

# 'It can happen to anyone'

## Sextortion now impacting 1 in 5

15 October

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

One in five New Zealanders has been caught up in sextortion blackmail, a crisis described as a 'hidden epidemic' devastating victims' mental health, relationships, and finances, and disproportionately harming rangatahi, Māori, and rainbow communities.

A new nationwide survey has found that one in five New Zealanders have been impacted by sextortion, either personally (8%) or through someone they know (13%). Online safety organisation, Netsafe, commissioned the research and says the results highlight the need for greater awareness, education, and stronger support systems for victims.

The survey, conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults and boosted for key demographic groups, reveals that sextortion is not just an emerging online threat—it's already affecting thousands across Aotearoa, particularly young people, Māori, and members of the Rainbow community.

"Sextortion is a serious online harm and not a fringe problem. New Zealanders need to know sextortion is not their fault. These are predators using technology as a weapon, and the only way to fight them is together," says Brent Carey, CEO of Netsafe.

"Sextortion, or sexual extortion, is when someone is being blackmailed with nudes or sexually explicit material. Sometimes the victim may have been tricked or pressured to share nude images or video, and sometimes this material may have been digitally faked. Once scammers have your content, or fake content that is digitally manipulated, they make threats to leak it unless you send money or more images."

Carey went on to say that the mental health impact can be significant, with over a third of victims (35%) reporting moderate to severe effects, while 73% of people who knew a victim described the impact as significant.

Scammers who use sextortion are often professional criminals, part of organised criminal groups, who use fake profiles, sometimes pretending to be in a romantic relationship. They gain trust, request or share explicit content, then use it as leverage. They are often located offshore and use sophisticated tactics and target victims at scale. "Tragically, overseas cases have shown how sextortion can drive young people to despair, and New Zealand is not immune. Our research confirms the same patterns," said Carey.

Netsafe sounded the alarm on sextortion in May with its data showing sextortion threats were up 68% in the first three months of this year.

“The findings also echo recent [Ministerial Advisory Organised Crime Strategic Report](#)<sup>1</sup> which analyses the harm derived from serious and organised crime. The Advisory group noted that addressing organised crime requires both enforcement and preventative strategies from public, private and civil society communities. The report stresses that reducing harm requires strong community engagement, education, and early prevention. Sextortion is a clear example of where this unified approach can make the difference,” said Carey.

Netsafe’s study was modelled on the ‘Sextortion in India’ survey by Social & Media Matters, based in Goa. Netsafe has a collaborative partnership with the online safety organisation, which conducts research, and aims to influence policy related to digital well-being.

Pratishtha Arora, CEO of Social & Media Matters said sextortion is a global crime that cuts across borders and industries, leaving deep scars on the mental well-being of victims who often struggle to find timely support. “Our own study at Social Media Matters shows how widespread and devastating this issue has become, and Netsafe’s research further reinforces the urgency to act. Collaboration is not optional — it is the only way forward,” said Arora.

## **Who Is Being Targeted?**

The research shows the highest incidence of sextortion among 18–24-year-olds, with 40% of this age group reporting a direct or indirect experience. Māori (38%) and Rainbow communities (32%) also reported higher-than-average rates.

“This survey did not include under 18 year olds, and when we look at the reports of harm we receive at Netsafe, we find teenagers are also targeted through sextortion.”

Although many assume sextortion is committed by strangers, among victims, in just under half of cases the most common perpetrator was a stranger (46%), meaning more than half were known to the victims. For one in 10, the perpetrator was either a former partner or online friend.

## **A Silent Crisis with Real-World Impact**

- 80% of sextortion cases involved threats to release private images or videos
- In half of the cases, money was demanded
- In one-fifth, perpetrators demanded sexual favours or more content
- 24% of victims had their explicit content shared without consent
- Only 18% sought help, most commonly from family or police
- Just 17% reported the incident to an official authority or platform
- Less than half of victims who reported their experience to authorities were satisfied with the response. Just half said action was taken following a report, and 31% were unsure if anything was done at all.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) on Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime (TSOC), established by Hon Casey Costello, Minister of Customs and the Associate Minister of Police.

Police say they acknowledge the impact that sextortion has on New Zealanders, and the importance of research such as this to understand who is being impacted and where they are receiving

assistance. “The internet opens up a world of opportunity for individuals but there are offenders online looking to exploit people. Police encourage all victims of sextortion to seek help and report these criminal acts,” said Greg Dalziel, Detective Senior Sergeant for the NZ Police’s Cybercrime Unit.

Carey said the research is a wake-up call. “Sextortion is here, it’s harming thousands of us, and it won’t go away without a whole-of-community response. Awareness saves lives. Victims deserve to know they are not alone, it is not their fault, and help is available right now.”

### **What Do Victims Want To Happen?**

Of the survey respondents, 80 percent agreed that there should be a dedicated awareness campaign addressing sextortion, and messages should include:

- How to identify and prevent sextortion
- Where and how to report it
- Legal consequences for perpetrators

### **Need Help or Advice?**

If you or someone you know is affected by sextortion or other online harm, Netsafe can help:

- Call toll-free on 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723)
- Reports of sextortion can be made [here](#) through an online form.
- Email: [help@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:help@netsafe.org.nz)
- Visit: [www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz)
- Helpline hours: Mon–Fri 8am–6pm

--ENDS--

### **For further information, please contact:**

Ireland Hendry-Tennent | Consultant | Boyd Public Relations Ltd  
m: 022 430 9913 | e: [ireland@boydpr.co.nz](mailto:ireland@boydpr.co.nz)

### **Background information**

#### **About the Survey**

This study was modelled on the ‘Sextortion in India’ survey by Social & Media Matters and aimed to:

- Measure awareness and incidence of sextortion in New Zealand
- Understand the methods used by offenders

- Gauge the impact on victims
- Evaluate reporting behaviour and satisfaction with support

## **Methodology:**

- 10-minute online survey
- Panels from Yabble, Pureprofile (PS), and Dynata
- Nationally representative sample (N=1,000) with boosts for:
  - Māori (N=302)
  - Asian (N=296)
  - Pacific (N=202)
  - Rainbow (N=156)

## **How to Spot the Warning Signs**

- Sextortion often starts with a simple conversation. It can happen on social media, messaging apps, dating apps or online games. Here are some red flags:
  - Moving platforms – You meet someone on one app, and they quickly encourage you to continue the conversation on another platform.
  - Inconsistent profiles – Their photos or details don't match up, or their language use seems unnatural.
  - Sexualised conversations – They introduce sexual topics early, often pushing boundaries.
  - Avoiding video calls – They may claim their camera or microphone isn't working, avoiding showing their real identity.

## **Take it Down service**

Services such as Take It Down can help young people remove online nude, partially nude, or sexually explicit photos and videos taken before they were 18.

<https://takeitdown.ncmec.org/>

## **About Netsafe**

Netsafe is an independent charitable organisation supporting people in Aotearoa to have safe and positive online experiences. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education.