not sure	No
All Respondents	n=1200	53%	15%	32%
Men & boys	n=547	51%	11%	38%
Women & girls	n=595	56%	17%	27%
LGBTQ+	n=224	58%	16%	25%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=952	52%	14%	34%
Ages 13-17	n=724	50%	16%	34%
Ages 18-20	n=476	58%	12%	29%

Fig 10 | **Victims' perceived use of catfishing as a sextortion tactic**

Among respondents who indicated they did not know their sextortionist offline

QS14. To the best of your knowledge, do you believe the person who threatened to share a sexual photo or video of you was lying about who they were online? For instance, by using a fake online profile or lying about their age, location, or identity to trick you?

		Yes	Not sure	No
All Respondents	n=177	45%	20%	35%
Men & boys	n=63*	53%	6%	41%
Women & girls	n=99*	45%	26%	28%
LGBTQ+	n=48**	28%	31%	40%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=124	52%	14%	34%
12 or younger	n=31**	63%	16%	20%
13-15	n=85*	44%	25%	31%
16-17	n=61*	39%	14%	47%

*Base size <100, **Base size <50

Victims who indicated they only knew the extortionist online (n = 177) were asked if they suspected the person was lying about who they were online: nearly half (45%) indicated they did suspect as much, with an additional 20% who were not sure. Although comparative base sizes were smaller, LGBTQ+ youth were considerably less likely to suspect catfishing was involved in their extortion experience (28%) compared to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts (52%), although this is largely attributable to higher rates of uncertainty (31% and 14%, respectively).

45%
of young people extorted
by an online contact
believed the person lied
about their identity.

When looking at this subsample by the age of victimization, younger victims were comparatively more likely to suspect their extortionist lied to them about their identity in this way; among victims who were 12 or younger at the time, 63% suspected as much compared to 39% of victims who were aged 16–17 at the time. Given the small base sizes for this data, additional research is needed to further explore this trend.

Relationship between Victim & Sextortionist

Among victims who knew their sextortionists offline (n = 99), respondents were most likely to describe them as a current or former romantic partner (52%), followed by a current/former friend or someone they knew from school (47%)(Figure 11). It is also notable that 1 in 10 (10%) indicated it was an adult friend of their family and 6% said it was a member of their family.

Among victims who knew their sextortionists exclusively online (n = 177), they were much more likely to indicate they were not sure how to describe their relationship to the sextortionist (24%); they were much less likely to describe the person as a friend or someone from school (22%) or as a current or former romantic partner (14%)(Figure 12).

Among sexual extortion victims who knew the perpetrator offline...

1 in 2

said they were a current or former romantic partner.

1 in 10

described them as an adult friend of the family.

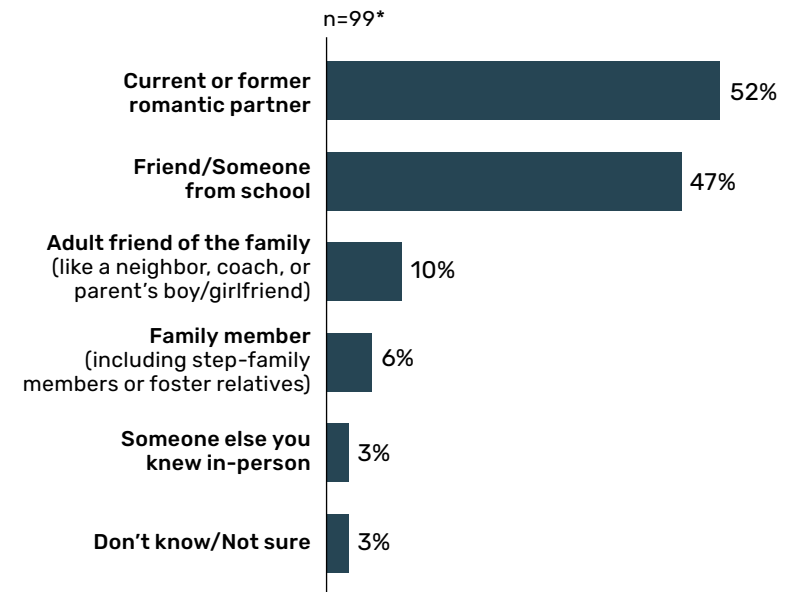
1 in 17

said they were a member of their family.

Fig 11 | **Context of relationship between victim and sextortionist, by offline contacts**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS17. And how would you best describe your relationship to the person threatening you?



Question was multiple select. *Base size <100

Fig 12 | **Context of relationship between victim and sextortionist, by online only contacts**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS17. And how would you best describe your relationship to the person threatening you?

Known only online n=177	
Someone you only knew online	49%
Friend/Someone from school	22%
Current or former romantic partner	14%
Adult friend of the family	2%
Family member	2%
Don't know/Not sure	24%
Other	1%

Demand Progression

Image Acquisition

A range of pathways were described through which the person who threatened them had acquired the explicit imagery, including, in some cases, elements of coercion, romantic exploration, and deceit. Roughly half (44%) of respondents who identified an experience of sexual extortion reported they had knowingly shared imagery (regardless of if it was consensual or a result of pressure or deceit) while the remainder either did not knowingly share (52%)(Figure 13).

Among victims who indicated they had knowingly shared their sexual imagery (n = 124), the leading reason was tied to feeling coerced or manipulated (74%), followed quickly by relational elements, with 71% feeling they trusted the person, that it was a normal or expected part of dating, or that this was a desired relationship. Far behind these two contexts, 25% said sharing was tied to some type of commercial incentive (Figure 14).

Fig 13 | Rates of sextortion victims knowingly providing sexual imagery to sextortionists

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS10. People can get sexual photos or videos of another person in a lot of different ways. [IF 18-20: While you were under the age of 18, had; IF 13-17 Has] someone ever threatened you with a nude photo or video of yourself that you **knowingly** shared with them – either because you wanted to share it at the time or because you felt forced or tricked into sharing it?

	Yes	Prefer not to say	No
All Respondents n=285	44%	4%	52%
Men & boys n=105	43%	3%	54%
Women & girls n=161	42%	6%	52%
LGBTQ+ n=78*	54%	5%	40%
Non-LGBTQ+ n=202	40%	4%	57%

*Base size <100

Fig 14 | Context of sexual imagery acquisition in sextortion experiences as minors

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor and who knowingly provided the imagery they were subsequently threatened with

QS11a. Please check any of the statements below that describe **why you first sent or gave a sexual photo or video of yourself to this person** (before they threatened you).

	Knowingly shared n=124
Coercion or Manipulation	74%
They pressured you or made you feel bad to get you to do it	53%
They tricked you into doing it	31%
They forced or threatened you into giving them a photo or video	23%
Relational Elements	71%
You trusted this person to keep it between the two of you	48%
You felt it was an expected or a normal part of dating	45%
You viewed this as a wanted romantic or sexual relationship	43%
Commercial Incentives	25%
They said they would pay you for them	16%
They said they would use it for professional purposes, like modeling or acting	13%
None of the options provided	5%

Question was multiple select. "None of the options provided" represents a net percentage of respondents who selected "None of the above," an exclusive response option, or "Some other reason." An additional exclusive response option of "prefer not to answer" was also available, however no respondents selected it.

Among respondents who had experienced sexual extortion, many described situations where the person threatening them surreptitiously acquired the image they used to threaten them. Nearly half (44%) of sextortion victims indicated the imagery that was used to extort them was acquired through a recording or screenshot without their consent, including 1 in 3 (32%) who said it was screenshotted from a disappearing

message (Figure 15). Around 1 in 4 (23%) victims indicated the imagery that was used to extort them depicted someone else, yet the sextortionist threatened to release it and say it was them anyway. One in 8 indicated the sextortionist acquired the imagery from someone else (13%) and/or they used AI technology to create a deepfake nude of the victim (13%). Tellingly, 1 in 10 (10%) victims simply were not sure how the initial image was acquired.

1 in 8

victims of sexual extortion reported they have been threatened with a deepfake someone made of them.

It was a girl bully from school who lied about a naked pic and told people in school it was me.

13, FEMALE, HISPANIC OR LATINA, NORTHEAST

Demands

What is demanded of victims of extortion can vary significantly, but one can think of demands as the thing an extortionist requires of the victim while *threatening* them with the explicit imagery. Put another way, threats use the explicit imagery to secure what is *demanded*. Threats are discussed later in this section.

Among victims of sexual extortion, the top three demands identified were demands for more sexual imagery of themselves (39%), demands to meet in person in some capacity (31%), and demands to stay in or return to a relationship (25%) (Figure 16a). Around 1 in 5 victims indicated they received

1 in 5

victims of sexual extortion reported they experienced demands for money.

Fig 15 | **How sextortionists acquired sexual imagery from victims**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS12. Has anyone ever done any of the following to get a sexual photo or video of you that they later threatened to share with other people?

	All Respondents n=285	Men & boys n=105	Women & girls n=161	LGBTQ+ n=78*	Non-LGBTQ+ n=202
Recorded or screenshot without consent	44%	43%	42%	41%	45%
...They screenshotted it in a disappearing message you sent them	32%	32%	29%	32%	32%
...They recorded a webcam image or video without your consent	20%	18%	22%	17%	21%
...They recorded you without your consent in some other way	1%	0%	2%	1%	1%
They used someone's photo and lied saying that it was me	23%	24%	25%	19%	24%
They got them from someone else	13%	14%	11%	16%	12%
They used AI technology to create a deepfake nude of you	13%	14%	14%	7%	16%
They hacked into a device (cell phone, computer, etc.) or online account	12%	19%	8%	11%	13%
Not sure	10%	6%	13%	11%	10%
None of the options provided	22%	23%	21%	22%	22%

Question was multiple select. "Not sure" was an exclusive response option. "None of the options provided" represents a net percentage of respondents who selected "None of these," an exclusive response option, or "Something else". *Base size <100

demands for money (22%) or to meet online for sexual activity (e.g., by webcam) (19%).

Notably, the numbers of those threatened for money are higher than have been reported in surveys predating recent increases in financial sextortion (since approximately late 2021). By comparison, in studies published in 2016⁴⁷ and 2017,⁴⁸ rates of financial demands were less than 10% (9% in the 2016 study and 7% in the 2017 study). Alternatively, some more recent studies, such as the 2023 study conducted by Snap, have shown even

higher rates: 48% of sexual extortion victims in that survey described demands for money.⁴⁹ The increase in the current survey is heavily driven by the experiences of men & boys, among whom 36% reported experiencing financial demands. While the data is not directly comparable, this aligns with recent concerns of significant increases in financial sextortion activity.

Some notable variations in the sextortionist's demands were identified when looking at the age of the victim at the time of victimization. Younger

Fig 16a | **Types of sextortion demands**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS21a. Thinking of when this person threatened you, what did they want from you?

	All Respondents n=285	DEMOGRAPHICS				AGE OF FIRST EXPERIENCE			RELATIONSHIP	
		Men & boys n=105	Women & girls n=161	LGBTQ+ n=78*	Non-LGBTQ+ n=202	12 or younger n=49**	13-15 n=146	16-17 n=90*	Known offline n=99*	Known only online n=177
More sexual pictures or videos of you	39%	29%	43%	44%	37%	38%	46%	26%	41%	38%
Meet in-person	31%	24%	39%	23%	34%	38%	33%	23%	33%	30%
Make you stay in or go back to a relationship with them	25%	23%	21%	30%	23%	30%	27%	19%	36%	19%
Money	22%	36%	13%	18%	25%	23%	18%	29%	17%	25%
To look a certain way or do certain things in pictures or videos	22%	15%	24%	31%	19%	36%	22%	15%	27%	19%
Meet online for sexual activity (by webcam, for example)	19%	18%	21%	13%	21%	33%	16%	15%	16%	19%
Sexual pictures or videos of someone else (friend, sibling, others)	17%	19%	18%	13%	19%	26%	17%	11%	26%	11%
Make you physically hurt yourself	9%	8%	6%	18%	6%	14%	9%	8%	11%	8%
Make you do something else	3%	2%	4%	1%	3%	5%	3%	1%	5%	1%

Question was multiple select. A response option "make you physically hurt others" was also available, however no respondents in the subsample selected it. This question closely matches a question we ask minors in our Youth Monitoring research (see Fig. 7B in Thorn. (2024). Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023). *Base size <100 **Base size <50

47 Wolak, Janis and David Finkelhor (2016) "Sextortion: Findings from a Survey of 1,631 Victims." https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Sextortion_Report.pdf

48 Thorn (2017). Sextortion: Summary findings from a 2017 survey of 2,097 survivors. https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Sextortion_Wave2Report_121919.pdf

49 Snap Inc. (2024, October 19) New Snap research: Gen Z remains a target for online sextortion, but signs of progress. <https://values.snap.com/news/new-sextortion-research-gen-z>

Fig 16b | **Types of sextortion demands, by sextortionist profile**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS21a. Thinking of when this person threatened you, what did they want from you?

	GENDER OF SEXTORTIONIST		AGE OF SEXTORTIONIST	
	Male n=183	Female n=59*	Another minor n=102	An adult n=126
More sexual pictures or videos of you	40%	39%	34%	49%
Meet in-person	37%	18%	22%	34%
Make you stay in or go back to a relationship with them	23%	31%	33%	21%
Money	19%	25%	23%	18%
To look a certain way or do certain things in pictures or videos	22%	21%	19%	27%
Meet online for sexual activity (by webcam, for example)	21%	13%	13%	23%
Sexual pictures or videos of someone else (friend, sibling, others)	17%	16%	15%	21%
Make you physically hurt yourself	11%	3%	14%	7%
Make you do something else	2%	5%	5%	2%

Question was multiple select. "Meet in person" represents a net percentage of respondents who selected "Meet in-person" or "Meet in-person for sexual activity." A response option "make you physically hurt others" was also available, however no respondents in the subsample selected it. This question closely matches a question we ask minors in our Youth Monitoring research (see Fig. 7B in Thorn. (2024). Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023). *Base size <100

victims (those aged 12 or younger at the time of the event) were most likely to identify they received demands for more sexual imagery of themselves (38%), to meet in person (38%), to look a certain way or do certain things in imagery (36%), and to meet online for sexual activity (33%)(Figure 16a). Victims aged 12 or younger at the time were also more likely to identify they received demands for sexual imagery of others, like a friend or sibling (26%), as well as demands to hurt themselves physically (14%). Victims aged 13-15 at the time of the event were the most likely to indicate they received demands for more sexual imagery of themselves (46%). In comparison, victims aged 16 or 17 at the time of the event were the most likely among other age groups to identify they received demands for money (29%).

When looking at the demands received based on whether the sextortionist was known to the victim offline or exclusively online, additional variations emerged. Victims who knew their sextortionist offline were more likely to identify the demands they received involved making them stay in or return to a former relationship (+17%), share sexual imagery of someone else, like a friend or sibling (+15%), and/or look a certain way or do certain things in imagery (+8%)(Figure 16a). Alternatively, victims who only knew

their sextortionists online were more likely than those who knew their sextortionist offline to indicate the demands they received involved money (+8%).

When analyzing demand type by perceived gender and age attributes of the sextortionist, additional differences were noted (Figure 16b). Victims of sextortionists perceived to be male were comparatively more likely to have received demands that involved meeting in person (+19%), meeting online for sexual activity (+8%), or making victims physically harm themselves (+8%). Victims of sextortionists perceived to be female were more likely to have demands to stay in or return to a relationship with them (+8%) or pay money (+6%).

Sextortionists who victims perceived to be adults were more likely to demand more sexual imagery from victims (+15%), to meet in person (+12%), and to meet online for sexual activity (+10%). Alternatively, sextortionists perceived to be other minors were more likely to demand victims stay in or return to a relationship (+12%) and victims physically harm themselves (+7%).

Among those who reported they had knowingly shared an image, for roughly 1 in 3 (37%), demands began within one week of sharing the image, including within 24 hours for roughly 1 in 6 (17%)(Figure 17a). Those being sexually extorted by someone they only knew online (and reported knowingly sharing the image they were threatened with) were more likely to describe a shorter period between when they shared the image and when demands began. Three-quarters of these respondents

reported demands began within one month of sharing an image, and 29% experienced demands within 24 hours of sharing an image (Figure 17b). By comparison, half of the young people who knowingly shared an image and reported extortion by someone they knew offline said demands started within one month of sharing, including only 7% who said it started within 24 hours.

Fig 17a | **Timing for receiving initial threats from sextortionists**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor and who knowingly provided the imagery they were subsequently threatened with

QS11b. After they acquired the sexual photo or video, how long was it before they began threatening you about it?

Response option '1 week - 1 month' indicates more than 1 week and up to 1 month, whereas '1-6 months' reflects more than 1 month up to 6 months. * Base size <100 **Base size <50

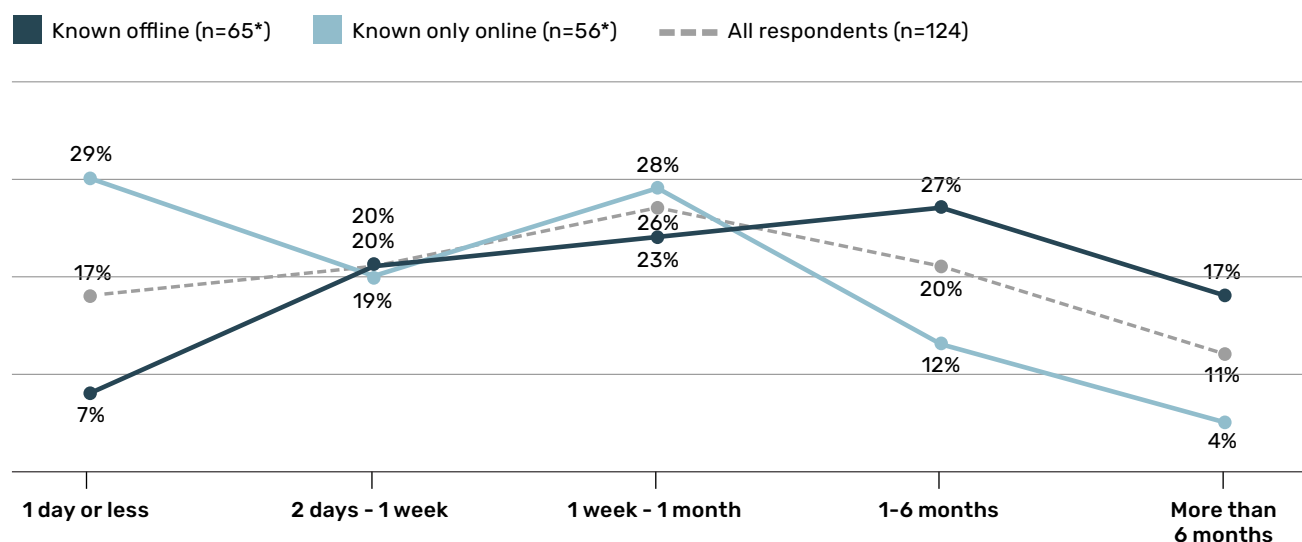
	All Respondents n=124	Men & boys n=45**	Women & girls n=68*	LGBTQ+ n=42**	Non-LGBTQ+ n=80*
A day or less	17%	21%	19%	16%	18%
2 days to 1 week	20%	12%	23%	12%	24%
Between 1 and 2 weeks	12%	7%	15%	11%	12%
More than 2 weeks to 1 month	14%	11%	16%	14%	14%
More than 1 month to 3 months	11%	10%	9%	19%	6%
More than 3 months to 6 months	9%	16%	5%	7%	9%
More than 6 months to 1 year	6%	7%	4%	5%	5%
More than 1 year	5%	10%	3%	4%	6%
Don't know/Not sure	7%	8%	6%	11%	5%

Fig 17b | **Timing for receiving initial threats from sextortionists, by context of familiarity**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor and who knowingly provided the imagery they were subsequently threatened with

QS11b. After they acquired the sexual photo or video, how long was it before they began threatening you about it?

Response option '1 week - 1 month' indicates more than 1 week and up to 1 month, whereas '1-6 months' reflects more than 1 month up to 6 months. Respondents selecting don't know/Not sure" are not included in the visualization. The data for these respondents was: All respondents = 7%; known offline = 6%; known only online = 8%. *Base size <100



Threats

Sexual extortionists use a variety of threats in attempts to get victims to comply with demands and isolate them from help. Victims were most likely to be threatened with distribution of the explicit imagery or personal information (72%), followed by threats of stalking or physical violence (37%), or threats to get the victim in trouble with family/friends, school, or police (30%)(Figure 18). LGBTQ+ victims were more likely than their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts to indicate some form of distribution (of imagery or personal information) was involved in the threats they received (+12%).

Overall, both victims extorted by someone they knew only online and those targeted by someone they knew offline showed threat types in a similar order of prevalence. However, those who knew the person

threatening them offline show comparatively higher rates of threats in almost all categories. Victims who knew their sextortionist in an offline capacity were comparatively more likely than victims who only knew their sextortionist online to indicate they received distribution related threats (+17%), threats involving physical intimidation and harm (+17%), and threats of getting the victim in trouble (+18%)(Figure 18). This may be due in part to the fact that, compared to an extortionist only known online, an extortionist from a victim's offline community would presumably have greater knowledge of – and access to – the victim's community (friends, families, etc.), and they may know the victim personally, thus increasing the viability of threats of physical violence or distribution to the victim's friends/family. However, additional research would be necessary to further explore this data.

Fig 18 | **Nature of threats sextortionists made to victims**
Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS19a. Has anyone ever threatened to do any of the following with a sexual photo or video of you? // QS19b. Has anyone ever threatened to do any of the following with a sexual photo or video of you?

	All Respondents n=285	DEMOGRAPHICS				RELATIONSHIP	
		Men & boys n=105	Women & girls n=161	LGBTQ+ n=78*	Non-LGBTQ+ n=202	Known offline n=99*	Known only online n=177
Distributing the content or personal information	72%	70%	71%	81%	69%	83%	66%
Physical intimidation or harm	37%	38%	36%	39%	35%	47%	30%
Get victim in trouble	30%	32%	29%	24%	32%	41%	23%
Impersonate you by creating fake online accounts or fake nude photos	24%	27%	23%	19%	27%	32%	21%
Use it to make money	15%	12%	19%	11%	16%	15%	15%
Prefer not to answer	6%	4%	8%	10%	4%	3%	7%
None of the options provided	42%	40%	43%	45%	41%	30%	49%

Questions were both multiple select. "Something else/None of the above" reflects the net percentage of respondents who selected the response options of "Something else" or "None of the above" in both QS19a and QS19b. "None of the above" was an exclusive response option in both QS19a and QS19b. *Base size <100

Threats Carried Out

While threats are central to sexual extortion, a minority of victims reported the perpetrator followed through on these threats. Still, 1 in 6 (17%) victims were aware of their sextortionist fulfilling a threat they made, most frequently by distributing imagery or personal information about the victim. LGBTQ+ victims were twice as likely to report having experiences with sextortionists who fulfilled their threats (26%) compared to non-LGBTQ+ victims (13%), particularly with respect to having their content or personal information distributed in some capacity or being the victim of physical intimidation or harm (Figure 19a).

1 in 6

victims of sexual extortion reported the person extorting them followed through on the threats made.

2x

LGBTQ+ youth were twice as likely to report the extortionist followed through on threats.

Fig 19a | **Threats carried out by sextortionists**
Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS20. To the best of your knowledge, has anyone actually **done** any of the things they threatened to do or harmed you in some other way? // QS20a. Which of the things below did this person do?

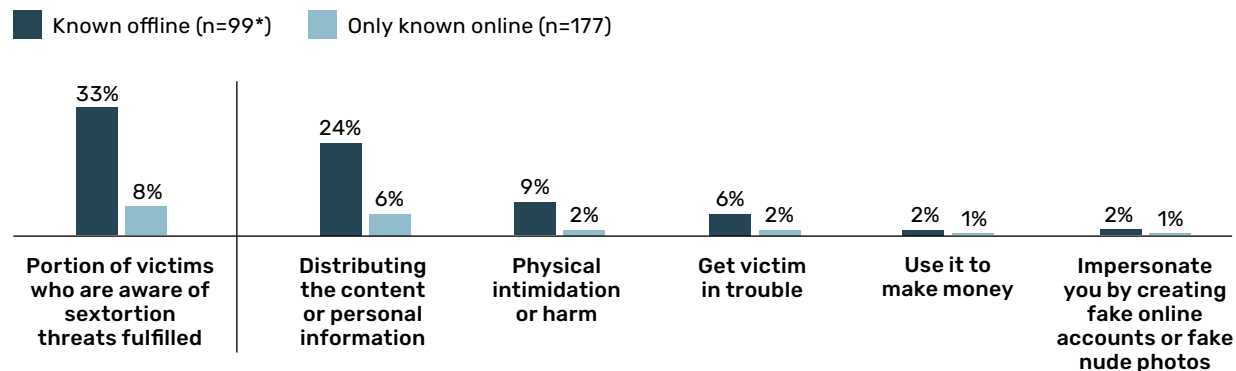
	All Respondents n=285	Men & boys n=105	Women & girls n=161	LGBTQ+ n=78*	Non-LGBTQ+ n=202
Portion of victims who are aware of sextortion threats fulfilled	17%	18%	15%	26%	13%
Distributing the content or personal information	12%	14%	10%	18%	10%
...speak about or send it to a friend or someone else you know	6%	6%	4%	11%	3%
...post your name or tag you in it once it's posted online	3%	3%	4%	4%	3%
...post other personal information about you with a picture posted online	3%	4%	3%	6%	2%
...speak about or send it to someone in your family	2%	4%	1%	1%	2%
...speak about or send it to your school	2%	4%	1%	1%	2%
...post it online	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Physical intimidation or harm	5%	4%	4%	10%	3%
...come after you or stalk you in-person	3%	2%	1%	6%	2%
...beat you up, assault you, or physically hurt you in some other way	3%	3%	3%	6%	1%
...physically hurt your family or friends	1%	0%	0%	3%	0%
Get victim in trouble	3%	7%	0%	2%	4%
...give it to the police to get you in trouble	2%	6%	0%	0%	3%
...get you in trouble at your school	1%	1%	0%	2%	0%
Use it to make money	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%
Impersonate you by creating fake online accounts or fake nude photos	1%	1%	2%	4%	0%

Question QS20a was multiple select. *Base size <100

Fig 19b | **Threats carried out by sextortionists, by context of familiarity**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS20. To the best of your knowledge, has anyone actually **done** any of the things they threatened to do or harmed you in some other way? // QS20a. Which of the things below did this person do?



	Known offline n=99*	Known only online n=177
Distributing the content or personal information		
...speak about or send it to a friend or someone else you know	11%	3%
...post your name or tag you in it once it's posted online	5%	3%
...post other personal information about you with a picture posted online	4%	3%
...speak about or send it to someone in your family	3%	1%
...speak about or send it to your school	6%	0%
...post it online	1%	0%
Physical intimidation or harm		
...come after you or stalk you in-person	7%	1%
...beat you up, assault you, or physically hurt you in some other way	6%	1%
...physically hurt your family or friends	2%	0%
Get victim in trouble		
...give it to the police to get you in trouble	5%	1%
...get you in trouble at your school	1%	0%

Question QS20a was multiple select. *Base size <100

Victims who knew their sextortionists offline were also notably more likely than victims who only knew their sextortionists online to report having experiences where their sextortionists fulfilled a threat; nearly 1 in 5 (24%) victims who knew their sextortionist offline indicated their sextortionists distributed the content or shared their personal information in some capacity, and 1 in 11 (9%) reported they experienced physical intimidation or harm as a result (Figure 19b).

4x

Victims who knew their extortionist offline were 4x more likely to say the perpetrator followed through on threats to leak imagery or personal information.

Communicating with the Extortionist

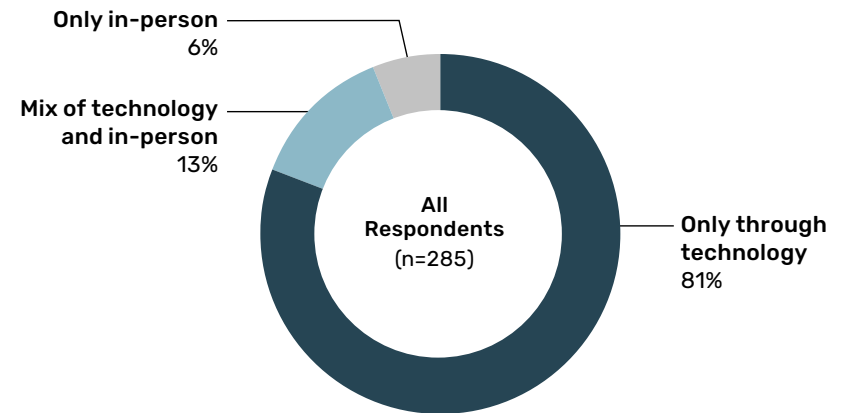
Technology was identified as a significant enabler of sexual extortion. Few respondents (6%) said they only experienced threats directly in person. Meanwhile, more than three-quarters (81%) said threats were *exclusively* made via technology such as online platforms, direct messaging, or video calls (Figure 20).

Sexual extortion victims identified various platforms, apps, and other technology services used by their sextortionists to communicate threats (Figure 21). Social media (60%) and messaging services (such as text messaging or iMessage) (56%) stand apart as the dominant channels enlisted in threats.

For each of these service types, respondents were asked which platforms were used by the extortionist when communicating threats. The top five

Fig 20 | **Sextortionists' methods for communicating threats to victims**
Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS18. How did the person threatening you communicate their threats to you?



individual platforms identified by sextortion victims were Snapchat (37%), Instagram (24%), Facebook Messenger (21%), Discord (18%), TikTok (11%), and WhatsApp (10%) (Figure 22). Among sextortion victims who indicated their sextortionist demanded money ($n = 60$), the overwhelming majority of victims (79%) reported money was transferred via payment apps (such as but not exclusive to CashApp, Paypal, or Venmo), followed by gift cards (23%), and cryptocurrency (20%) (Figure 23).⁵⁰

50 The corresponding survey question was, "You indicated the person threatening you wanted money. How did they want you to pay them?" The available response options were multiple select and included Amazon gift card, Apple Pay, CashApp, cryptocurrency (Bitcoin, Ethereum, Tether, etc.), gift card (other), online gaming currency (Robux, V-Bucks, Minecoins, etc.), PayPal, physical cash (in-person), Venmo, Zelle, and other. Given the small sample size ($n = 60$), respondents' answers are described qualitatively rather than presented within a data table.

Fig 21 | **Technologies sextortionists used to communicate threats to victims**
Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor using technology

QS18a. You indicated this person made threats to you using technology. Which technology, platforms, or apps were used **to send you** the threats?

	All Respondents n=267	DEMOGRAPHICS				AGE OF FIRST EXPERIENCE		
		Men & boys n=98*	Women & girls n=150	LGBTQ+ n=74*	Non- LGBTQ+ n=189	12 or younger n=44**	13-15 n=137	16-17 n=86*
Social media platforms	60%	51%	64%	64%	58%	54%	61%	59%
Messaging platform or service	56%	53%	58%	64%	54%	62%	59%	50%
...text message or iMessage	39%	34%	43%	40%	39%	45%	36%	40%
...private messaging apps	29%	30%	25%	37%	25%	38%	33%	17%
Video calls	14%	15%	12%	12%	14%	30%	12%	7%
Gaming apps	13%	15%	10%	11%	14%	22%	12%	11%
Adult platform or services	13%	18%	9%	10%	14%	22%	14%	7%
...dating or hookup apps	9%	14%	5%	8%	10%	17%	10%	4%
...adult content or pornography sites	5%	6%	5%	2%	6%	10%	5%	3%
Email	10%	10%	7%	12%	9%	21%	9%	5%
The dark web	5%	9%	2%	6%	4%	15%	4%	2%
Other	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	0%	3%	0%
Don't know/Not sure	3%	4%	2%	0%	4%	4%	2%	2%

Question was multiple select. "Don't know/Not sure" was an exclusive response option. *Base size <100 **Base size <50

Fig 22 | **Platforms and apps sextortionists used to communicate threats to victims**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS18b-e. You indicated this person made threats to you using private messaging apps/social media platforms/gaming apps/dating or hookup apps. Which of these did the person use **to send you** the threats?

	Classification	n=267		Classification	n=267
Among Us	Gaming	2%	Signal	Private messaging	2%
Bumble	Dating	2%	Snapchat	Social media	37%
Call of Duty	Gaming	1%	Tagged	Dating	2%
Discord	Social media, Gaming	18%	Telegram	Private messaging	7%
Facebook	Social media	7%	TikTok	Social media	11%
Facebook Messenger	Social media, Private messaging	21%	Tinder	Dating	6%
Fortnite	Gaming	3%	Tumblr	Social media	4%
Google Hangouts/Meet	Private messaging	2%	Twitch	Social media, Gaming	2%
Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	Gaming	1%	Viber	Private messaging	3%
Grindr	Dating	4%	WhatsApp	Private messaging	10%
Hinge	Dating	2%	Wickr	Private messaging	1%
Instagram	Social media	24%	Wink	Social media	2%
Kik	Private messaging	4%	Wizz	Social media	2%
Minecraft	Gaming	2%	X (Twitter)	Social media	7%
OkCupid	Dating	1%	YouTube	Social media	4%
Omegle	Social media	5%	Other social media, private messaging, gaming, or dating platform		1%
Reddit	Social media	4%			
Roblox	Gaming	3%			

Questions were multiple select. Omegle is no longer active as of November 2023. "Other social media, private messaging, gaming, or dating platform" reflects the net percentage of those who indicated that they use a different platform than the ones listed in QS18b-e.

Fig 23 | **Demanded method for money payment**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor, where money was demanded

QS21b. You indicated the person threatening you wanted money. How did they want you to pay them?

	All Respondents n=60*
Payment app	79%
Giftcards	23%
Cryptocurrency (Bitcoin, Ethereum, Tether, etc.)	20%
Physical cash, in-person	10%
Online gaming currency (Robux, V-Bucks, Minecoins, etc.)	9%
Other	1%

Question was multiple select. Payment app response options included: CashApp, Paypal, Venmo, Zelle, Apple Pay, and Google Pay. Gift card response options included: Amazon Gift Card and Other gift card. *Base size <100

Responding to Sexual Extortion

Responding to Demands

A majority of the young people who had experienced sexual extortion described high-risk and harmful actions taken in response to the demands made. Around 1 in 6 indicated they sent more sexual imagery of themselves (18%) and/or did certain things in the content (17%), 1 in 7 indicated they had self-harmed (15%) and/or remained in or returned to a relationship (14%), and 1 in 10 indicated they sent more imagery of someone else (10%) and/or met the person threatening them for sexual activity offline (10%)(Figure 24).

Women and girls were notably more likely to indicate they sent more sexual imagery of themselves in response to the demands they received; compared to men and boys, they were twice as likely to do so. LGBTQ+ victims were substantially more likely to indicate self-harm behavior was involved in their response (28%) compared to their non-LGBTQ+ counterparts (10%).

When looking at the victim's age at the time of the experience, younger ages appear to be associated with a higher likelihood of compliance with demands, particularly in relation to meeting online for sexual activity, making themselves look a certain way or do certain things in imagery, sharing more sexual imagery of themselves, and meeting up in person.

1 in 7

victims of sexual extortion described engaging in self-harm following their extortion. LGBTQ+ youth were 3x as likely to have this experience.

2x

Women & girls were roughly 2x more likely than me & boys to send additional imagery when being extorted.

Limited variability was seen between those respondents who experienced sextortion by someone they know offline versus online. However, three actions were notably higher among those extorted by people they knew offline. The first two, returning to a relationship (+17%) and meeting in person (+19%), are likely associated with the higher prevalence of relationship demands associated with offline extortionists and having physical proximity to the person threatening them (Figure 24). Worryingly, this group also showed higher rates (18%) of sending sexual imagery of someone else, such as a friend or sibling, to the person threatening them. These findings warrant additional research to understand the pathways leading to this outcome.

Help-Seeking Actions

Victims of sexual extortion were asked about how they attempted to respond to or disclose their sextortion experience (Figure 25). While the vast majority (70%) indicated they took action online, mainly through the use of available online safety features like blocking tools (44%) and/or reporting features (24%), nearly half of victims (47%) indicated they sought support offline, most likely by telling their parents (23%). Around 1 in 7 victims (16%) indicated that they never disclosed their sexual extortion experience to anyone, either online or offline.^{51 52}

1 in 7

victims of sexual extortion said they've never disclosed their experience.

When looking at the responses taken by victims based on their age at the time of victimization, some variations emerged, although a primary reliance on online tools remained consistent. Older ages at the time of victimization appeared to be negatively associated with attempting to respond in a variety of ways, including being less likely to respond by

51 The percentage for non-disclosure is derived from adding the percentage of respondents who selected the exclusive response option of "I did not do any of these things" (12%) and the percentage of respondents who selected "ignored it" as their only response (i.e., they did not select any other response option) (4%)

52 This rate is similar to rates observed in previous studies looking at minors' responses to potentially harmful online sexual interactions (see Fig. 17, pg. 23, in Thorn. [2024]. Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023) and deepfake nude experiences (see Fig. 12, pg. 20, in Thorn. [2025]. Deepfake nudes & young people).

deleting the apps from their phones, reporting the other person to the platform(s) involved, reporting the person to school authorities, and telling their parents.

While there was limited variation in the rates of online actions taken by victims based on if they knew their sextortionists offline or online only,

victims who knew their sextortionists offline were more likely to indicate they sought offline support (+18%) compared to those who only knew their sextortionists online. In particular, victims who knew their sextortionists offline were more likely to report the person to school authorities (+19%) and/or tell their parents (+11%).

Fig 24 | **Responding to sextortion demands**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS22. When this happened to you, did you do any of the following in response?

	All Respondents n=285	DEMOGRAPHICS				AGE OF FIRST EXPERIENCE			RELATIONSHIP	
		Men & boys n=105	Women & girls n=161	LGBTQ+ n=78*	Non-LGBTQ+ n=202	12 or younger n=49**	13-15 n=146	16-17 n=90*	Known offline n=99*	Known only online n=177
Sent them more sexual pictures or videos of you	18%	11%	23%	15%	19%	25%	20%	11%	20%	18%
Made yourself look a certain way or did certain things in pictures or videos	17%	17%	15%	23%	15%	29%	15%	14%	19%	15%
Physically hurt yourself	15%	10%	11%	28%	10%	17%	16%	11%	17%	13%
Stayed in or returned to a relationship with them	14%	12%	13%	19%	13%	13%	20%	6%	25%	8%
Met them online for sexual activity (by webcam, for example)	12%	14%	10%	12%	12%	22%	13%	5%	14%	10%
Met in-person	14%	17%	15%	13%	15%	20%	17%	7%	27%	8%
Sent them sexual pictures or videos of someone else (friend, sibling, others)	10%	13%	8%	6%	12%	12%	11%	6%	18%	6%
Paid them money	7%	10%	6%	8%	8%	11%	8%	4%	9%	6%
Physically hurt someone else	4%	7%	3%	4%	4%	9%	4%	3%	6%	2%
None of the options provided	43%	46%	41%	31%	47%	34%	34%	61%	35%	47%

Question was multiple select. "Prefer not to say" and "I did not do any of these things" were exclusive response options. *Base size <100, **Base size <50

Fig 25 | **Actions taken: Online and offline responses**

Among respondents who've had a sextortion experience as a minor

QS23. When this happened to you, did you do any of the following in response?

	All Respondents n=285	DEMOGRAPHICS				AGE OF FIRST EXPERIENCE			RELATIONSHIP	
		Men & boys n=105	Women & girls n=161	LGBTQ+ n=78*	Non-LGBTQ+ n=202	12 or younger n=49**	13-15 n=146	16-17 n=90*	Known offline n=99*	Known only online n=177
Online action	70%	69%	71%	78%	67%	73%	72%	67%	73%	69%
...blocked the person online	44%	38%	44%	64%	37%	33%	49%	42%	45%	42%
...reported the person to the app(s) or platforms involved	24%	21%	25%	30%	22%	35%	24%	20%	28%	23%
...deleted the app(s) from your cell phone	22%	25%	18%	28%	20%	30%	24%	14%	20%	23%
...changed your account privacy settings	20%	16%	23%	21%	19%	25%	18%	22%	21%	21%
...closed your account on the app(s) or platforms involved	18%	17%	17%	23%	16%	19%	19%	15%	17%	18%
...told someone you only know online	12%	12%	11%	13%	12%	17%	12%	10%	16%	11%
...looked for advice online	1%	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%
...took new security precautions online	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Offline action	47%	50%	45%	47%	47%	50%	47%	45%	58%	40%
...told your parents/guardians or a trusted family member	23%	26%	23%	19%	24%	27%	24%	19%	30%	19%
...told your friends that you know offline	17%	15%	18%	17%	17%	9%	19%	19%	18%	16%
...reported the person to any relevant school authorities	14%	15%	14%	9%	16%	21%	15%	7%	25%	6%
...reported the person to the police	14%	16%	11%	15%	14%	17%	11%	17%	16%	13%
...told someone else offline	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%
Ignored it	21%	19%	18%	27%	18%	24%	19%	21%	17%	23%
...only ignored it	4%	5%	2%	2%	5%	8%	2%	5%	5%	3%
I can't remember	3%	2%	5%	2%	4%	2%	4%	2%	2%	4%
I did not do any of these things	12%	14%	12%	5%	15%	10%	13%	12%	9%	14%

Question was multiple select. "I can't remember" and "I did not do any of these things" were exclusive response options. An additional response option of "something else" was also available, however no respondents selected it. *Base size <100, **Base size <50

Discussion

This data highlights the continued need for more research into the rapidly shifting digital landscape and the threats young people navigate when using technology. Reported prevalence rates of sexual extortion have risen over the last ten years. Understanding the drivers behind that rise — awareness, security to disclose, increased threat activity, or others — is vital to building effective interventions. From this data, several key findings exist:

It is not uncommon for young people to be threatened with explicit images — either of themselves or with images people might believe are of them.

Recommendation: Have conversations about the risk of image-based threats, emphasizing that these dangers can come from both strangers and known contacts and may occur regardless of whether explicit images were actually shared.

Sexual extortion is impacting far too many young people. At times, this occurs wholly online; at others, technology facilitates the demands and coercion of someone in their offline communities. The impacts of sexual extortion remain dire while the pathways leading to such experiences are broadening.

As we work to reduce the likelihood that such experiences will confront young people, it's vital we equip them with awareness of these risks and

how to respond should such a moment occur. Guidance to avoid stranger danger or communicating with online contacts remains insufficient, as we see high numbers of sexual extortion cases originating in offline relationships.

Further, assuming knowingly sharing an intimate image is a prerequisite to experiencing sexual extortion is incorrect. The ease with which generative AI technologies are used to create convincing explicit imagery in service of harassment and extortion is clear, leading to increasing instances of abuse. Safeguarding conversations that not only help young people protect themselves from being targeted but also build confidence that they are not to blame and that support is available should they be targeted is critical.

The nature of demands differs between groups.

Recommendation: Design intervention strategies to account for distinct demand profiles and ensure the representation of a range of victim profiles, experiences, and perspectives in support resources.

This research reminds us that, sadly, there is a multitude of sexual extortion profiles. Sexual extortion includes demands tied to relationships, sexual imagery, money, self-harm, and others. The velocity, demands, and extortionist can look very different from child to child.

Progress has been made in the last two years to increase awareness of financially motivated extortion cases, educating boys in particular that they too may be targeted and normalizing help-seeking for this group. Similar work must continue to elevate the experiences that focus on threats entrapping someone in a relationship, pressuring them to send

more explicit imagery, or demanding they physically harm themselves or others – particularly among those disproportionately impacted. Further, it's imperative all young people are involved in conversations to help recognize how these threats could affect them or their friends. Awareness ahead of danger is vital to reduce harm if someone is targeted and ensure they have a clear line to a trusted adult in which they can confide.

Prevention efforts must reach varied audiences while addressing a wide spectrum of threat types and risk signals. Equipping the right groups with the right information increases the likelihood that young people might recognize a dangerous situation when it arises, realize they are not the only ones being manipulated in this way, and empower them to seek support.

One in 3 victims of sexual extortion reported they knew their perpetrator offline.

Recommendation: Discuss the role of technology as a facilitator of threats from people youth meet online and embedded within offline friendships and relationships.

Sexual extortion has, in recent years, become heavily focused on threats originating online. While this has been an essential step in awareness of online dangers, many – youth and adults alike – mistake this for being the only place where sexual extortion may occur. This is evident by the proportion of survey respondents who indicated they did not believe they could fall victim to sexual extortion if they didn't engage with people online.

The reality, however, is that a significant portion of sexual extortion cases originate from within young people's offline communities: former romantic partners, friends, or even family members or neighbors. While technology facilitates these cases, merely avoiding online "strangers" fails to protect young people from this risk.

Safeguarding conversations about sexual extortion need to move beyond the narrow focus of social media and gaming environments to account for technology as a tool for the perpetrators that live among us and walk the same school halls with our children.

The risk of online sexual extortion is increasing.

Recommendation: Prepare legal, social, and technical systems to address the rapidly expanding and evolving nature of online sexual extortion.

These latest numbers point to increasing risks of sexual extortion stemming from online-only interactions and an expanding set of motivations driving bad actors. In addition to those online offenders driven by sexual motivations, we increasingly see offenders leveraging CSAM as a tool to extort victims into non-sexual outcomes, such as paying money or committing physical violence against themselves or others. This research underscores the many harms that can surround the production and distribution of CSAM and highlights the importance of a response that addresses these wider risks.

These online threats can happen rapidly, across mainstream platforms, and often out of sight of trusted adults. This makes it even more important

that we do not wait until a crisis strikes to ensure the public is aware and that the systems designed to protect are in place.

Concerted efforts across investigators, child-serving organizations, and platforms have helped to raise the public's awareness and understanding of financial sextortion over the last several years; however, too late for too many. Moving forward, we must act proactively on emerging extortion trends before they become widespread.

Collaboration across jurisdictions and specializations can unlock critical knowledge on tactics and network behavior, and can cement partnerships that may prove pivotal in addressing the next form of sexual extortion. Simultaneously, reviewing existing legal frameworks is essential to ensure they remain effective against the scale and nature of evolving forms of sexual extortion of minors.

Technology plays a central role in sexual extortion.

Recommendation: Technology companies should leverage strategies that layer a multitude of tactics such as proactive detective, increased user awareness, and user reporting to reduce abuse of platform features in service of child sexual exploitation.

Nearly all cases described by sexual extortion victims in this study involved technology, often as a place where perpetrators targeted them and almost always as the venue for threats, particularly via social media or direct messaging services. This means technology companies also play a pivotal role in combating these threats.

As is seen in other technology-facilitated risks such as fraud and online extremism, platforms are uniquely positioned to recognize emerging forms

of sexual extortion of minors and should leverage cross-industry sharing systems to improve the safety of all users. On platform user education provides an opportunity for timely awareness of risk types and tactics in the setting they may encounter it, and can surface help resources and safety tools intended to protect users and flag abusive accounts for further action.

And, in many environments, proactive, scalable detection mechanisms can identify abusive accounts before they have the chance to reach thousands of victims.

This ongoing process of recognizing emerging threats, disrupting abusive accounts, empowering users and responding to reports, creates an environment that constantly learns and protects children from abuse.

Final Thoughts

*Just please don't keep this a secret. Tell someone, anyone, everyone right away.
Don't wait someone will believe you and will help you.*

15, MALE, HISPANIC OR LATINO, WEST

The evolving landscape of sexual extortion demands our immediate attention. Threats extend beyond stranger danger online—they emerge from both digital interactions and offline relationships, target youth regardless of whether they've shared explicit images, and involve a range of demands and threats. Too many now view child sexual abuse not only as a goal but as a tool in service of other harms. The impacts are devastating while the pathways to victimization continue to broaden. And many young people are navigating this alone.

Our collective responsibility extends beyond raising awareness: We must create environments that actively defend against these threats, normalize help-seeking and disclosure, and ensure systems are equipped to support young people confronted with these threats.

By fostering cross-sector collaboration between technology companies, civil society, investigators, and policymakers, we can implement layered protections and continuously adapt to emerging threats. Moving forward, our strategies to prevent and combat must evolve as quickly as the tactics of those seeking to harm young people, while our support systems must remain steadfast in their message: no one has to face sexual extortion alone.

Resources

If you or someone you know has been a victim of sexual extortion, resources are available for immediate support. Remember, being the victim of any form of sexual abuse or exploitation is never your fault and you are never alone.

Receive immediate crisis support

Text **THORN to 741741** to reach a Crisis Text Line Counselor — support is available 24/7.

Having suicidal thoughts? Contact the [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) for emotional support or [Trevor Project](#) for tailored LGBTQ+ support.

Report sexual extortion

If you or the person you know is under 18, report the material to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's (NCMEC) [CyberTipline](#). You can also submit the content to NCMEC's [Take It Down](#) service, which helps remove the content from the internet.

If you or the person you know is 18 or over, you can submit the content to [StopNCII.org](#), a project operated by the [Revenge Porn Helpline](#) and dedicated to supporting take-down efforts.

NCMEC also has resources for submitting reports of your sexual imagery and videos directly to platforms, including Discord, Facebook, Google, Instagram, Imgur, Kik, Microsoft, Reddit, Snapchat, TikTok, Tumblr, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and other sites. To access these resources, visit NCMEC's [Is Your Explicit Content Out There?](#) webpage.

Learn more about sexual extortion

Check out Thorn's blog "[Sextortion: What to do if someone is blackmailing you with nudes](#)," which contains a Quick Guide for how you can immediately respond to sextortion threats.

Check out the [Stop Sextortion](#) content within Meta's Safety Center, which provides information for teens, caregivers, and educators about sextortion, in addition to outlining steps you can take after sextortion takes place.

Watch these short videos that explain sexual extortion with engaging and accessible content: [Sextortion: Online Coercion and Blackmail](#) (created by Amaze) and [Stop Sextortion Cat Video](#) (created in partnership by Thorn and Facebook).

Tweens and teens can also visit [NoFiltr.org](#) to explore educational sexual extortion content tailored to them.

For Parents & Caregivers

Explore [Thorn for Parents Sextortion Discussion Guide](#). More generally, Thorn for Parents offers [a resource hub](#) for facilitating age-appropriate information, conversation starters, and discussion guides about related topics tailored to the age of the child and caregiver's comfort levels.

Explore these [additional tips for adults](#), compiled by Thorn in partnership with Facebook.



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