

## **Sexual Corruption and Inequality: Barriers and Strategies for the Inclusion of Marginalized Communities in Public Services**

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**Abstract:** Sexual corruption, commonly known as sextortion, occurs when individuals in positions of power exploit their authority to obtain sexual favors instead of monetary bribes. Despite its widespread impact—particularly on marginalized communities—this form of corruption remains underexamined in academic discourse. This conference paper tries to, within the traditional constraints of such presentation, tries to present the topic and critically analyzes the structural and socio-cultural factors that sustain and perpetuates sexual corruption, emphasizing its deep entrenchment in institutional failures, power asymmetries, and social hierarchies. Traditionally, existing literature often overlook the systemic nature of the problem, treating it as isolated misconduct rather than a structural issue rooted in inequality and patrimonial governance. By synthesizing insights from corruption studies, gender research, and sociology, this review argues for a more comprehensive approach that situates sexual corruption within broader social and historical contexts. Findings underscore the need for targeted, context-sensitive interventions that address the underlying barriers to justice and institutional accountability. This study contributes to bridging the gap in existing literature by advocating for a nuanced, sociological understanding of sexual corruption and highlighting the urgency of informed policy action to combat its pervasive influence.

**Keywords:** Sexual corruption, sextortion, structural barriers, public services, gender inequality.

### **Introduction**

Over the past decade, the gap in social inequality has significantly widened on a global scale. Globalization has exacerbated socio-economic disparities, as well as inequalities in income and opportunities, systematically benefiting economic elites at the expense of the most

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vulnerable populations, as argued by Piketty (2014). This unequal distribution, which is structural rather than random, deliberately relegates certain groups to a state of social and political marginalization, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. Mbembe (2019) delves deeper into this phenomenon through his concept of necropolitics, which has been further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis has underscored society's critical dependence on both technology and the State for access to essential services and has revealed how the insufficiency of minimalist state policies has left marginalized communities particularly unprotected, emphasizing the urgent need to strengthen public services.

Moreover, Castells (2010) examines how the technological revolution has given rise to an informational economy that deepens pre-existing divides, favoring those with access to advanced technology and digital skills while marginalizing those without such resources. The lack of adequate infrastructure and high costs have further restricted access to essential services, forcing many individuals to rely on personal connections. This dependency not only prolongs administrative processes but also facilitates corrupt practices such as sextortion, exacerbating vulnerabilities in a context already characterized by structural and technological inequalities.

These circumstances have created a fertile ground for all forms of corruption (Gupta, 1998; Jong-sung, 2005). Within this context, sextortion emerges as a severe manifestation of corruption, where structural disparities and the digital divide, exacerbated by global economic policies, render marginalized communities particularly vulnerable (Merkle et al., 2023). This form of corruption, which involves the abuse of power to obtain sexual favors in exchange for access to services (IAWJ, 2012), disproportionately affects women.

By adopting a qualitative methodological approach, this study makes a significant contribution to the limited literature on sextortion, a profoundly impactful yet underexplored type of corruption due to the complexities involved in untangling the intersection between sexual abuse and corruption. Previous research limitations, compounded by stigma and the absence of adequate legal frameworks to protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable, have hindered comprehensive understanding. By integrating disciplines such as public ethics, gender studies, and political science, this work not only enriches the theoretical framework but also sheds light on how sextortion disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, highlighting barriers to equitable public service access.

The article is structured as follows: it begins with an analysis of how sextortion, understood as a form of corruption, exacerbates socio-economic inequalities and undermines trust in democratic institutions. The study explores the structural, social, cultural, and historical

barriers that perpetuate this phenomenon, demonstrating how these dynamics reinforce victimization and impunity. Subsequently, the necessary strategies to effectively address sextortion are outlined, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive approaches that include legislative reforms, public policies, and technological interventions. The results section illustrates how sextortion restricts access to essential services and perpetuates cycles of violence and corruption, disproportionately impacting women and marginalized communities. Concrete examples and strategies for combating sextortion are presented, focusing on their effects on vulnerable groups.

The conclusion synthesizes the findings, discusses their implications for effective public policies, and highlights how the results can enhance the protection and empowerment of affected communities. Finally, the study's contributions to the existing literature are examined, and future research directions are proposed to deepen the understanding and treatment of sextortion.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative methodological approach to explore the complexity of sextortion, a deeply personal and often concealed form of corruption. By reanalyzing testimonies and case studies drawn from existing literature, the analysis delves into the power dynamics and emotional responses involved in cases of sextortion, providing detailed insights into the institutional contexts that either facilitate or combat this form of corruption. This approach allows for an enriched understanding of how sextortion impacts individuals and communities, uncovering barriers to reporting these abuses and highlighting effective prevention and response strategies.

The selection of materials is based on a comprehensive review of literature on corruption, public ethics, and gender studies, ensuring that the testimonies and cases analyzed are relevant and representative of sextortion experiences. This process involves a critical evaluation of previous studies to establish a dialogue between existing findings and the insights offered by this research. The use of thematic and content analysis applied to data collected from secondary sources helps to unravel underlying patterns and broader implications of sextortion, ensuring a rigorous analysis and robust conclusions.

The adopted methodology underscores the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach to address complex issues such as sextortion, reinforcing the study's relevance for the development of more inclusive and effective public policies. By integrating theories from

public ethics, gender studies, and political science, this research aims to provide new perspectives on the prevention and treatment of sextortion, contributing to the existing literature and laying a foundation for future investigations.

## **Discussion**

### ***Sextortion: A Specific Form of Gendered Corruption***

Corruption, broadly defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, manifests in various forms, including bribery, fraud, embezzlement, and more subtle practices such as nepotism and patronage. These corrupt actions not only erode institutional integrity and distort economic decision-making but also undermine public trust and weaken social cohesion, exacerbating economic and social disparities. The most vulnerable groups—those lacking influential connections and decisive power—are disproportionately affected by corruption (Forattini, 2023).

From an economic perspective, corruption diverts public funds and distorts the allocation of government contracts, compromising the efficiency of infrastructure and development projects, ultimately hindering socioeconomic progress. Socially, the perception that services and opportunities are only accessible through corrupt means erodes civic engagement and trust in official systems, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and discrimination. Marginalized communities, in particular, face severe limitations in accessing crucial sectors such as education and healthcare, further entrenching systemic inequalities.

Sextortion, as a gendered form of corruption, uniquely exploits power asymmetries by demanding sexual favors instead of monetary bribes, disproportionately targeting women and vulnerable populations. Despite its pervasive impact, sextortion remains underreported and inadequately addressed due to social stigma, fear of retaliation, and the lack of clear legal frameworks that recognize it as a distinct form of corruption. Addressing sextortion requires a nuanced understanding of its intersection with structural inequalities, gender norms, and institutional failures that facilitate its persistence.

Within the spectrum of corruption, sextortion stands out as a particularly insidious manifestation that involves the abuse of power to obtain sexual favors. Transparency International defines sextortion as "the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage. Sextortion is a form of corruption in which sex, rather than money, is the currency of the bribe. It is not limited to specific countries or sectors but can be found wherever those in positions of

power lack integrity and seek to exploit the sexually vulnerable who depend on their authority" (Feigenblatt, 2020, p. 10). For an act to constitute sextortion, two key elements must be present: an implicit or explicit demand for unwanted sexual activity and the abuse of a position of authority by the perpetrator to solicit or accept such favors in exchange for exercising their entrusted power. Despite its widespread occurrence, sextortion has largely evaded thorough scrutiny due to the absence of precise terminology, inadequate legal frameworks, and ineffective policy responses. Social stigma and reporting barriers further contribute to its concealment, depriving victims of justice.

In his research, Rasjidi (2023) identifies three forms of sextortion, each reflecting different levels of corruption and complexity. The first, referred to as petty sexual corruption, occurs in situational contexts where sexual favors are exchanged for services or public facilities, often involving lower-ranking officials. The second, grand sexual corruption, takes place at higher levels of power and includes politicians and senior officials who engage in the exchange of sexual services and bribes to advance their personal interests, resulting in significant social and political ramifications. The third, intermediated sexual corruption, introduces a third party who provides sexual services financed by the briber, allowing the recipient to distance themselves from direct moral stigma, adding further complexity by involving multiple actors in the transaction.

Sextortion exploits power asymmetries and socioeconomic disparities, placing vulnerable individuals at even greater risk. Those affected often lack the economic resources to resist conventional bribery, making them more susceptible to demands for sexual favors. The lack of financial means not only increases their vulnerability to extortion but may also lead to the immediate loss of access to essential services such as water, food, land, freedom, and social acceptance. In contexts of extreme need, the pressure to comply with sextortion can be overwhelming, with devastating consequences for the victims' integrity and autonomy.

When it came time to distribute land parcels, the village chief said that we were too new [to the area] to receive land and that if I wanted a plot, I would have to have sexual relations with him. I had to accept because we are poor and have no land. I only did it because I wanted the land, but he wanted to continue having sexual relations with me indefinitely. When I refused, he expelled me from his village" (Feigenblatt, 2020, p. 19).

This form of corruption inflicts severe physical and psychological harm on victims, contributing to a profound distrust of government institutions. Physically, the direct consequences include injuries resulting from forced sexual activities, an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections, and unwanted pregnancies that may lead to additional health complications. Long-term reproductive issues such as infertility, chronic gynecological pain and inflammation, urinary tract infections, and physical trauma—manifested in abrasions, bruises, and lacerations—are common outcomes. In regions where abortion is illegal, the complications of unsafe abortions can be fatal. Furthermore, the psychosomatic consequences are significant; survivors may develop chronic conditions such as heart disease, gastrointestinal disorders, respiratory issues, hypertension, arthritis, diabetes, and other gynecological problems. These realities illustrate how sexual violence and corruption extend beyond immediate harm to affect the long-term health of victims.

The psychological impacts of sextortion are profound and permeate various aspects of victims' lives, leaving consequences that range from persistent fear and anxiety to more severe conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. These conditions may manifest through symptoms such as insomnia, nightmares, difficulty concentrating, and chronic fatigue, underscoring the severity of the abuse and the critical need for appropriate interventions. In addition, suicidal tendencies and difficulties in personal relationships, including challenges in maintaining healthy intimate relationships, are common and can persist over time.

Revictimization represents another critical issue, where victims may find themselves trapped in repetitive cycles of abuse, reliving patterns of guilt, shame, and fear. This phenomenon highlights the necessity for effective interventions that address not only the immediate manifestations of abuse but also the long-term psychological repercussions. These effects demonstrate how sextortion transcends a mere act of corruption to profoundly impact victims' mental health and overall well-being, making a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach imperative for its prevention and treatment.

These impacts generate profound social and economic consequences. In the workplace, a decline in performance is often observed, manifesting in reduced job satisfaction, unplanned job changes, career interruptions, decreased income, and limited opportunities. This highlights how the repercussions of sextortion extend beyond the personal sphere to significantly undermine professional capabilities. In the educational sector, the fear of exposure to abuse can lead students to abandon their studies, perpetuating long-term economic disadvantages. As a

result, sextortion isolates individuals from pathways to economic and intellectual empowerment, reinforcing cycles of disempowerment.

Furthermore, victims frequently face social stigma, rejection, humiliation, and isolation, which can be as devastating as the abuse itself. The social exclusion experienced by victims underscores the necessity for strategies that not only focus on justice and psychological support but also foster social reintegration and community support. Ensuring that victims can regain and maintain an active and valued role in society is essential to breaking the cycle of victimization and promoting resilience. Addressing these multifaceted impacts requires a holistic approach that combines legal, psychological, and socio-economic interventions to support survivors and mitigate the broader consequences of sextortion.

### ***The Impact of Sextortion on Government Services***

The effects of sextortion are particularly evident in the provision of essential government services such as healthcare, education, housing, entrepreneurship, and security. Victims often forgo these services out of fear of further abuse or due to a deep-seated distrust in authorities, exacerbating social inequality and leaving vulnerable communities even more unprotected. In Latin America, it is estimated that 71% of the population perceives that sextortion occurs at least occasionally, with one in five individuals reporting direct experiences or knowledge of sexual extortion when attempting to access government services. Similarly, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, 50% of people believe that sextortion occurs at least occasionally (Feigenblatt, 2020, p. 14).

In the context of public employment, sextortion is frequently observed in hiring and promotion decisions within governmental institutions. A study conducted in South Africa in 2013 revealed that 84% of sextortion victims were women, particularly those seeking employment or career advancement (Feigenblatt, 2020, p. 16). In the judicial sector, sextortion complicates access to justice, as lawyers may refuse to represent victims for fear of negative repercussions on their careers. This dynamic perpetuates a cycle of corruption and abuse, challenging accountability mechanisms.

Within law enforcement, sextortion by officers can severely limit victims' access to justice and undermine the rule of law. Sextortion erodes personal and community security by weakening trust in authorities responsible for protecting citizens. Potential victims may avoid contacting the police or seeking legal assistance out of fear that they will be coerced into providing sexual favors in exchange for protection or justice, leaving them even more

vulnerable to violence and abuse. For instance, in Panama, a survey conducted among sex workers revealed that the majority of respondents had been extorted by security forces (Feigenblatt, 2020, p. 15).

In refugee camps, such as the former "Calais Jungle" near France, single mothers are particularly vulnerable to transactional sexual relationships driven by the need for protection (Merkle et al., 2023). These instances illustrate how sextortion infiltrates various public service sectors, exacerbating social inequalities and perpetuating systemic abuse that disproportionately affects marginalized and vulnerable populations. Addressing this pervasive issue requires comprehensive legal frameworks, effective reporting mechanisms, and strengthened institutional oversight to restore public trust and ensure equitable access to government services.

In the educational sector, sextortion is not only imposed by figures of authority; it can also become a desperate strategy used by women to gain access to educational opportunities. In some contexts, women may feel pressured to offer sexual favors in exchange for financial support or the chance to enroll in educational programs. This type of sextortion, driven by the need to overcome financial and social barriers, underscores the deep inequities in access to education. Additionally, a study on tertiary institutions in Nigeria revealed that institutions often respond to reports of sextortion with crisis management strategies that include denial and minimization. The BBC's *\*Sex-for-Grades\** investigation exposed how university officials attributed such incidents to broader societal decay, shifting the blame onto students while downplaying the severity of sexual harassment (Fadipe & Bakenne, 2020).

In the public housing sector, sextortion presents a significant barrier to equitable housing access. Victims—particularly women and minority groups—are often coerced into providing sexual favors in exchange for securing or maintaining adequate living conditions. This form of abuse is not confined to developing countries; it has also been documented in developed nations. For instance, a report by *\*The Irish Times\** revealed that some landlords in Ireland have normalized the demand for sex in exchange for rent (Dempsey, 2023). This case highlights how the urgent need for housing can be exploited to abuse vulnerable tenants and underscores the necessity of implementing stricter policies and oversight mechanisms to protect individuals from sexual exploitation across all contexts.

Sextortion emerges as a critical barrier in addressing the challenges faced by individuals, particularly women and minorities, manifesting in increasingly desperate and exploitative exchanges. Kolbe (2015) documented how, in Haiti, under the presence of UN peacekeeping forces, citizens—who were de facto dependent on these forces for governance—

were compelled to trade sex for employment, money, and access to basic services such as food, water, and security.

A striking example involves a woman who described being forced to exchange sex for basic food supplies: "When it came time to distribute food, the officer in charge demanded sex in return. I had no choice; if I wanted to feed my family, I had to accept"(Kolbe, 2015, p. 9).

These cases illustrate how sextortion thrives in environments where individuals lack the economic and social power to resist coercion, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address the root causes of vulnerability and exploitation.

### ***The Intersection of Sextortion and Basic Service Access***

The lack of access to basic necessities and economic desperation often compel individuals to engage in corrupt acts. Promises of employment are frequently unfulfilled, perpetuating the vulnerability and exploitation of women. As one victim recounts, "I was promised a job in exchange for sexual favors, but after complying, the promised job never materialized. I felt betrayed and without resources" (Kolbe, 2015, p. 10).

#### ***Water and Sanitation Sector:***

In the water sector, sextortion exploits the significant control that some providers have over this essential resource for survival. Women from households facing water insecurity often find themselves in desperate situations, believing they have no alternative but to comply with inappropriate demands. This power imbalance, coupled with the critical necessity of water, enables service providers to exploit the vulnerability of women, further perpetuating gender inequity and severe violations of human rights.

Authorities within the water sector, including personnel from water service companies, have been reported to demand sexual favors in exchange for access to essential services. For instance, women may be coerced into providing sexual services in return for access to water facilities or as a means to settle outstanding debts for their use. Merkle et al. (2023) document the case of a woman who, unable to pay for the use of a sanitation facility, was forced to offer sexual favors to the attendant as a way to settle her debt.

Similar patterns are observed in other sectors such as hygiene and sanitation, commonly referred to as the WASH sector. A key factor contributing to the persistence of sexual exploitation in this field is the limited representation of women in decision-making roles.

Buisson et al. (2017) found that only 20% of leadership positions in water management organizations are held by women, while a World Bank report (2019) indicates that merely 6% of the workforce in water and sanitation services consists of women.

The underrepresentation of women in leadership underscores the urgent need to promote gender equality and greater inclusion in decision-making roles. Increasing female representation in these sectors not only enhances accessibility and security but also disrupts existing power structures and reduces opportunities for impunity, ultimately mitigating sexual coercion and fostering a more equitable and safer environment. Addressing these structural imbalances is essential to ensuring that access to fundamental services does not come at the cost of human dignity and gender equality. En el sector salud, las mujeres, debido a sus roles tradicionales de cuidadoras y sus necesidades individuales – especialmente durante los periodos reproductivos –, utilizan los servicios de salud con mayor frecuencia que los hombres.

The increased dependence of women on healthcare services heightens their vulnerability to sextortion by medical personnel. Sexual coercion in this context can lead women to forgo essential treatments due to fear of exploitation, resulting in a rise in untreated health conditions. This dynamic not only jeopardizes women's physical and mental health but also perpetuates a cycle of inequality and exclusion from adequate healthcare access.

When faced with the threat of sextortion, women may delay or entirely avoid seeking medical attention, exacerbating existing health disparities. The fear of being subjected to coercion by healthcare providers forces many women into a position where they must choose between their well-being and personal dignity. This reluctance to engage with healthcare services further entrenches gender-based inequalities, as untreated conditions can result in long-term health complications that limit opportunities for social and economic advancement.

Furthermore, the lack of effective reporting mechanisms and legal protections exacerbates the problem, allowing perpetrators to act with impunity. Addressing sextortion in healthcare settings requires the implementation of strict ethical guidelines, gender-sensitive training for healthcare professionals, and accessible channels for reporting abuse. Without these interventions, sextortion will continue to undermine efforts to achieve equitable healthcare access and deepen the marginalization of vulnerable populations.

### ***Effects of Sextortion on Bureaucracy and Economic Empowerment***

For those seeking to improve their economic conditions—particularly women and minorities—sextortion represents a significant obstacle to establishing and maintaining

businesses. Gillanders et al. (2024) highlight that sextortion has a greater negative impact on opportunity-driven entrepreneurship compared to necessity-driven entrepreneurship. Women motivated by opportunity tend to be more deterred by sextortion than those driven by necessity. Interacting with government officials to obtain permits, financing, or commercial spaces often leads to encounters with this form of corruption, which acts as an additional barrier to business development. Eldén et al. (2020) emphasize how corruption has become institutionalized in certain regions, such as Colombia, where women are expected to pay with their bodies for what men can pay with money.

In this context, Stahl (2021) investigates the prevalence and dynamics of gendered corruption in Malawi, showing how female entrepreneurs and micro-entrepreneurs face sexual corruption, particularly at service points where informal networks reinforce patriarchal values and gender biases. This environment discourages reporting of sexual corruption due to fear of retaliation, a sense of futility, and the absence of gender-sensitive reporting mechanisms. Stahl (2021) also found that women frequently encounter demands for money and sexual favors to comply with regulations and obtain certifications for their products, with such demands extending to interactions at customs and in securing public contracts.

Female entrepreneurs, especially those without political connections, are more vulnerable to sexual corruption when dealing with public officials. This situation is exacerbated by low literacy levels among women, which male officials exploit to manipulate and intimidate them using legal documents in English. Moreover, the lack of reliable reporting mechanisms and support for victims of sexual corruption is evident, with many women unaware of the possibility of reporting such incidents or fearing that state mechanisms will be ineffective or unreliable. For example, a female entrepreneur who won a public contract faced constant pressure for sexual favors from a male procurement officer. Upon refusal, the products she delivered were deemed non-compliant with specifications, leading to loan defaults and severe personal and financial consequences (Stahl, 2021, p. 8).

Male government officials frequently seek sexual favors from female entrepreneurs dealing with public entities. Women often feel cornered, as they desperately need these contracts to survive and pay their bills, and government employees exploit this desperation to make sexual demands. In some cases, even women with sufficient financial resources avoid doing business with the government out of fear of sexual advances (Stahl, 2021, p. 8).

Gillanders et al. (2024) highlight how the perception of corruption negatively affects women's entrepreneurial intentions. Their findings indicate that women, being more aware of the risks of sextortion, tend to avoid entrepreneurial activities. Additionally, the normalization

of corruption in a country's business practices may serve as an indicator to potential entrepreneurs about the challenges they will face, influencing their decision to pursue business ventures. Gillanders et al. (2024) also observed that while sextortion significantly reduces opportunity-based entrepreneurship among women, it has no significant effect on men and does not substantially influence necessity-driven entrepreneurship, demonstrating a strong correlation between sextortion and entrepreneurial outcomes.

On the other hand, many scholars argue that corruption may be the "missing variable" in explaining the relationships between entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic prosperity. Although corruption has historically been viewed as having potential positive effects by "greasing the wheels" of bureaucratic systems, this perspective is difficult to sustain when considering the negative impacts corruption has on economic growth and the even more harmful effects of sextortion at both individual and societal levels. Furthermore, excessive bureaucracy is often a product of corruption itself, deliberately designed to encourage and extract bribes (Breen & Gillanders, 2012).

### ***Structural Barriers Perpetuating Sextortion***

After analyzing the implications of sextortion in essential services and its entrenchment in various spheres of public life, it is crucial to reflect on the structural barriers that perpetuate this phenomenon. These barriers are not merely circumstantial but are deeply embedded within legal and social frameworks, reinforcing inequalities and enabling the persistence of sextortion across multiple contexts. At the core of this discussion lies the concept of patriarchy, intertwined with other forms of hierarchical domination that collectively shape the power dynamics in which sextortion thrives.

This approach is essential in understanding how patriarchal systems—defined as social arrangements that privilege men and structurally and ideologically subjugate women—are both a product and a contributor to the broader social order that normalizes such abuses of power. Hunnicutt (2009) argues that patriarchy is sustained not only through explicit acts of control and aggression but also through subtler forms of social and cultural conditioning. These practices include social expectations and cultural norms that perpetuate gender roles and reinforce male dominance, increasing women's vulnerability to various forms of violence and exploitation, including sextortion. Furthermore, the intersectionality of gender with other social categories such as race, class, and age introduces additional layers of disadvantage, further exacerbating women's vulnerability to sextortion.

The influence of patriarchy on violence against women is evident in how gender-based social arrangements and power dynamics structure such violence along gendered lines, making women targets precisely because of their gender. Empirical evidence shows that women face a higher risk of violence from their heterosexual male partners. These observations underscore how patriarchy manifests not only in economic domination—where most rape victims earn less—but also in cultural and ideological factors, such as the moral authority granted to men over women and children in religious texts, which reinforce patriarchal domination and control.

Patriarchy also includes a paradox of protection, in which norms and protective measures can simultaneously serve as instruments of repression. Women, relying on men for protection, are placed in a position of powerlessness and vulnerability to aggression.

Power dynamics are fundamental to understanding violence against women, as they are intrinsically linked to gender inequality and social norms. Traditionally, in many cultures, men wield greater power in both public and private spheres, often leading to control over women. This power imbalance is frequently maintained through coercive tactics, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

From a socio-economic perspective, marginalized women—due to factors such as race, socioeconomic status, or migration status—are at greater risk. Women with fewer resources and limited access to support services are more vulnerable to abuse. Additionally, severe mental health conditions such as schizophrenia may prevent these women from recognizing danger, seeking help, or effectively defending themselves. Similarly, substance abuse can impair their ability to identify, resist, or escape victimization, making them more susceptible to revictimization, sexual abuse, and sextortion.

Understanding these dynamics is crucial for the development of effective interventions and support systems for victims of violence. Addressing these power imbalances is essential to helping women escape abusive situations, rather than solely focusing on issues such as bureaucracy and sexual corruption, which are often emphasized in discussions of sextortion.

### ***Historical Contexts and Structural Factors Perpetuating Sextortion***

Historical contexts play a crucial role in the prevalence of sextortion, as they are deeply rooted in long-standing social structures and cultural norms that have perpetuated gender inequality and male dominance. Historical patterns of patriarchy and male dominance have established a framework in which women's rights and autonomy are systematically limited, creating an environment where sextortion can thrive. These precedents continue to shape

contemporary attitudes and behaviors, allowing sexual exploitation to persist as a normalized and often overlooked practice.

In many traditional societies, patriarchal systems have long been the norm, with men occupying primary positions of power in political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and property control. In contrast, women have been relegated to subordinate roles, often confined to domestic duties and denied access to education and employment opportunities. Furthermore, historically, legal systems in many countries have discriminated against women by denying them basic rights and protections. For example, marital rape was not recognized as a crime in many jurisdictions until relatively recently, and the lack of legal protection has contributed to a culture of impunity for perpetrators of violence. This historical context has created an environment where violence against women, including sextortion, is more likely to be tolerated or ignored. The lack of opportunities and patriarchal control further perpetuate women's vulnerability, facilitating their exploitation by those in power in exchange for access to essential services and fundamental rights.

Cultural norms and practices passed down through generations continue to perpetuate violence against women, reflecting the persistence of patriarchal values that justify violence and exploitation. Practices such as dowry, female genital mutilation, and honor killings—deeply rooted in historical traditions—regard women as property or bearers of family honor. The historical contexts of colonialism and slavery have also significantly contributed to the prevalence of violence against women, as they were subjected to sexual violence and exploitation by colonizers and slave owners. This legacy continues to affect the descendants of these women, perpetuating cycles of violence and trauma. Additionally, during periods of war and conflict, sexual violence has been used as a weapon to terrorize and subjugate populations, with lasting effects that perpetuate cycles of victimization beyond the immediate conflicts.

Racism further exacerbates the vulnerability of women of color to sextortion. Racial discrimination can limit their access to resources and support systems, and women of color may face additional barriers when seeking assistance. For instance, an African American woman experiencing sextortion may encounter racial biases within the criminal justice system, leading to inadequate protection and support. These intersecting factors highlight the compounded challenges faced by marginalized groups and underscore the need for intersectional approaches in addressing sextortion.

### ***Persistent Cultural and Legal Challenges***

These historical and cultural precedents continue to influence contemporary attitudes and behaviors, making it challenging to eradicate deeply rooted practices of gender-based violence. The historical acceptance of violence against women contributes to its normalization in modern society, manifesting in attitudes that blame victims and hold women responsible for the violence they suffer. This normalization extends to modern forms of exploitation, such as sextortion, where the same power and control dynamics are perpetuated in new contexts. Sextortion, as a contemporary form of sexual violence and exploitation, is deeply embedded in these historical and cultural antecedents. Patriarchal practices and attitudes have created a fertile ground for sextortion to flourish, normalizing sexual exploitation in various forms.

### ***Challenges in Legal Frameworks***

The intergenerational trauma and historical contexts of patriarchy, legal discrimination, cultural norms, colonialism, slavery, and conflict have perpetuated sextortion, affecting women's mental health and well-being across generations. Resistance to gender equality and adherence to traditional values complicate efforts to combat this form of exploitation. Understanding these contexts is essential to developing effective strategies.

The discussion on legislative developments related to various forms of violence against women (VAW) underscores the need to recognize both advances and shortcomings in the global legal framework, which are intrinsically linked to social, cultural, and historical factors that perpetuate victimization and impunity, facilitating practices such as sextortion. From the 1990s to the 2000s, feminist movements and their allies successfully advocated for legal reforms in many states to prevent and penalize VAW. Specialized legislation was adopted to combat domestic violence and other forms of violence and harassment (Htun & Jensenius, 2020). However, there is significant variation in how states address intimate partner violence and sexual harassment. Some states have comprehensive laws that criminalize various forms of violence and provide support services, while others lack adequate legal mechanisms to address these issues, creating a legal vacuum that sextortion can exploit.

Despite legislative progress, the implementation of these laws continues to face numerous challenges, even in states with progressive legal frameworks. Activists continue to advocate for the effective enforcement of laws and for adequate resources to be allocated to support services. Legal coverage gaps are particularly evident; 36 countries lack specialized legislation on domestic violence, and 34 offer no legal protection against marital rape. The

latter remains a controversial concept, and in some jurisdictions, it is not explicitly criminalized, leaving it open to legal interpretation.

Furthermore, in countries such as Angola, Bahrain, and Lebanon, laws still exist that exempt rapists from criminal penalties if they marry their victims, perpetuating a culture of impunity. Although many countries have adopted legislation against sexual harassment, only 32 have laws addressing harassment in public spaces. This legislative variation is also reflected in other areas: while 130 countries have laws covering workplace harassment, only 66 address harassment in educational settings, and even fewer (32) cover public spaces.

These legislative deficiencies and legal loopholes create an enabling environment for sextortion, as the lack of protection and accountability facilitates the exploitation of vulnerable women and normalizes other forms of violence and exploitation. In a system where impunity prevails, sextortion finds fertile ground to thrive, further consolidating inequalities and perpetuating gender-based violence.

### **Strategies to Combat Sextortion**

This section outlines key strategies to combat sextortion by framing it as a form of corruption and, following the recommendations of García-Moreno et al. (2015), emphasizing the need for leadership, the implementation and strengthening of laws, investment in prevention, and the integration of technology to support victims.

**Recognizing Sextortion as a Form of Corruption:** It is crucial to acknowledge and address sextortion not only as a form of violence but also as an act of corruption. This dual characterization is essential, as it enables the identification of the power structures in which sextortion is embedded and operates. Traditionally, sexual violence has been conceptualized primarily as a personal and psychological abuse of power. However, by defining it also as corruption, the institutional and public dimensions of power abuse are brought to the forefront.

Understanding sextortion as corruption highlights how perpetrators exploit their positions of power to obtain sexual benefits. This issue extends beyond the personal sphere and becomes embedded within institutional practices, where actors should ideally be serving the public interest. Failure to recognize sextortion as corruption critically overlooks the institutional structures and practices that facilitate such abuses of power. Government institutions, corporations, and other entities may allow or even cover up such acts under the guise of normality and legality. Framing sextortion as corruption underscores the need for legal and policy reforms that go beyond addressing personal violence, by implementing clear and

transparent policies aimed not only at punishing but also preventing sextortion, ensuring accountability and transparency at all levels of governance. Additionally, addressing sextortion as corruption facilitates international cooperation in prosecuting these crimes, given that corruption often transcends national borders.

**Demonstrating Leadership Against Sextortion:** Effective leadership in combating sextortion requires publicly condemning all forms of sexual violence and exploitation while emphasizing the importance of gender equality. Leaders should actively promote changes in social norms that perpetuate inequality and enable sextortion. Integrating specific gender equality objectives into international development agendas ensures that the fight against sextortion receives the necessary attention and resources. Developing national action plans with concrete actions and measurable goals in key sectors such as health, justice, and education is essential to ensure coordinated efforts and efficient resource allocation.

**Developing and Enforcing Laws, Implementing Policies, and Strengthening Institutional Capacity:** Strengthening and enforcing laws and policies that prohibit all forms of sexual violence is fundamental. National legislation must promote equality and eliminate discrimination, offering women equal access to education, income, and safe employment opportunities through sectoral strategies. Additionally, it is crucial to challenge discriminatory attitudes and behaviors toward women and girls, including those rooted in masculinity constructs that perpetuate male violence. Social policies that promote equality in relationships, such as childcare support and parental leave, also play a key role in addressing gender disparities.

**Investing in Violence Prevention:** Investment in community-based programs aimed at changing social norms that foster discrimination and violence is crucial. Supporting interventions that engage both women and men in reshaping social norms that perpetuate gender inequality is essential. Addressing individual risk factors, such as exposure to violence during childhood and substance abuse issues, is also vital. Furthermore, collaborating with the media to promote the unacceptability of violence and fostering supportive attitudes toward survivors strengthens local prevention efforts and responses to violence.

**Investing in Research, Data Collection, and Civil Society Engagement:** Implementing nationwide population-based surveys every five years to measure the prevalence, risk factors, and consequences of violence against women is essential. Supporting research to address knowledge gaps and improve understanding of various forms of violence is crucial. Investment in violence prevention research and program evaluations can help

document the costs and cost-effectiveness of anti-violence programs, providing evidence-based solutions to combat sextortion.

**Technology-Based Strategies to Combat Sextortion:** One of the most promising strategies to mitigate sextortion involves the effective use of technology, which can reduce direct interactions, promote transparency, safeguard rights, and document processes. These technologies not only enhance the security and accessibility of reporting mechanisms but also empower victims through knowledge and self-advocacy. Developing secure digital platforms is critical to facilitating the confidential and protected reporting of sextortion cases. Additionally, targeted training programs can equip women with digital skills and legal knowledge, increasing their resilience against sextortion and enhancing their ability to navigate institutional systems safely and effectively.

These comprehensive strategies, encompassing legal, policy, educational, and technological interventions, are essential in the fight against sextortion. By addressing the root causes and structural barriers that facilitate this form of corruption, societies can take significant steps toward ensuring justice, accountability, and the protection of the most vulnerable populations.

## **Final Considerations**

This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of sextortion, highlighting its complexity and its interconnection with gender-based violence and systemic corruption. Through this analysis, it has been revealed how sextortion, sustained by deeply entrenched power structures, reinforces discrimination and social exclusion. The findings demonstrate that this form of abuse disproportionately affects women and marginalized communities, exacerbating existing inequalities and perpetuating cycles of violence and corruption.

The study has emphasized the importance of understanding the structural and sociocultural barriers that perpetuate sextortion. The intersection of patriarchy, sexism, and other forms of social inequality creates an environment conducive to sexual exploitation, where cultural and social norms continue to justify and minimize these acts. Furthermore, the lack of robust legal frameworks and the insufficient enforcement of existing laws significantly contribute to the impunity and persistence of sextortion.

From a public policy perspective, this study underscores the urgent need to develop comprehensive strategies that address both gender-based violence and sextortion as a manifestation of corruption. It is crucial for governments to implement legislative reforms that

incorporate clear and effective measures against sextortion, supported by adequate resources for their enforcement. The creation of secure and accessible technological platforms can facilitate the reporting of sextortion cases, safeguarding victims' identities and promoting greater transparency and accountability within public institutions.

This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature on corruption and gender-based violence by providing an integrative perspective that highlights the importance of an intersectional analysis. This approach not only aims to enrich academic dialogue on corrupt practices and their interconnections with gender inequality but also offers a solid foundation for the development of more effective and inclusive public policies. The research stresses the necessity of addressing the specific realities of affected communities, promoting a context-based approach to effectively combat sextortion.

Future research should focus on exploring how anti-sextortion interventions impact the dynamics of corruption and the delivery of public services in the long term. Additionally, it is crucial to investigate how gender, race, and class differences influence the experience and resilience against sextortion, and how culturally adapted measures can enhance the effectiveness of interventions. Assessing the outcomes of technological innovations in the prevention and reporting of sextortion across various geographic and cultural contexts will be essential to validate the applicability and effectiveness of these solutions on a global scale.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the complexity of sextortion and provides a framework for developing strategies that address both its immediate and underlying causes. A comprehensive and contextualized approach is essential to promoting gender equality, protecting victims, and fostering a more just and equitable society.

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