

ARE YOU GONNA COOPERATE WITH ME OR I RELEASE YOUR NUDE?: SEXTORTION, RESPONSES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Olasupo O. THOMPSON

Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Ogun State. Nigeria
Email: thompsonoo@funaab.edu.ng

Olugbenga S. AINA

Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Ogun State. Nigeria
ainaos@funaab.edu.ng

Ridwan Tosho IDRIS

Muhammad Kamalud-deen University, Ilorin, Kwara State.
Email: idrisr1994@gmail.com

Emmanuel O. ADEMOLA

Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta
Email: ademolaoe@funaab.edu.ng

BaseerahAbisola AKINRETI-RAJI

Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Ogun State.
Email: baseerahakinreti@gmail.com

Phoebe Dooshima AWANGE

Nassarawa State University, Keffi, Nassarawa State.
phoebeawange@gmail.com

Surajudeen O. OLADELE

Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Ogun State. Nigeria
dotunsuraj@yahoo.com

Abstract

Sextortion has emerged as a global issue with significant impacts on individuals, social relations, and nations. In Nigeria, the phenomenon is not only increasing but also taking on an international dimension. This paper examines sextortion, state responses, and the implications for national development. Drawing on secondary sources, including literature reviews, media reports, and expert opinions, the paper highlights that sextortion is a growing menace, with perpetrators targeting victims both within and outside Nigeria. Government efforts, such as laws and arrests, have largely been ineffective due to a lack of political will, inadequate legal frameworks, poor law enforcement practices, and societal stigma faced by victims. The failure to address this issue has detrimental effects on Nigeria's international reputation, violates victims' rights, contributes to rising poverty and loss of livelihood, and can lead to psychological trauma and suicide among victims. The paper concludes that stakeholders must address underlying causes such as poverty and unemployment. The paper recommends a comprehensive policies and public awareness initiatives to better support victims and address the broader implications for national development.

Key words: Sextortion, Internet Fraud, Nigeria, Cybercrime, national development

Introduction

There are increasing cases of sextortion globally. Beauchere (2023) reveal that nearly two-thirds of Generation Z teens and young adults, in six countries, said they or their friends have been targeted in online “sextortion” schemes, and that 65 percent of Gen Z teens and young adults, on all platforms and devices aside from Snapchat revealed that they or their friends were targeted in online “catfishing” scams, or were hacked by criminals who stole explicit personal imagery or other private information. In 2023 alone, the United States National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received 26,718 reports of financial sextortion, up from 10,731 reports in 2022 (Vaughan, 2024). Social relations which usually depended largely on physical meetings and exchange of missives or correspondences have now been revolutionised by the advent of technology.¹ This evolution has given rise to a new cultural phenomenon known as sexting, defined as the exchange of sexual messages through digital platforms such as phones, apps, email, or webcams. In this digital age, particularly among millennials and Generation Z, malicious individuals have exploited online tools to exploit vulnerable individuals and children (Cordeiro, 2023).

Historically, children, women, and girls have been primary targets of sexual extortion, abuse and harassments (Thompson, 2012). However, recent trends show that adolescents whether boys or girls aged 14 to 17 are now the most frequent victims of sextortion. According to the FBI (2024b), victims typically fall within the age range of 14 to 17, although any child can become a target. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (2023) also reports that 91% of sextortion incidents involve boys. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 further accelerated the shift to digital relationships, providing additional opportunities for predators to exploit vulnerable individuals.

In Nigeria, although the crime itself has historical roots, advancements in technology, social media, and increasing greed have significantly amplified its prevalence. One emerging trend involves sextortionists targeting both local residents and foreigners. For instance, the recent arrest of Olamide Shanu, accused of blackmailing victims with threats to release compromising photos and videos, illustrates how this activity has evolved, reportedly yielding up to £2 million (Parry, 2024). While numerous studies on sextortion have emerged globally in recent years (International Association of Women Judges, 2017; International Bar Association, 2019; France, 2022; Transparency International, 2020), research on this phenomenon within Nigeria remains notably scarce. Igwe (2022) argues that limited studies exist due to significant underreporting influenced by cultural taboos and social stigma surrounding sextortion victims. Furthermore, sextortion has taken on an international dimension, with perpetrators now targeting foreign individuals. This paper aims to explore the nature of sextortion, analyze the responses of Nigerian authorities, and discuss its implications for national development. The

research questions are: How has sextortion manifested within and outside Nigeria? What are government responses to tackle the menace in Nigeria? What has hindered government responses? What implications does sextortion have on national development? It draws on secondary sources including literature reviews, media reports, and expert opinions. This topic on sextortion in Nigeria is crucial, as it explores the impacts of such crimes on individuals and the broader implications for national development.

Conceptual Clarifications

There are two definitions to sextortions. The first defines it as a form of extortion in which sex is the means of exchange. The International Association of Women Judges (2012) defines sextortion as a form of corruption in which sex, rather than money, is the currency of the bribe. The International Bar Association (2019:8) defines it as

[A] form of sexual exploitation and corruption that occurs when people in positions of authority whether government officials, judges, educators, law enforcement personnel, or employers seek to extort sexual favours in exchange for something within their power to grant or withhold. In effect, sextortion is a form of corruption in which sex, rather than money, is the currency of the bribe.

Transparency International (2020) defines Sextortion as a type of corruption that occurs when those entrusted with power use it to exploit those dependent on that power (Transparency International 2020: 3). It went further to state that it is said to occur “when those entrusted with power use it to sexually exploit those dependent on that power” (Transparency International 2020: 4).

The second defines it as an untoward extortion of children or kids for money. Sextortion is a crime that involves adults coercing kids and teens into sending explicit images online. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) uses “sextortion” and the term “sexual extortion of children” to refer to “coercing a child into producing sexual material on threat of exposure” (UNICEF 2019: 10). Europol also recognises the widespread use of “sextortion” to mean online coercion and extortion of children but notes that the “unqualified use of this term – an amalgam of 'sexual' and 'extortion' – can be problematic, as it can promote reductionist thinking [...] [and it] can also lead to the development of ambiguous and sometimes paradoxical concepts” (Europol 2017: 15). The FBI (2024a) defines it as:

A crime in which an offender coerces a minor to create and send sexually explicit images or video. After receiving the sexually explicit content from the child, the offender threatens to release that compromising material unless the victim produces additional explicit material. In these cases, the offenders are motivated by the sexual gratification they receive from the content.

The report explains that Offenders, motivated by financial gains and not necessarily just sexual gratifications threaten to release that compromising material unless they

receive payment, which is often requested in gift cards, mobile payment services, wire transfers, or crypto-currency (FBI, 2024b). Thus, it is not restricted to children or kids being the victims. In this study, we define the term as a coterie of cybercrime and violence against humanity where a person who legally or illegally gets the explicit images or videos of another person for the sole intent of financial or sexual gratifications. Thus, it has two components of sex and corruption.

Sextortion: A Literature Review

Corruption is generally defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Thus, the differences in power levels between people are utilised for goods, money, services, or sexual favours (Bullock & Jenkins, 2020). The growing concern of sextortion is not the limited phenomenon but presents a challenge to Nigerian society and development. This literature review discusses sextortion as a phenomenon, responds to it, and implications for Nigeria. Jameson (2022) reports that Americans send 1.8million nudes per day or 20 per second, such are usually done without coercion and based on trust. Wolak et al. (2018) examine the dynamics of sextortion, particularly among minors. The research reveals that minors who experienced sextortion often knew the perpetrators personally, commonly as romantic partners. This finding underscores the significance of trust and intimacy in the perpetration of sextortion among young individuals. The substantial portion of minors Wolak et al (2018) willingly provided intimate images to perpetrators, although a significant proportion felt pressured to do so. This highlights the nature of coercion and manipulation involved in sextortion cases, where victims may feel compelled to comply due to fear or intimidation. The study indicates that sextortion incidents against minors were often accompanied by threats of physical violence and persisted for extended periods, with more than one-third lasting over six months. The study reveals significant underreporting of sextortion incidents among minors, with half of the victims choosing not to disclose the incidents and few reporting them to authorities or websites. This reluctance to seek help or support may be attributed to factors such as fear of retaliation, shame, or lack of awareness about available resources. Nilsson, et al. (2019) study interrogates the intersection of sextortion and suicide through a thematic analysis of three cases. It highlights common themes such as fear, helplessness, shame, and self-blame among victims, which are typical antecedents of suicidal behavior. This underscores the serious psychological impact of sextortion, emphasised the need for interventions to address both the immediate coercion and the long-term emotional consequences for victims. Cross et al. (2023) examined the intersection of romance fraud and sextortion, a phenomenon where perpetrators use threats of exposing intimate images or recordings to extort money from victims. The study analysed reports from individuals who complained to Scamwatch, an Australian online fraud reporting portal, between July 2018 and July 2019. Each complaint involved sextortion tactics within the context of romance fraud. The article applied an established cyber sextortion typology to categorise these incidents and determine if there are consistent patterns in the use of sextortion within romance fraud, or if its use in this context is unique. Patchin and Hinduja (2020) delineate sextortion as the threatened dissemination of explicit, intimate, or

embarrassing images of a sexual nature without consent, often for the purpose of obtaining additional images, sexual acts, money, or other favors. Despite increasing public interest, this behavior has not been empirically examined among adolescents. The study indicates that students reported being victims of sextortion, while some admitted to threatening others who had shared an image with them in confidence. Males and non-heterosexual youth were more targeted, and males were more likely to target others. In addition, youth who threatened others with sextortion were victims themselves. Also, the work of O'Malley and Holt (2022) conducted a qualitative content analysis of media articles and court documents to investigate cyber sextortion. They identified four themes of offenders: minor-focused, cybercrime, intimately violent, and transnational criminal offenders. These findings highlight the diverse nature of sextortion and its implications for crime control policies. The study emphasises the lack of legislative action targeting cyber sextortion, which limits legal recourse for victims.

There have also been many cases in Africa. Makinde et al. (2021) contended that the incidences of violence facilitated by digital technology platforms, particularly in high-income countries are of various types of technology-facilitated violence and abuse (TFVA) occurring across sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), including cyberbullying, cyber-stalking, trolling, dating abuse, image-based sexual violence, sextortion, and revenge porn. They furthered that both young men and women experience TFVA, with the most common form being the receipt of unwanted sexually explicit images, comments, emails, or text messages. Female respondents reported more frequent experiences of repeated and/or unwanted sexual requests online, while male respondents more commonly experienced violent threats. The study that various coping mechanisms were employed to deal with TFVA, such as blocking the abuser or deleting their profile on social media. Lawal et al. (2020) highlights the challenges faced by abused women in Ghana in reporting domestic abuse, attributing it to cultural norms that view such issues as private family matters. Despite this, many women still report incidents of domestic violence. The study provides a systematic review of abuse cases leading to sextortion, focusing on understanding the causes of Emotional Abuse and Sextortion among Ghanaian Women. It identifies social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram as key contributors to emotional abuse, manipulating women's feelings and affecting their well-being. The research underscores the significance of social media in cyberbullying vulnerable women in Ghana. Feigenblatt (2020) discusses sextortion as a gendered form of corruption affecting both developed and developing countries, targeting individuals such as undocumented migrants and professionals. Although women are disproportionately targeted, men, transgender, and gender non-conforming individuals are also affected. Sextortion has historically been overlooked and not recognised within corruption or gender-based violence frameworks. This lack of recognition has led to limited research, laws, or strategies to address it. Barriers to reporting and obtaining redress contribute to its invisibility, denying survivors justice.

In Nigeria, Van Heugten, Caarten, and Merkle (2021) highlight the prevalence of sextortion as a non-financial form of corruption among Nigerian migrants. They explored the gendered experiences of sextortion, based on interviews with experts on migration, gender, and corruption in Nigeria and the Netherlands. The study finds that Nigerian migrants are most vulnerable to sextortion in Nigeria, Libya, Niger, and Italy. Sextortion often occurs alongside financial bribes, with sexual favors being demanded in addition to monetary payments. While women are commonly viewed as victims of sextortion, men and non-binary individuals are also at risk. Factors such as age, economic situation, and social network availability influence a migrant's vulnerability. Moreover, migrants often face pressure to succeed in their journeys, leaving them with little choice when confronted with sextortion. Kuteyijo, Akinyemi and Merten (2022) highlighted that in Nigeria, many young girls turn to commercial sex work for economic support, often to provide for dependent relatives. Economic reasons were the primary motivation for engaging in this profession. However, the study identified significant risks, especially for vulnerable youth. Common experiences included stigmatization from the community, aggressive behavior from clients, and harassment by law enforcement agents. To cope, individuals often employed self-help strategies. The authors emphasised the necessity for policy and program interventions to provide alternative economic empowerment for those seeking to leave the profession. They also stressed the importance of harm reduction strategies to protect young sex workers from violence.

Manifestations: Within and Outside Nigeria

Though there have been many cases in Nigeria. The major reasons why the sextortionist involve in the crime is mainly for pecuniary gains, greed and self-aggrandisement as well as satisfaction of ecstasy or sexual fantasy. In a confessional statement of a suspect arrested for blackmailing a veteran Nigerian artiste, SalwaAbeni in 2020, he stated that:

My intention was to negotiate with her for few bucks and for me to destroy the photographs. I thought everything was going on fine until the following day when I heard the news of the blackmail over the radio. I was with my mother. She was even cursing the blackmailer unknown to her that I was the brain behind it (Ezeobi, 2020).

The above show that the main intention was strictly for pecuniary financial gain and nothing else. It also shows that the technique used is basically blackmail. Similarly, when a popular artiste known as Tiwa Savage expressed concern over the leakage of her explicit video online. She noted that the blackmailer wanted to collect money from her. This greed for money is also taking a global dimension. The recent surge of sextortion in Nigeria and outside the country particularly, in the western world has been linked to the activities of the cyber criminals of Nigeria origin popularly referred to as "Yahoo Boys". The Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI) revealed that sextortion is a fast-growing crime in the United States, Australia and Canada. This position was validated and reinforced by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)'s report that the last 18 months witnessed one thousand percent

increase in sexual extortion cases in the United States of America (Poireault, 2024). The menace is also manifesting in Nigeria and outside Nigeria. That is, Nigerians have been perpetrating the crime within and outside the country as listed below:

S/ N	Victim and Country	Suspected Culprit	Offence	Source
1.	Seventeen (17) Years Old Jordan DeMay (Marquette, Michigan USA)	Two Nigerian brothers: Samuel Oqoshi (22yrs) and Samson Oqoshi (20yrs) as well as one Ezekiel Robert	Sexual extortion of teenage boys and young men in Michigan and other parts of the country, including the victim who committed suicide.	Associated Press [AP] (2024, April 10). 2 Nigerian Brothers Plead Guilty to Sexual Extortion after Death of Michigan Teen. https://apnews.com/articles/sexual-extortion-guilty-pleas-michigan-nigerian-brothers25c1593410c9fa538d39539ca34363c0
2.	Arare Monica (Nigeria)	Ayan Olubunmi	Sextortion	The News Agency of Nigeria (2018, October, 24). Married man bag two-year term for posting nude pictures of lovers on facebook. <i>Premium Times</i> . https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/292403-married-man-bag-two-year-term-for-posting-nude-pictures-of-lovers-on-facebook.html
3.	Tiwa Savage (Nigeria)	unknown	Sextortion	BBC (2021, October 8). Nigeria's Tiwa Savage Reveals Sex Tape Blackmail https://www.bbc.com/news/world-Africa-58844381
4.	Teenage boys (United Kingdom and the United States)	Olamide Oladosu Shanu (33 Years)	Sextortion and Money Laundering	Saharareporters (2024, May 6). Nigerian Sextortion Blackmailer Who Made £2 Million to Appear in UK Court for Threatening to Release Embarrassing Photos of Boys. https://saharareporters.com/node?eR71_html=&page=7334
5.	Salawa Abeni (Nigeria)	Olufowoke Emmanuel	Sextortion	Folarin, S. (2020, May 31). Nude Photos: 19-Year-Old Plotting to Blackmail Salawa Abeni arrested. <i>Punch Newspapers</i> https://punchng.com/nude-photos-19-years-old-plotting-to-blackmail-salawa-abeni-arrested
6.	A Teenage Australian Boy (He Committed Suicide)	Two Nigerian Men (yet to be revealed)	Sextortion	AAP (2024, April 8). Two Charged in Nigeria over Alleged Sextortion that led to Australian Teenager's Death. <i>The Guardian</i> https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/apr/08/nigeria-sextortion-charges-australia-teenagers-death
7.	Fourteen (14) years Old (Canada)	Olukeye Adedayo Olalekan	Sextortion	Poireault, K (2024, January 29). Nigerian "Yahoo Boys" behind Social Media Sextortion Surge in the US. <i>Infosecurity Magazine</i> . https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/nigerian-yahoo-boys-social-media/
8.	Church Members (Nigeria)	Victor Duru and accomplices	Sextortion	PM News (2019) Busted: Church Protocol Officer blackmailing girls with their nude pictures arrested. https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2019/11/04/busted-church-protocol-officer-blackmailing-girls-with-their-nude-pictures-arrested/
9.	Married Male Client (Nigeria)	Jessica	Sextortion	Nwachukwu, J O (2016, October 14) Abuja-based lady arrested for blackmailing her married lover [VIDEO, PHOTO]. <i>Daily Post</i> https://dailypost.ng/2016/10/14/abuja-based-lady-arrested-blackmailing-married-lover-video-photo/

Figure 1: Some cases of Sextortion in Nigeria and Abroad perpetrated by Suspected Nigerians

In a transcript of what happened between the Ogoshi brothers (acting as dani.robertts) and one of their victims, the late DeMay:

dani.robertts: I have screenshot all ur followers and tags can send this nudes to everyone and also send your nudes to your Family and friends Until it goes viral ... All you've to do is to cooperate with me and I won't expose you

dani.robertts: Are you gonna cooperate with me

dani.robertts: Just pay me rn [Just pay me right now]

dani.robertts: And I won't expose you

Jordan DeMay: How much

dani.robertts: \$1000

DeMay sent \$300, which failed to stop the extortion. They demanded more and increased their threats. DeMay told them he would kill himself, and they urged him on.

dani.robertts: Enjoy your miserable life

Jordan DeMay: I'm kms rn [I'm killing myself right now]

Jordan DeMay: Bc of you [Because of you]

dani.robertts: Good

dani.robertts: Do that fast

dani.robertts: Or I'll make you do it

dani.robertts: I swear to God

After interacting with the men, DeMay took his own life. He was discovered dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound on March 25, 2022. The Ogoshis were later extradited to the United States, convicted, and sentenced on September 5, 2024. The Justice Department sentenced Samuel Ogoshi, 24, and Samson Ogoshi, 21, to 210 months in prison and five years of supervised release for conspiring to sexually exploit minors (Office of Public Affairs, 2024).

Government Responses

Over the last two decades, the Nigerian state has taken decisive steps on issues related to sextortion, revenge porn, blackmail and other online sexual exploitation offences. The responses of the Nigerian government to stem the tide of the growing menace of sextortion is a three-fold approach which can be regarded as legal, organizational and informational in nature. These so-called tripartite governmental interventions are: promulgation of laws making the act punishable under the law, establishment of an agency to checkmate it and handle all issues related to online

sexual exploitation cases and sensitisation of the public/awareness publicity (Alike, 2022; Abeku, 2024 and Poireauit, 2024). The recognition of the unwholesome act of sextortion and other online sexual exploitation offences as both anti-social behaviours and criminal activities has made the Nigerian State to enact codified laws to prohibit it and attach a strict punishment to its violation. Through the parliament, the Nigerian government came up with Criminal Code Act which legalizes criminal investigation, trial and punishment of criminals (Alike, 2022). In an attempt to checkmate this gruesome act of sextortion, the government through the chapter 33 of the Act, especially from Section 373 to Section 376, provides for the punishment of one to three years for the offence or defamation while sextortion or publication of defamatory matter with the intention to extort the victim carries a punishment of seven years imprisonment term. Section 376 of the Criminal Code Acts provides thus:

Any person who publishes or threaten to publish, or offers to abstain from publishing, or offers to prevent the publication of defamatory matter, with the intent to extort money or other property, or with intent to induce any person to give, offer, procure, or attempt to procure, to, upon, or for, any person, any property or benefit of any kind is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for seven years.

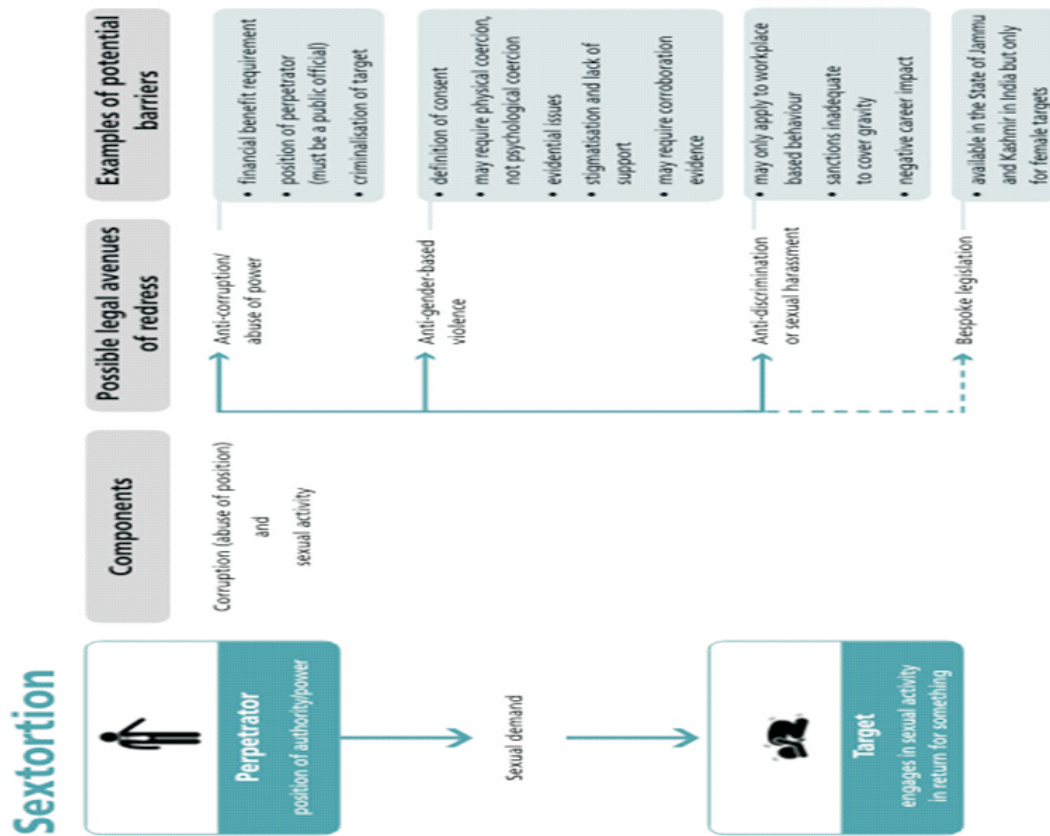
The government also enacted the cybercrime Acts, 2015 to provide a unified legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks for the prohibition, prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of cybercrimes in Nigeria. The Act is another legislative response to the increasing rate of fraudulent activities in the cyberspace. This Act prohibits and prevents sextortion with its violation attracting a wide range of sanctions, including fines and imprisonment term. Besides, Section 23 of the Act also stipulates that the involvement of an infant or an underage person in this heinous act attracts stiffer punishment because the culprit is liable to imprisonment term of 5-10 years or paying 10 - 20 Million Naira fine or even both the prison term and fine. Although there is a dearth of reported cases of successful enforcements or completed prosecution of offences under the Act, its enactment was to make the cyberspace more secure and the consciousness of the severe punishment stipulated in the Act would deter many people from committing the crime and thereby limiting the number of perpetrators (Alike, 2022). There is a law that proscribes a five-year jail term to teachers in tertiary institutions who demand sexual pleasure from the students. Nevertheless, such laws are not comprehensive as it does not address the cases in other levels of educational institutions such as primary, secondary, Almajiri among others.

A law enforcement agency known as the National Agency for the Prohibition of

Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) was also set up by the government under the parent Agency of Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development on 14th July, 2003. The agency was established by the Trafficking in Person (prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Acts of 2003 to combat human trafficking and other human rights violations. This agency recently sets up a cyber-security response team owing to the high cases especially of cyber extortion in the country. The volume of complaints received by the agency from victims of sextortion who have been blackmailed and earnestly requesting for assistance prompted the agency to intensify efforts in the areas of intelligence gathering and undercover operations with state-of-the-art facilities and expertise (Gwamzhi, 2023). This agency has recorded a few breakthroughs in its efforts to ameliorate cases of sextortion in Nigeria. It recently apprehended some members of a notorious cult known for perpetrating sextortion and terrorising young girls and other residents of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and other places in recent time. The cyber - security response team was created to handle all issues relating to online exploitation including sexual exploitation which is on the rise (Adekoye, 2023).

The Nigerian government through this agency and the Nigeria Police often create awareness and sensitize the general public especially the youngsters against online indiscriminate sharing of intimate content, private and sensitive information with so called friends or strangers in order to curb rising cases of online sexual exploitation and sextortion in the country. The government further sensitizes the general public, both old and young, on the nature and dynamics of the menace of online sexual exploitation crimes such as sexual blackmail, sextortion and revenge porn from time to time through seminars, print and social media, in order to reduce the number of victims. They enlighten the people on the need to protect themselves from avoidable potential threats by maintaining privacy, protecting personal information like home address, financial details and keeping of one's intimate content by not sharing data with online friends and lovers until their trust is convincingly ascertained (Abeku, 2024). Nevertheless, responses have not really succeeded as a result of the culture of sexual and gender violence, silence, and weak laws among others.

Figure 2: Framework for Interventions and Hindrances in cases of Sextortion



Source: IBA (2019). Sextortion: A Crime of Corruption and Sexual Exploitation. London, United Kingdom: IBA, p. 14

Why Government Responses Have Been Less Effective?

The inefficiency of government responses can be attributed to several factors. One major issue is the lack of political will. Government agencies, particularly law enforcement, often offer only superficial attention to the problem (Thompson and Awange, 2022). Instead of taking meaningful action, they frequently blame victims for supposedly instigating the incidents, accusing them of seeking cheap popularity, blackmail, sending inappropriate content, or dressing improperly. In some cases, officials even exploit the situation themselves, further worsening the victims' plight. In the Ojota region of Lagos State, Nigeria, for example, a police officer raped a 17-year-old girl after she made a commitment to the perpetrator to assist her in getting back her stolen phone (Idowu, 2024). Without a doubt, a case like this could deter future victims from coming forward because they might not feel comfortable with the purported defender.

Another major factor contributing to the inefficiency of government responses is the culture of silence (Ahrens, 2006; Amnesty International, 2021a; Amnesty

International, 2021b). Many victims prefer to remain silent rather than report their cases due to fears of shame, blame, stigmatization, or abuse. This culture of silence only emboldens perpetrators, knowing that victims are unlikely to speak up. Additionally, the lack of accessible platforms or avenues for victims to report incidents is another reason why such crimes continue unabated. Poverty and unemployment are also significant driving factors. Many perpetrators are either unemployed or come from impoverished backgrounds. However, this does not mean that wealthy individuals or people from affluent countries are exempt from involvement in sextortion, whether at local or international levels. Even when some perpetrators accumulate substantial profits from the crime, they continue due to greed. In Nigeria, poverty and unemployment are pressing issues; in 2023, the unemployment rate was reported to be almost 39%. Although the new government rebased this figure to around 4%, the underlying reality remains unchanged. Another contributing factor to the inefficiency of government responses is the declining morals and value systems in the society. One might question whether these individuals have any human sympathy, as their actions often reveal a disregard for their victims' circumstances. Some of the victims are not only very young or very old, but there have been instances where they are old enough to be the perpetrators' parents or grandparents. Despite pleas from these victims, perpetrators still go ahead with extortion and blackmail. An example is the case of Salwa Abeni, who implored her perpetrator to show sympathy, pointing out that she was old enough to be his mother (Folarin, 2020).

Other factors contributing to the inefficiency of government responses include poor legal framework and laws, inadequate policies, and insufficient personnel. Many organizations, agencies, and even states have yet to recognise the importance of protecting children, youth, and vulnerable individuals, including professional sex workers. Many institutions still rely on outdated laws or lack existing legislation to protect vulnerable groups like the girl-child. Furthermore, there is a need for institutions to have properly trained personnel capable of intervening in cases of sexual harassment and sextortion. Poor handling of evidence often results in flawed cases, leading to the discharge and acquittal of culprits due to a lack of, or tampered, evidence. There is also a significant need for better training, education, and sophisticated technology. Personnel across all levels—be it enforcement, executive, or legislative—should be well-trained and educated on these issues. Providing personnel with advanced tools to trace, monitor, and report sextortion activities is crucial. The fact that most cases involving Nigerians engaging in online sextortion abroad are only detected and traced by foreign law enforcement speaks volumes. Nigerian law enforcement agencies must also create avenues for victims from anywhere in the world to report incidents, so that appropriate action can be taken. Failure to establish such mechanisms has resulted in many undetected cases and the continued occurrence of the crime.

Another critical factor is the loss of empathy. Many perpetrators seem to lack

conscience or human feelings. For instance, threatening victims to commit suicide, or showing indifference towards such threats, highlights the need for humanity to be "re-humanised." Other contributing factors include a corrupt and inefficient judiciary, patriarchy, irresponsible use of social media, toxic misogyny, and insufficient support for survivors.

Implications of Sextortion on National Development

The phenomenon of sextortion has implications for national development. First, it causes severe psychological harm and impacts victims' health and well-being. In cases of sextortion of students or employees, the trauma of such experience may leave with the victim for a long time. For instance, a BBC reporter who was harassed by her lecturer when she was in the university narrated that she had to abandon her students and she has never forgotten the incident since it happened. Veteran juju singer, SalawaAbeni also cried out that she was traumatised and discovering that she was old enough to be the mother of the perpetrator further angered her to an extent that she asked of the kind of training that parents of these days give to their children.

Secondly, it leads to waste of resources in prosecuting cases. The monies that are supposed to be used for the development of the human capital may be spent in prosecuting cases that have to do with sextortion. For example, the Nigerian artiste, Tiwa Savage confessed recently that she had to pay an Information Technology (IT) expert to get her viral video off the internet (Bamidele, 2024). Usually, when such case comes up, it takes the law enforcement agencies time and logistics as well as efforts to prosecute and do their findings and investigations. The time spent on such ventures would have been used in pursuing other pressing national and international security threats. For instance, it took the police Decoy Team of Rapid Response Squad almost two months and three days of monitoring the suspected blackmailer of the Nigerian Afro juju singer (Waka Queen), SalawaAbeni in 2020 to resolve the case. There is no doubt that such monies, time and resources would have been used for other ventures.

Thirdly, it results in de-marketing the image of the citizens of the country or country where the perpetrators emerge from. With the internationalization of the threat and the targeting of victims outside the shores of Nigeria, intelligence and reports tainting the country in bad light appears to be renting the air. A report from the United States revealed that, "Federal authorities have pointed to West African nations, particularly in Nigeria and Ivory Coast, as major sources of the attacks on teenagers in the United States and other English-speaking countries" (Moody, 2023). The stereotype and name calling as well as profiling has further put the country in bad light. To be sure, the Australian Commander of State Crime Command's Cybercrime Squad, Detective Superintendent Matthew Craft stated after tracing the perpetrator of the crime of sextortion which led to the death of an Australian teenager thus, "these arrests in Nigeria show just how far police are willing to go to seek justice on behalf of our young community" (*Australian Associated Press, 2024*).

Fourthly, it is not only an act of abuse but also dehumanizes the human person especially the victims. The release of one's image without consent or demand for sexual gratification in whatever guise by a superior person which the power relation is not balanced is not only dehumanizing but also a crime against humanity. Municipal laws and international conventions within the sub-region and at the global levels have all condemned such act. As Eldén, et al (2020) posits, sextortion is not only a gross violation of human rights in itself, but also hinders victims' rights in other spheres as well as sustainable development at large

Furthermore, it has economic implications and deepen poverty. This is because the victim may not be productive as the thought of having his or her images or videos in the public without approval may not allow such victim to focus. By deepening poverty, the victim may go ahead to not only borrow but also sell his or her or their inheritances and livelihood in order to fulfil the asking price of the perpetrators in the case of sextortion for financial gains. For instance, the young boy that committed suicide in the United States had paid hundreds of dollars and when he realised that he could no longer afford the asking price, he committed suicide. In some cases, many victims have even been jailed as a result of the inability to pay back loans used in settling sextortion. Eden et al (2020:1) did not mince words when they concluded that "Sextortion deepens poverty and constitutes a greater risk for those living in poverty."

In addition, victims of sextortion often face profound challenges in trusting others again. The traumatic experience of being rescued or paying off perpetrators can severely impact their ability to trust even genuine individuals. Many victims may choose to avoid using the internet or social media altogether, becoming more withdrawn and altering their interactions with colleagues at work or peers in school. This can lead to feelings of paranoia and may even prompt drastic measures such as changing identities or relocating, as noted by Tzani (2022). Consequently, victims can find themselves confined within a self-imposed isolation, struggling to regain a sense of security and normalcy in their lives.

Moreover, sextortion can tragically lead to suicide and self-harm among victims and their families, both in Nigeria and globally. Numerous cases, both reported and unreported, highlight the devastating consequences of sextortion. Between October 2021 and March 2023, there were several instances where victims, predominantly boys, took their own lives following online financial extortion, with at least 20 cases resulting in suicides. For example, the blackmail by two Nigerian brothers led to the tragic suicide of 17-year-old Jordan DeMay from Marquette, Michigan, on March 25, 2022. Jordan, a promising young man and school prom king with aspirations to attend a prestigious school, took his life due to the distress caused by the sextortion. Similarly, before Olamide Shanu's arrest for sextortion, at least three UK schoolchildren had reportedly committed suicide after being blackmailed with

sexually compromising material (Parry, 2024). Tiwa Savage expressed her fear that her son might one day encounter such videos, echoing the sentiments of Mrs. Jennifer Buta, Jordan DeMay's mother, who shared her deep sense of loss. John DeMay, Jordan's father, emphasised how their family had been forever changed by this "heinous crime," stressing their mission to prevent others from falling victim (Moody, 2023). O'Melly (2023) argues that while the short-term impacts of sextortion include worry, stress, anxiety, self-blame, and somatic symptoms of stress, its long-term effects can lead to enduring episodes of anxiety. Bordelon (2024) further underscores those victims of crimes like sextortion experience shame, fear, and humiliation, placing them at significant risk of self-harm and suicide.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings presented, the paper underscores that sextortion is an escalating threat, with perpetrators targeting victims both within and beyond Nigeria's borders. Government responses through legislation and arrests have thus far proven inadequate, leading to adverse implications such as tarnished national reputation, violated rights of victims, increased poverty and loss of livelihood, and profound psychological trauma including instances of suicide.

In conclusion, the paper advocates for concerted efforts by the government and stakeholders to address the root causes of sextortion. It recommends addressing issues like greed, unemployment, sexual exploitation, and financial motives. Strengthening legal frameworks is also highlighted, alongside collaboration with both state and non-state actors such as traditional leaders, civil society organizations, and the media to ensure effective reporting and prosecution of cases. Furthermore, the paper proposes integrating robust social studies education from early childhood education upwards, aimed at enhancing digital literacy and security awareness among the youths and internet users in order to prevent victimization. By this, Internet users can be oriented on knowing what to share online, wary of the people they encounter and initiate relationship with online and be responsible online. Additionally, it suggests that law enforcement and regulatory agencies provide free services to assist victims in removing or halting the dissemination of non-consensual sexually explicit materials online. Overall, the recommendations emphasise a multifaceted approach involving legal reforms, educational initiatives, and collaborative partnerships to combat sextortion effectively and protect vulnerable individuals from its devastating consequences.

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