



# Online blackmail of Czech children focused on so-called “sextortion” (analysis of culprit and victim behaviors)



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## ABSTRACT

The online blackmail of children within the environment of Internet services (specifically, social networks) has become an extremely dangerous phenomenon that affects 6–8% of Czech children. Within the following text, data obtained from research conducted in 2013–2015 by the Centre for the Prevention of Risky Virtual Communication, Faculty of Education, Palacký University in Olomouc will be discussed. A selection of analyses aimed at gender and age differences connected with the blackmailing of children will be presented. Additionally, whether the children participate in blackmailing on their own and whether they eventually become offenders of other individuals will be examined.

The text will also be supplemented with a typical blackmail model using intimate and sexually explicit materials (which are referred to as “sextortion”) that was created based on a detailed analysis of 25 serious cases of online blackmail. The model has been divided into several connected stages through which the online attack is carried out. The specific stages are subsequently elaborated on using documented evidence. Based on the analysis of individual cases, we have compiled a model that describes the different stages of the process of extortion and can predict communication of the attacker and the victim.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Introduction to the topic – terms definitions

The term *extortion* (blackmailing) is obviously defined as *the illegal and intentional use of threats to one's person or property, coercion, or fraudulent claims of right of public duty (such as impersonating a Police officer) for the purpose of taking money, goods, property, services or some other thing of value from a victim against his/her will* (HG.org – Legal Resources, n.d.).

Within the framework of international and European law extortion is defined similarly, eg. In the Irish Criminal Justice Code (“Criminal Justice Act, 1994, Section 17,” 1994) is blackmail defined as follows: *It shall be an offence for any person who, with a view to gain for himself or another or with intent to cause loss to another, makes any unwarranted demand with menaces*. British law (“Theft Act, 1969, Section 20,” 1969), then for example defines extortion as follows:

- (1) *A person is guilty of blackmail if, with a view to gain for himself or another or with intent to cause loss to another, he makes any unwarranted demand with menaces; and, for this purpose, a demand with menaces is unwarranted unless the person making it does so in the belief—*
  - (a) *that he has reasonable grounds for making the demand; and*

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- (b) *that the use of the menaces is a proper means of reinforcing the demand.*
- (2) *The nature of the act or omission demanded is immaterial, and it is also immaterial whether the menaces relate to action to be taken by the person making the demand.*

In the Czech Republic extortion is defined under the Act No. 40/2009 Coll. ([Parlament České republiky, 2009](#)) in Section 175 as follows:

- (1) *A person who by violence, threat of violence or threat of other severe injury forces others to act, neglected or suffer, will be punished with imprisonment from six months to four years or with a fine.*
- (2) *The offender will be imprisoned for two to eight years if he*
  - (a) *commits an offense referred to in paragraph 1 as a member of an organized group,*
  - (b) *commits such an offense at least with two other persons,*
  - (c) *commits such an offense with a gun,*
  - (d) *causes damage by such a crime,*
  - (e) *commits such an offense against a witness, expert or interpreter in connection with the performance of their duties, or*
  - (f) *commits such an offense against another person for his actual or perceived race, ethnicity, nationality, political beliefs, religion or because they are actually or allegedly without religion.*
- (3) *The offender will be punished with imprisonment of five to twelve years if he*
  - (a) *causes grievous bodily harm by the act.*
  - (b) *commits such an act with the intention of enabling or facilitating the act of crime of treason (§ 309), terrorist attacks (§ 311) or terror (§ 312), or*
  - (c) *causes damage by offence of great extent.*
- (4) *imprisonment for eight to sixteen years, the offender will be punished if he causes death by offense stated in paragraph 1.*
- (5) *preparation is punishable.*

There are differences between the terms “blackmailing” and “extortion” – in modern usage blackmail differs from extortion in that the money or other valuable object or act is not extorted by threat of direct bodily harm, but by the threat of revealing something presumed to be injurious to the victim. The difference is noticeable only in US English ([Maddox, 2011](#)).

In our study we work with the term sextortion, a combination of the words “sex” and “extortion”, which is generally defined as *a specific kind of blackmail in which the offender uses intimate material to achieve his goals, whether of their own (in primary stages of blackmail), or materials obtained from the victim* ([Clark, 2014](#); [Kopecký, 2014](#); [Wilson, 2011](#)). Other authors ([Flores et al., 2015](#)) define sextortion as *a means of coercing cybercrime victims to perform sexual favors or to pay a hefty sum in exchange for the non-exposure of their explicit images, videos, or conversations. These extortion tools are normally obtained through various chat programs. Another authors defines sextortion as blackmail via having cybercrime victims pay money to prevent sexually explicit images and video from being made public* (“[Cyber criminals turn to ‘sextortion’ blackmail | Fin24](#),” n.d.).

It is necessary to distinguish between the terms sextortion and cyber grooming. The term cyber grooming (child grooming, online grooming) indicates the *behavior of Internet users (predators, cybergroomers), which goal is to cause victim’s false confidence and force the victim to go to a personal meeting* ([Kierkegaard, 2008](#); [Kopecký, 2010](#); [O’Connell, 2003](#)). The result of this meeting can be sexual abuse, physical violence on a victim, abuse of victim for child prostitution, production of child pornography etc.

Other authors define cyber grooming as *a process where the offender (in cooperation with accomplices) prepares the child for abuse and ensures good conditions for this act. Among the targets of the attack belong gaining access to the child, ensuring compliance of the child and ensuring the confidentiality of the child to avoid disclosure* ([Craven et al., 2006](#)). Cyber grooming is *a kind of psychological manipulation carried out through the Internet, mobile phones and other related technologies* ([Berson, 2003](#); [Knoll, 2010](#); [Kopecký, 2009](#); [O’Connell, 2003](#); [Penna et al., 2005](#)).

The boundary between sextortion and cyber grooming is not sharply defined, but there are some differences that can be used to distinguish the both forms of risky communication. Fundamental differences between sextortion and cyber grooming can be seen in two areas:

#### 1. In the motivation of the offender

For cyber grooming, the primary motivation of an offender is sexual abuse of a child-within real personal meeting in the real world. Intimate materials that an offender gets from the child are just means and instruments to achieve this goal. Sextortion is then one of techniques that can be used in the process of cyber grooming. Primary goal of sextortion is to lure a victim to a personal meeting, but rather to blackmail to get the victim to cover a certain amount for that the offender will not release intimate materials received from the victim. However, there are also cases when a victim was forced to a personal meeting in this way ([Kopecký et al., 2015c](#)).

#### 2. In connection of sextortion with cyber grooming

Sextortion can be seen as one of the techniques that are used to manipulate the victim within cyber grooming; blackmail, however, does not have to happen. In many cases, the victim arrived at a personal meeting of the offender entirely voluntarily – without giving the offender intimate materials.

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