



THE QUALITY OF
GOVERNMENT INSTITUTE



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

Sexual forms of corruption and sextortion

How to expand research in a sensitive area

20
21

Working paper series 2021:10

Aksel Sundström
Lena Wängnerud



THE QUALITY OF
GOVERNMENT INSTITUTE



Sexual forms of corruption and sextortion

How to expand research in a sensitive area

Aksel Sundström

Lena Wängnerud

WORKING PAPER SERIES 2021:10

QoG THE QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTE

Department of Political Science

University of Gothenburg

Box 711, SE 405 30 GÖTEBORG

December 2021

ISSN 1653-8919

© 2021 by Aksel Sundström & Lena Wängnerud. All rights reserved.

Sexual forms of corruption and sextortion: How to expand research in a sensitive area

Aksel Sundström

Lena Wängnerud

QoG Working Paper Series 2021:10

December 2021

ISSN 1653-8919

Abstract

There is increasing attention among advocacy organizations about the urgent problem of sextortion and other ways in which sexual forms of corruption hurts vulnerable people. Yet, scholarly understandings of this challenge are, conceptually and empirically, underdeveloped. In this Working Paper, we make three contributions: First, we elaborate on the concept and discuss how to define sextortion, i.e., what it is and what it is not. Towards that aim, we trace the use and evolution of the concept and present empirical illustrations of where, in which sectors, the phenomenon thus far has been detected. Second, we analyze the first cross-national survey that includes questionnaire items gauging sextortion. This survey helps to disentangle where, geographically, the problem is prevalent and what individual factors that seem to increase the risk of experience sextortion. Third, we discuss a future research agenda on this theme and provide suggestions on what research questions this vein of study should be posing. Systematic empirical studies are scant, and thus there is little knowledge about the scope of the phenomenon. Therefore, we propose, as a next step, more of theoretically informed survey research. We conclude by discussing potential recommendations for policy that would come out from such renewed research.

Aksel Sundström
The Quality of Government Institute
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
Aksel.sundstrom@pol.gu.se

Name Surname
The Quality of Government Institute
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
Lena.wängnerud@pol.gu.se

“This corrupt sexual exploitation often has a far greater adverse effect on victims than monetary corruption, not only because of the act itself—which can be extremely violent and is always a violation of personal dignity and human rights—but also because of the possibility of disease, pregnancy, and, all too frequently, social ostracization, victim blaming, and loss of prospects in the marriage market.”

Sarah Gitlin (2015)

Introduction

The awareness about sexual forms of corruption and sextortion is on the rise. Testimonies from female migrants attempting to cross borders suggest that they are asked to pay a ‘double cost’ from officials, not only the monetary sum taxed on male migrants, but also a sexual ‘service’.ⁱ In the criminal justice system in countries with dysfunctional institutions, relatives of inmates are asked by prison guards for physical intercourse to visit their family members in jail.ⁱⁱ In the education sector in several African countries, students are witnessing university teachers systematically asking for sex to give higher grades. On workplaces, such behavior can take the form of offers or forced situations of sex linked to promises of career opportunities. A Human Right Watch Report from 2010 gives voice to a refugee in Sierra Leone, where relief workers inappropriately used their advantaged position, “In this community no one can have access to CSM [a soya nutrient] without having sex first.”ⁱⁱⁱ A related testament to the severity of this problem is the involvement of personnel from international organizations as perpetrators. At the time of writing, in September 2021, a scandal within the World Health Organization (WHO) is unfolding where sexual forms of corruption is at the center. An investigative commission suggests that WHO employees in supervisory positions, working in the 2018-2020 Ebola crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, forced local staff to have sex to keep their jobs, get paid or get a better paid position.^{iv}

Advocacy work by NGOs and individual efforts by people such as Nancy Hendry from the International Association of Women Judges, have led to the phenomenon of sexual corruption being discussed in wider circles. Today, the problem is being highlighted, but academic research in the field is still scarce and the scientific understanding of this challenge is both conceptually and empirically underdeveloped. Ongoing debates concern the *nature* of the phenomenon, whether, for example, definitions should only include direct

forms such as the examples in the introduction above or also include indirect forms where an individual engages another person's (sex worker) sexual work as payment to a third person (public official). Other debates concerns the *scope* of the phenomenon since sexual forms of corruption comes with a special stigma – in addition to negative effects such as loss of dignity, potential violence, diseases and pregnancy, there is, for example, reports that female migrants who have failed to reach their destinations are considered prostitutes in their home communities because they are believed to have been forced to sell their bodies along the route. There are also reports that affected women are blamed for exposing themselves to risks. Therefore, measures of prevalence are likely to be particularly tricky in this area. Moreover, although men are among the affected, most evidence indicate that sexual forms of corruption disproportionately victimize women. The problem is thus a highly gendered phenomenon, but we know little about whether sextortion is a *supplement* for women, something they have to deal with in addition to other forms of corruption and in that case constitute a 'double cost' as indicated in testimonies from female migrants trying to cross borders.

Against the backdrop above, the aim of this Working Paper is to make three contributions: First, we elaborate on the concept and discuss how to define sextortion, i.e., what it is and what it is not. Towards that aim, we trace the use and evolution of the concept and present empirical illustrations of where, and in which sectors, the phenomenon thus far has been detected. Second, we then analyze the first cross-national survey, conducted in Latin America by Transparency International (TI), which includes questionnaire items gauging sextortion. This survey helps to disentangle where, geographically, the problem is prevalent and what individual factors that seem to increase the risk of experience sextortion. Third, we discuss a future research agenda focusing the relationship between sexual corruption and other forms of corruption. We conclude by discussing potential recommendations for policy that would come out from a theoretically and empirically renewed research agenda in this sensitive and highly urgent area.

Definitions of sextortion

What it is not

In reports and documents, there are several related terms used, including 'corruption involving sexual exploitation', 'sex coercion', 'sex extortion', 'sexual corruption', 'sexual bribery', 'sexual forms of corruption', 'sex-related bribery' and, finally, 'sextortion'. To complicate further, not all types of behaviors that are presented as examples of sextortion – the term that by now is the most established – are, from our point of view, to be seen as cases of corruption. For example, we have noted that sextortion, in news media and popular culture, tend to have a broad meaning and cover situations geared towards blackmailing and revenge. To illustrate, a search in Google Trends suggests that the most frequent search on sextortion by internet users originate from the Philippines. The reason for this is an international criminal network that

targeted younger men whom were convinced into letting themselves be filmed carrying out sex acts, films that later on were used in blackmailing (BBC 2018). We also note that the term sextortion increasingly refers to practices of ‘revenge porn’ among youths, where recordings of sexual activities are used for various types of humiliation. In addition, blackmailing and revenge are also phenomenon covered by the research that has received the most attention so far (see Patchin and Hinduja (2020) for an overview). In these discussions, sextortion generally refers to “threats to expose a sexual image in order to make a person do something or for other reasons, such as revenge or humiliation” (Wolak and Finkelhor 2016, p. 5).^v

Although important, we argue that blackmailing, revenge, and similar phenomenon where sexual acts are involved, preferably should not be seen as a form of corruption. Conceptual stretching is frequent in many areas and a case similar to the one described here is when ‘corruption’ is used to cover a variety of behaviors that people dislike. In most research, corruption specifically refer to “the *misuse* of public office for private gain”. When the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), coined the term sextortion in 2008, they referred to corruption and sexual exploitation involving government officials (IAWJ, 2015). We find the ideas of IAWJ to be the most useful starting point for developing a theoretically grounded definition of the term.

What it is

In 2012, a statement from the IAWJ describe sextortion 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.” Currently, the IAWJ defines sextortion as “the abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage” (EuropeNow 2020) but in an interview (EuropeNow 2020), Nancy Hendry outlines a more comprehensive definition: “We now have a four-part definition that serves to differentiate sextortion from other kinds of abuses. First, you have to have someone in a position of entrusted authority; second, there has to be a quid pro quo element, which means the person has to exercise his authority in exchange for some personal benefit; third, that benefit has to have a sexual character; and finally, the person has to rely on the coercive power of authority rather than on physical force to obtain the sexual benefit.” Thus, the organization behind the term suggest a relatively specific definition of the phenomenon where two actors are involved and there is a direct transaction involving sex between them.

A small but growing scholarship has further informed our theoretical understanding of this concept. One early publication, paving the ground, is Jeffrey’s (2006) study on sex buyers in China. Jeffrey pointed out that as early as 2000, the topic of ‘sex-related bribery’ was discussed within the country, as it was publicized

that Chinese officials who embezzled public funds often traded favors for sex.^{vi} Another early contribution is Goetz (2007) who discusses the implications for women of male dominated political networks and state that such networks: "...can make the women who do try to seek advance within parties socially unattractive, and sometimes sexually suspect." Thus, Goetz pointed to potential discredit to women rising in such settings, i.e. suspicions that they have used sexual favors to gain advantage. She also highlighted that being the only woman among a group of powerful men *de facto* could pose risks of sexual threats and violence. Goetz is one of the first scholars to ask: "Is the 'currency' of corruption sometimes sexual harassment or abuse? For instance, do officials extort sexual favours, rather than money, in return for services?" (p. 102).

Towns (2015) pick up this discussion on situations where more than two actors are involved and bring further clarity by distinguishing between different forms of sexual corruption: "One relatively straightforward form of sexual corruption relates to sexual bribery, or the giving, offering or being asked for sex in order to influence the actions of a public official" (p. 58). The second type is more indirect, and refers to situations where sex workers are a means but not active agents of corruption, that is when an agent engages the sexual labor of another person as payment to a third person, the public official. Making this distinction, Towns (2015) has a good point, as the latter behaviour would not directly be included in the IAWJ-view on sextortion as 'abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage'. As already highlighted, the IAWJ seem to focus only on direct transactions. The definition of Towns – that sexual corruption is a "transactional relationships that involve the trade of sex for services, benefits or goods tied to public office" (p. 51) – is more encompassing.

Lindberg and Stensöta (2018) elaborate further on the concept of sextortion and refer to the scale in which such transactions take place. To start, they discuss situations where 'two parties are involved in a transaction, and person A has the power to give person B something that he/she wants', which they term 'sexual petty corruption' and contrast that to transactions at higher levels of power which they term 'sexual grand corruption'. To continue, the indirect behavior discussed by Towns (2015) Lindberg and Stensöta (2018) refer to as 'transmitted sexual corruption'. Thus, they suggest three different terms to capture the full complexity of the phenomenon.

Summing up, what advocates, policy-makers and researchers agree on is that there is a need to stop thinking about corruption as something that only involves monetary currency. Already in 2007, in a study on Mexico, de la Jara documented cases of recipients of publicly funded Conditional Cash Transfers, most of whom were women, being asked to do extra work for the city, that is, cleaning and sweeping streets, in order to avoid losing benefits (see de la Jara 2007 p. 68). In a bit frustrated tone Boehm and Sierra (2015) states:

“it cannot be stressed enough that corruption is not restricted to money changing hands. Sexual extortion and sexual favours – or voluntary *quid pro quo*s – are also common forms of corruption.”^{vii}

We see merits in all work discussed above. For example, we note that Lindberg and Stensöta’s approach probably can be contrasted to the notion of collusive versus non-collusive corruption (see Foellmi and Oechslin 2007). Petty corruption can be divided into collusive acts – where officials turn a blind eye to law violations – and non-collusive, when officials ask citizens for payments for services they are legally entitled to. In this light, one can see situations of a police officer who demands sex from a prostitute (in a setting where selling sex is legally prohibited and penalizes the selling individual) in exchange for not enforcing the law on selling sex as ‘collusive sexual petty corruption’, as both parties collude to violate the law. A contrasting case would be someone seeking help from an official to get access to a permit the person is legally entitled to, but is denied this unless sexual favors are traded. This type of behavior would be ‘non-collusive sexual petty corruption’. Another useful distinction could be between ‘need’ and ‘greed’ sexual corruption (cf. Bauhr 2017) where our last example, from the viewpoint of the affected individual, would be a case of need sexual corruption. An example of greed sexual corruption could be the indirect situations described by Towns (2015) when an individual engages the sexual labor of another person as payment to a third person to receive special advantages that the individual is not entitled to.

A related conceptualization is that of Eldén and colleagues (2020). They mainly focus on the direct form of sextortion and build on the ideas of ‘need’ and ‘greed’ to suggest that one can think about two forms of sextortion: opportunistic and oppressive sextortion, focusing on the motives of the perpetrator. According to these authors, oppressive sextortion is when “a person in authority refuses to give out a service, such as health care or education, unless a sexual service is performed” (p. 45). Opportunistic forms of sexual corruption is, in their view, more about officials using a position of authority to hand out unwarranted privileges.

All in all, we favor the general definition suggested by Towns (2015): that the term sextortion should be used for *transactional relationships that involve the trade of sex for services, benefits or goods tied to public office*. This definition is restrictive in the sense that it ties sextortion to public office in ways similar to the much-used definition of corruption as the *misuse* of public office for private gain; the definition is at the same time also comprehensive enough to cover a variety of situations. In specific research projects each group of scholars then have to specify whether they examine direct or indirect forms, collusive- or non-collusive acts, acts based on need or greed, and so forth.

Sectors where sextortion has been reported

Transparency International (2020) refer to sextortion in a wide variety of public sectors: police officers demanding sex from individuals to avoid arrest or detainment; teachers requiring sex in exchange for a passing grade; judges trading favorable rulings for coerced sexual acts; immigration officers exploiting asylum seekers or refugees for sex; public service officials sexually extorting employees during hiring or promotions; other government officials demanding sex in exchange for land, a business permit, food, water, public housing or countless other services.

Generally, authors such as Hallward-Driemeier (2011) has pointed out that citizens' encounters with officials might be the general interaction to give rise to sexual forms of corruption. The study refers to a survey of new enterprises in Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal where a gender-specific obstacle regards interactions with government authorities: "[Women] may be expected to pay higher amounts to get things done, may be less likely to get things done even having paid – and the 'payment' sought may not only be monetary. Indeed, over a quarter of respondents, male and female, reported that they had heard of sexual favors being requested to obtain licenses, receive credit or in dealing with the tax authorities."^{viii} Yet, some societal sectors seem to be particularly problematic. Below we discuss a selection of cases that we have come across in our reading of reports, news media and scholarly publications. The ambition is to concretize the phenomenon of sextortion one step further before discussing fruitful ways of moving research in the area forward.

Education

The phenomena of sex in relation to corruption in the education sector made headlines in the United States several decades ago, mainly because of investigative reporting. Reports of practices of teachers demanding an 'A for a lay' across colleges in the US, suggested grave misuse of public servants that seldom were detected nor sanctioned (Epstein 1981). In their 2010 book *Half the Sky*, Pulitzer Prize-winners Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn write about a disturbing but not uncommon problem in Southern Africa: that is, male teachers who trade good grades for sex with students. Boehm and Sierra (2015) add that, in education, gender vulnerabilities involve three roles: students, teachers, and parents. In addition, they point to studies showing that women (besides in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, see UNESCO 2010) dominate the teaching profession in primary education. Such teachers face a different situation than students: Women in teaching profession are vulnerable to sexual extortion by superiors and during selection processes – cases have been revealed in official and social audits in, for example, Honduras (Transformemos Honduras 2010). Boehm and Sierra (2015) further exemplify that mothers, in most countries, often take

care of dealings with their children's schools, and thus may be exposed to sextortion and/or bribes for school admission (see also Fatoorechi 2011; Heyneman 2009; Mumporeze et al. 2021; Yusuph 2016).

Hlongwane (2017) cites some numbers regarding frequency of sextortion from public schools in South Africa but do not indicate whom – students, teachers and/or parents – that were involved: “In fact, the scourge of sextortion or sexual corruption is prevalent in the South African public sector institutions. For instance, the South African Council of Educators (SACE) reveals that high levels of sexually related offences were recorded in public schools during the past financial years since 2010, the statistics of which are as follows: during 2010/2011, 126 cases were registered; in 2012/2013 556 cases were reported; and 91 cases were registered during 2014/2015.”

Law enforcement

According to the IAWJ, the judicial sector is the one that in particular has driven awareness of this topic. For example, in 2012, sextortion in the Nigerian justice system had received so much attention that a high-level male politician spoke out on the issue, emphasizing the economic challenges that drives individuals into sextortion: “The only time the judges can begin to redefine sextortion is when those who are in public office begin to give equal opportunities, I did not say money, I say fair opportunities for people to compete favorably. What drives a lot of people into ‘sextortion’ is the economic challenges they face from day to day. They become victims of such economic challenges.”^{ix}

Prison guards can be seen as a subsector of law enforcement and Hlongwane (2017) notes, in a very direct way, that: “On 31 December 2016 in Cape Town a 32-year old female detainee offered sexual services to a police official after the officer had promised to release her.” Reports in this area also tells about relatives of inmates being asked by prison guards for physical intercourse to visit their family members in jail.

Another subsector of law enforcement is the police and it is reasonable to expect sextortion to be present in police vice squads – those dealing with prostitution and trafficking. There are, for example, several stories of corrupt officers in the United States some decades ago, demanding sex not to enforce sanctions where selling sex is illegal (see Dombrink 1988). In fact, the examples described in Dombrink's historical account suggests that vice squads would have the possibility of extorting both sex buyers, pimps and those working in prostitution – for both money and sexual services – providing examples from cities such as Philadelphia, New York, Boston, San Francisco and Miami. Yet, this sector does not seem to be very much discussed in the recent literature on sextortion.

Migration and immigration

In the report from Transparency International (2020), referred to previously, a male migrant respondent tells about 'the double price' female migrants have to pay when facing corrupt officials, compared to men that only has to give them money: "Sextortion is a well-known 'fact' of undocumented migration, so many women prepare contraception before departing. Others arrive pregnant at their destination." (TI 2020, p. 12)

In 2010, a federal immigration officer in the U.S. pleaded guilty to coercing oral sex from a 22-year-old Colombian woman who was seeking a green card as the wife of an American citizen. The case is unusual since the occasion was caught on film.^x A similar case in Canada, also in 2010, concerns a former immigration adjudicator in Toronto (sentenced to 18 months in jail) who promised to approve the refugee claim of a South Korean woman in exchange for sex. Also in this case the victim nabbed the perpetrator by secretly videotaping his demands, and then going to police.^{xi} Hassan (2016) documents how female Syrian and Iraqi refugees face physical assault, exploitation and sexual harassment on their journey through Europe.

Diplomacy and other high-level cases

In her analysis on sexual corruption, Towns (2015) focuses on the sphere of diplomacy and discusses the grey zone of agents with immunity, employing people (often without legal rights to stay in the country) as domestic keepers, exploiting them for sex. Towns outline further problems in this sector – showing that visa-cases open up for dependency and that immunity allow these actors to engage in sextortion without sanctions. Her conclusion is that "visa application processes appear to carry particular potential for sexual bribery, including sexual extortion." Towns highlight that one triggering factor is that applicants, whom often are female *and* low-status, can be desperate, in particular when they do not fulfill all visa requirements. A concrete example in her text concerns two female applicants for visas to the US, who were interviewed by US federal agents in an investigation of a consular officer, claiming that the officer persistently demanded sex. The officer was subsequently sentenced to 20 years in prison. Another triggering factor in diplomacy, highlighted by Towns, is that there are a set of corrupt behaviors which diplomats can engage in by misusing diplomatic immunity and the inviolability of diplomatic property and premises. Here Towns exemplifies with a Polish-born former Vatican ambassador to the Dominican Republic who, in 2013, came under investigation for alleged sexual abuse of young boys. The ambassador invoked diplomatic immunity to avoid prosecution in a Dominican court. Diplomacy involves what we would like to label high-level cases. A much-noticed example outside the area of diplomacy is the former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who allegedly traded sex with a Moroccan minor and aspiring model for her career advancement.^{xii}

Employees in public sector

When discussing sextortion in the educational sector we pointed out that women in the teaching profession are vulnerable to sexual extortion by superiors and during selection processes. A similar picture appears in Makhubu (2014) who refers to the situation at a hospital in Pretoria, South Africa: “Sources, who spoke anonymously for fear of victimisation, said the recruitment irregularities had surfaced as far back as 2007 and increased over the years. Cleaners, laundry workers, porters and mortuary attendants had been the target of the alleged corruption... interviewees – whose employment was confirmed and then revoked at the last minute – came forward and more admitted to having paid or had sex to get on staff lists... After a mass meeting in February, where some victims and beneficiaries spoke openly of the corrupt acts, management was forced to take action, and 17, including a director, were suspended.”

In conclusion, the important takeaway from examples in different spheres above is that sextortion takes place in various types of public sectors. Most cases discussed above illustrate sextortion based on need; that is, victims who have few alternatives than to provide sex in exchange for services that they are entitled to. This type of corruption is often, but not always non-collusive types of corruption. However, it is important to bear other potential cases in mind, especially since high-level cases, based on greed, can be very hard to detect. In need corruption, victims, as illustrated by some of the cases above, had the fortune to be able to record events and go to the police. However, in greed corruption – which often, but not always, is a collusive form of corruption – the involved actors have few incentives to make events public.

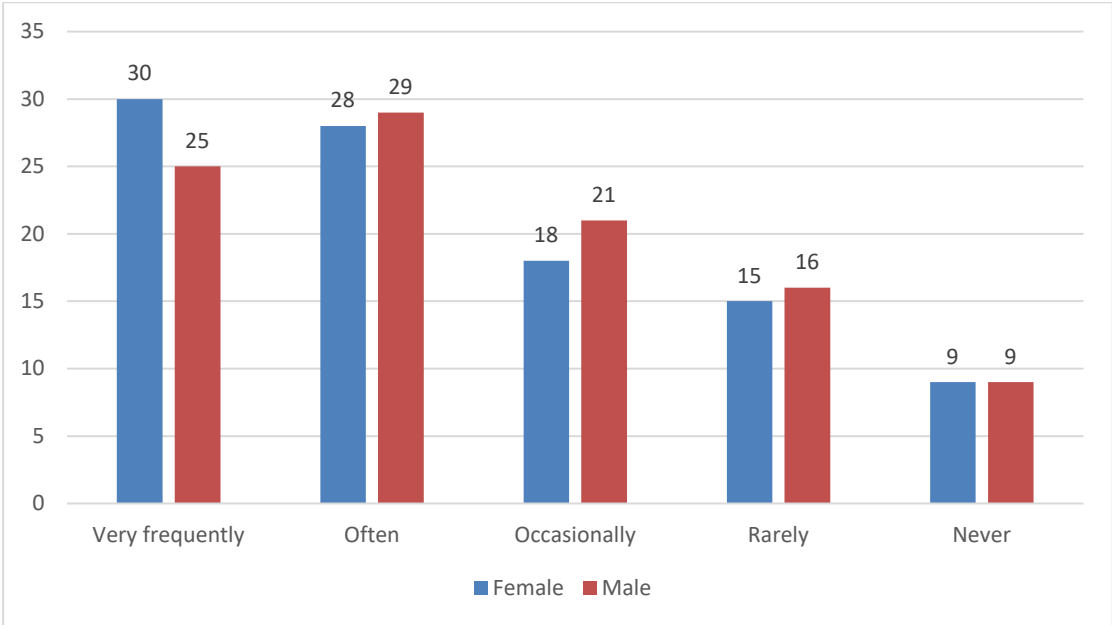
A first systematic survey of sextortion

Several scholars have highlighted the lack of data concerning sextortion. For example, Boehm and Sierra (2015) state that prior survey projects have been too blunt to capture such behaviors: “survey questions only ask about monetary bribes. As a result, the data is blind with respect to the prevalence of other practices of which women are more likely to be the victims, such as sexual extortion.” In a similar vein, Bigio and Hoffmann (2016) highlight that: “Regional and global instruments also don’t capture sextortion... and so do not track how men and women are affected differently by corruption.”^{xiii} So far, this dearth of comparative data is still indicative of the knowledge gap that exists around these issues.

To the best of our knowledge, Transparency International (TI) have initiated the first large-scale survey on the topic. In 2019, the Global Corruption Barometer for Latin America and the Caribbean, a sub-section of TI, interviewed about 17.700 citizens across 18 countries in a nation-wide random sampling with regional stratification.^{xiv} Two questions on sextortion were included. The first item read: “Sextortion is a form of corruption which occurs when a public official says that they will give a government benefit (such as quicker

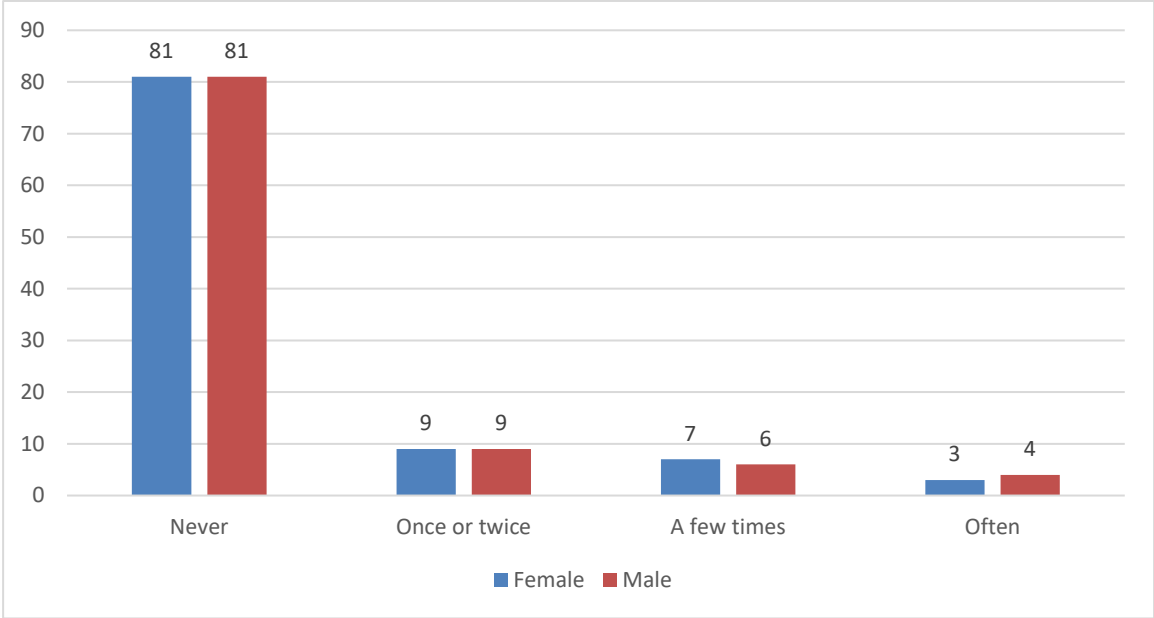
service, approval of documents, a job or promotion, or avoiding a fine or imprisonment) in exchange for sexual favours. How often, if at all, do you think that sextortion occurs in this country? Do you think it happens...?” Response alternatives were: ‘Very frequently’, ‘Often’, ‘Occasionally’, ‘Rarely’ and ‘Never.’ The second item read: “And thinking about your own experience or experiences had by people you know, how often, if at all, has a public official implied either openly or suggestively to either yourself or someone you know, that they will grant a government benefit in exchange for a sexual favour?” Response alternatives were: ‘Never’, ‘Once or twice’, ‘A few times’, ‘Often’, and ‘Or have you had no contact with any public officials ever.’ Figure 1 reports answers on the first question and Figure 2 answers to the second, disaggregated by female and male respondents (those never having been in contact with officials coded as missing).

FIGURE 1, PERCEIVED SEXTORTION OCCURRENCE, SHARE OF RESPONSES (%)



Comment: Builds on the item ‘How often, if at all, do you think that sextortion occurs in this country?’ Global Corruption Barometer (2019), 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

FIGURE 2, SEXTORTION EXPERIENCED PERSONALLY OR AMONG ACQUAINTANCES, SHARE OF RESPONSES (%)



Comment: Builds on the item 'How often, if at all, has a public official implied either openly or suggestively to either yourself or someone you know, that they will grant a government benefit in exchange for a sexual favor?' Those never having been in contact with officials coded as missing. Global Corruption Barometer (2019), 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

These descriptive results show three things: First, that a majority of women as well as men believe that sextortion is a common phenomenon in their own country. Among women, 58% responded ‘very frequently’ or ‘often’ to the question how often they think sextortion occurs in their country, whereas the corresponding figure for men is 54% (Figure 1, categories ‘very frequently’ and ‘often’ merged). Secondly, the results show that women perceive this as more common than men – which can be seen in that a higher share of women, 30% as compared to 25% among men, answered ‘very frequently’ on the question of prevalence in their own country (Figure 1). Finally, the results in Figure 2 show that most respondents have no personal experience of sextortion (category ‘never’ in Figure 2). However, 20% of both women and men state that they themselves or someone they know has experienced that a public official implied either openly or suggestively, that they will grant a government benefit in exchange for a sexual favor (categories ‘once or twice’, ‘a few times’ and ‘often’ merged, Figure 2). Transparency International (2020) notes that this figure of 20% is equivalent to the percentages that in the same survey report that they had to pay a (monetary) bribe when they used a public service.

A disaggregation by country indicates that respondents in Trinidad sees sextortion as most prevalent (40% answering ‘very frequent’) whereas the opposite is true for Panama (15% answering ‘very frequent’). When

it comes to sextortion experienced personally or among acquaintances, the span is from 32%, for Barbados (where 68% report 'never'), to 14% in Chile and Panama (where 86% report 'never') (see Table 1 below).

It should be noted that, in general, women perceive more sextortion than men do (Figure 1) whereas there is no observable gender difference when it comes to the question of experience (Figure 2). At this stage, it is only possible to speculate on why there is gender differences in the first survey item, but not the other. For example, women may be more sensitive to cases reported in the news media or on social networks, cases that do not directly affect them or someone they know but still affect their perception of frequency in general. From the two questions reported here, it is not possible to tell whether women or men is most affected. It may be that men, in their answer to the question of experiences (Figure 2), largely think of women they know. This is something that future research could examine further. As the frequencies of the two sextortion-items suggest, their responses have a quite different dispersion: the one on experiences being heavily tilted towards its first category. In fact, the two items correlate on a notably low level, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.19.

TABLE 1, PERCEIVED OCCURRENCE AND EXPERIENCES OF SEXTORTION ACROSS COUNTRIES

	How often, if at all, do you think that sextortion occurs in this country?	How often, if at all, has a public official implied either openly or suggestively to either yourself or someone you know, that they will grant a government benefit in exchange for a sexual favor?
	% very frequently	% never
Trinidad	40	82
Dominican Rep.	38	84
Colombia	37	83
Peru	36	80
Bahamas	33	76
Honduras	29	84
Jamaica	28	81
Guatemala	28	77
Costa Rica	28	82
El Salvador	28	86
Brazil	25	80
Argentina	24	80
Venezuela	24	80
Mexico	24	79
Guyana	20	77
Barbados	19	68
Chile	18	86
Panama	15	86

Comment: See Figure 1 and 2 for information on question wording.

Correlation between sextortion and other forms of corruption

When analyzing the correlation between the sextortion measures and twelve other perception-based indicators on corruption in the survey, we see that none of these items seem to be highly associated.^{xv} In detail, and as reported in Table 2, few of the twelve corruption variables correlate with the two items on sextortion on more than a Pearson correlation coefficient of about 0.1. Whereas some of these corruption items – such as those measuring attitudes about corruption among ‘government officials’ and ‘local government officials’ – have a rather high correlation between each other, it seems that the responses on sexual forms of corruption empirically follow a different pattern. Potentially, this can be interpreted as meaning that sextortion and other forms of corruption are separate phenomena – the existence of one form does not necessarily go hand in hand with the existence of the other form.

TABLE 2, SEXTORTION AND OTHER CORRUPTION ITEMS, PEARSON CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS

	Perceived sex-tortion occurrence	Sextortion experienced personally or among acquaintances
Corruption among the Prime minister/ President and Officials in his Office	-0.11	0.10
Corruption among senators and Members of the House of Representatives	-0.13	0.07
Corruption among government officials	-0.11	0.09
Corruption among local government councilors	-0.12	0.09
Corruption among police	-0.09	0.08
Corruption among judges and magistrates	-0.11	0.06
Corruption among religious leaders	-0.11	0.09
Corruption among business executives	-0.11	0.07
Corruption among non-governmental organisations	-0.09	0.06
Corruption among journalists	-0.09	0.10
Corruption among bankers	-0.11	0.08
Corruption among members of the national legislative assembly	-0.00	-0.05

Comment: The corruption measures builds on 12 questions, each starting with the query: 'How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: □' The questions refer a range of various actors: 'The Prime minister/ President and Officials in his Office', 'Senators and Members of the House of Representatives', 'Government officials', 'Local government councilors', 'Police', 'Judges and Magistrates', 'Religious leaders', 'Business executives', 'Non-governmental organisations', 'Journalists', 'Bankers' and 'Members of the national legislative assembly'. Response categories were 'None', 'Some of them', 'Most of them' and 'All of them'. The category 'Don't know/ Haven't heard' is coded as missing. Global Corruption Barometer (2019), 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Expanding research further

There are a multitude of testimonies of sextortion. Victim blaming and the special stigma associated with sexual 'services' makes it likely that the problem of underreporting in survey research is even more severe in this area than when it comes to monetary forms of corruption. In addition, it is reasonable to assume that sextortion seldom is registered in legal files since the phenomenon may even go unnoticed by existing laws and prosecutions.

Transparency International (TI 2020) highlight that survey researchers must be trained to address this problem: “One of the reasons why data on sextortion is absent from corruption datasets is that the right questions are not asked... individuals asked if they have paid a bribe may say “No” if they understand bribes as monetary transactions, but their response may be different if asked explicitly about sexual bribes” (p. 35). However, the solution, what “right” questions to ask, is far from straightforward, since a question like “Have you experienced sextortion?” may a) be hard to understand by respondents and b) be emotionally overwhelming to admit for anyone who have such experiences.

In sum, there is no doubt that sextortion is a serious problem affecting individuals, most of whom are women, but also the communities in which they live. In order for research and policy instruments to develop there is a need to, more exactly, get an understanding of how prevalent the phenomenon is and whom, which groups, are affected the most. A first step in an expanded research agenda would ideally be to use a mixed-methods approach to develop better measurement tools. Experimental research has proven to be a fruitful way forward in research on sensitive topics (see e.g., Agerberg 2021) but we also envision focus group interviews with self-selected respondents to acquire nuanced understandings. Since survey research is highly used by international organizations such as Transparency International but also the United Nations, World Health Organization and other actors combatting corruption and gender inequalities, we perceive the ultimate goal to be the development of questions to be included in future large-scale survey studies.

When survey questions have been developed and validated, the next step would be to understand the magnitude of sextortion in different country contexts but also in different sectors such as health, education and law enforcement. This task can be particularly sensitive since sextortion might involve minors – young boys and girls – to a higher degree than other forms of corruption. But the question of sensitivity is also linked to non-binary ways of expressing gender. Transgender individuals and sexual minorities might be victimized to a high degree but also, due to prejudices and harassment, less likely to report instances of sextortion.^{xvi}

Finally, there is, as in other studies on corruption, a need to develop our understanding of the mechanisms behind sextortion. We perceive the distinction between need versus greed corruption as useful in this endeavor. An interlinked question concerns whether sextortion occurs since certain groups in society – women, minors, or non-binary people – more than others lack money, or whether there are other mechanisms at work linked to, for example, patriarchal structures where sex abuse is used to uphold male dominance.

From a policy perspective, theoretically and empirically rigorous research would be a help in trying to understand both the cost of the problem – for individuals, for communities – but also how to design good

interventions and instruments. Current legal instruments seem to miss the target and a front-figure in the fight against sextortion, Nancy Hendry, note a paradox when sexual abuse and corruption are intertwined: “What we find is that the combination of sexual abuse and corruption paradoxically appears to make sextortion less likely to be prosecuted under laws governing either sexual abuse or corruption than an offense that pertains to only one type of abuse.”^{xvii} Others, such as the International Bar Association (2019) warn against a strategy where sextortion is ‘shoe-horned’ into current anti-corruption policies.

In conclusion, survey research is a forceful instrument both in academic work and policy development. There is certainly a need to identify a number of particularly relevant contexts and use a mixed-method approach to develop new and better survey questions. We envision two types of contexts as interesting: one where issues of sexuality, in general, is sensitive and one where it is not. Thus we would like to depart from a common ground – cases where there is evidence of sextortion – but then deal with one “hard” (sexuality being sensitive and hard to talk about) and one “easy” (sexuality being less sensitive and relatively easy to talk about) case which would be helpful in the development of new instruments. In practice, one way forward would be to make the selection of cases based on the aforementioned TI survey in Latin America, another way would be to build on the large number, but somewhat anecdotal, cases of sextortion reported in African countries. In the end, both theoretical and pragmatic arguments (of accessibility and context knowledge) will have to play a role for the selection of cases.

References

Agerberg, M. (2020) Corrupted Estimates? Response Bias in Citizen Surveys on Corruption. *Political Behavior*, published online ahead of print July 6, 2020.

BBC (2018) “Sextortion: Big rise in victims with 'tens of thousands at risk'”. Available online, at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-43433015>

Bigio, J. and L. Hoffmann (2016) “Fighting Corruption by Combating Sexual Extortion” Blog post, online at: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/fighting-corruption-combating-sexual-extortion>

Boehm, F. and E. Sierra (2015) The gendered impact of corruption: Who suffers more – men or women? Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute (U4 Brief 2015:9) 4 p

Dombrnk, J. (1988) The Touchables: Vice and Police Corruption in the 1980's. *Law and Contemporary Problems* *Law and Contemporary Problems*. 51, No. 1, 201-232.

Eldén, A., D. Calvo, E. Bjarnegård, S. Lundgren and S. Jonsson (2020), Sextortion: Corruption and Gender-Based Violence, EBA Report 2020:06, the Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), Sweden.

Epstein, N (1981) When Professors Swap Good Grades for Sex. The Washington Post September 6, 1981. Available online <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1981/09/06/when-professors-swap-good-grades-for-sex/dae0ace9-58e0-4dc8-bdf2-a271c1245d9a/>

EuropeNow (2020) Noticing and Combating Sextortion: An Interview with Nancy Hendry <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2020/03/09/noticing-and-combating-sex-tortion-an-interview-with-nancy-hendry/>

Foellmi R, Oechslin M (2007) Who gains from non-collusive corruption? *Journal of Development Economics* 82 (1), 95–119.

Gitlin, S. (2015). “Beyond Sextortion: How Corruption Uniquely Affects Women.” The Global Anticorruption Blog. January 2. <http://goo.gl/pP5BNT>

Global Corruption Barometer (2019) Global Corruption Barometer - Latin America and the Caribbean: Citizens' views and experiences of corruption. Transparency International. <https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/global-corruption-barometer-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-2019>

Hlongwane, P. (2017). Sextortion in South African public sector institutions. *Administratio Publica*, 25(2), 7–25.

<https://utamu.ac.ug/docs/research/publications/journals/Administratio%20Publica%2025%20No%202.pdf#page=11>

Human Rights Watch. (2015). "India: Enforce Ruling Protecting Transgender People Court Directive Recognizes 'Third Gender' But Stigma Continues." <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/02/05/india-enforce-ruling-protecting-transgender-people>

International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) (2015) Combating Sextortion: A Comparative Study of Laws to Prosecute Corruption Involving Sexual Exploitation <https://www.trust.org/contentAsset/raw-data/588013e6-2f99-4d54-8dd8-9a65ae2e0802/file>

International Association of Women Judges (2012) *Stopping the abuse of power through sexual exploitation: Naming, Shaming and Ending Sextortion*, IAWJ.org

International Bar Association (2019) Sextortion A crime of corruption and sexual exploitation <https://www.ibanet.org/Document/Default.aspx?DocumentUid=E5E451C2-A883-4518-B0ED-5AAAEBBCDD5AA>

Jeffreys E (2006) Governing buyers of sex in the People's Republic of China. *Economy and Society*, 35:4, 571-593,

Lindberg, H., Stensöta, H. (2018) *Corruption and Exploitation: Feminist exchange theories and the link between gender and corruption* (pp. 237-256) in Stensöta, Helena, Wängnerud, Lena (Eds.) *Gender and Corruption: Historical Roots and New Avenues for Research*. Palgrave.

Makhubu, N. 2014. Sex-for-jobs officials return to work. PretoriaNews. 17 October 2017. Available at: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/sex-for-jobs-officials-return-to-work-1766606>

Mumporeze, N., E. Han-Jin & D. Nduhura (2021) Let's spend a night together; I will increase your salary: an analysis of sextortion phenomenon in Rwandan society, *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, 27, 120-137.

Patchin, J. W., and Hinduja, S. (2020). Sextortion Among Adolescents: Results From a National Survey of U.S. Youth. *Sexual Abuse*, 32(1), 30-54.

Reuters (2021) "WHO employees took part in Congo sex abuse during Ebola crisis, report says" September 29, 2021. Available at:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/who-heartbroken-by-congo-sex-abuse-probe-findings-2021-09-28/>

Rodrigues-Neto, José A. (2014) On corruption, bribes and the exchange of favors. *Economic Modelling* 38, 152-162

Towns, A. (2015). "Prestige, Immunity and Diplomats: Understanding Sexual Corruption." In (Eds.). Dahlström, C. and L. Wängnerud. *Elites, Institutions and the Quality of Government*. Palgrave Macmillan. Pp 49-65.

Transparency International (2020) "Breaking the silence around sextortion" Transparency International <https://www.transparency.org/en/press/new-report-finds-sexual-extortion-ignored-under-reported-and-unpunished-wor#>

Wittes, B. C. Poplin, Q. Jurecic & C. Spera (2016) Sextortion: Cybersecurity, Teenagers, and 11 Remote Sexual Assault, Brookings (May 11) Available online, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports2/2016/05/sextortion-wittes-poplin-jurecic-spera>

Wolak, J., & Finkelhor, D (2016) Sextortion: Findings from a survey of 1,631 victims. Crimes against children research centre.

Yusuph, K. (2016). Sextortion in education sector and response to criminal legal system in Tanzania - A review. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Sciences*, 3(1), 56–63.

ⁱ See TI (2020).

ⁱⁱ See Hlongwame (2017).

ⁱⁱⁱ Quoted in Gitlin (2015).

^{iv} See Reuters (2021).

^v This literature depicts those various forms of sextortion also as a form of sexual violence, albeit sometimes a distant one, where predators prey on teens in front of their phones and computers (Wittes et al. 2016).

^{vi} Jeffreys (2007) discuss legal aspects of how Chinese officials are able to evade sanctions on sex-related bribery.

^{vii} See also Rodrigues-Neto (2014), who presents an economist view on how to understand when bribery takes the shape of money and when these exchanges take the shape of sex.

^{viii} <https://blogs.worldbank.org/allaboutfinance/where-you-work-how-does-gender-matter>

^{ix} <https://web.archive.org/web/20120806233343/http://www.punchng.com/feature/the-law-you/how-to-curb-sex-tortion-violence-against-women-amaechi/>

^x <https://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/07/23/immigration-officer-sentenced-in-sex-coercion-case/>

^{xi} <https://nationalpost.com/posted-toronto/steve-ellis-jailed-18-months-for-seeking-sexual-favours/>

^{xii} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silvio_Berlusconi_prostitution_trial.

^{xiii} <https://www.cfr.org/blog/fighting-corruption-combating-sexual-extortion>

^{xiv} As described in the report, this survey was carried out using face-to-face interviews in 17 countries and by telephone in one country. The interviews were conducted in the local language and administered through Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing, besides the case of Venezuela, where the survey was coinducted using pen and paper interviewing. The sample was stratified by level of urbanization and by subnational units; Secondary Sampling Units were selected at random and households were selected using a random walk. In the final step of sampling, respondents were chosen using quotas based on gender and age (In the Bahamas, the survey was administered through telephone (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing). Random digital dialing was used to contact households, with respondents selected at random. The results are then weighted to be nationally representative according to available population data. As noted in this report, “The results have a margin of error of +/- 2.8 percentage points at a 95 per cent confidence level. Unless otherwise stated, for reported multi-country averages, an additional weighting factor is applied so that the sample sizes for each country are equal. The overall results for Latin America and the Caribbean are equivalent to an average of the 18 countries surveyed.”

^{xv} In detail, the survey has a battery of 12 questions, each starting with the query: ‘How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: []’ The questions refer a range of various actors: ‘The Prime minister/ President and Officials in his Office’, ‘Senators and Members of the House of Representatives’, ‘Government officials’, ‘Local government councilors’, ‘Police’, ‘Judges and Magistrates’, ‘Religious

leaders', 'Business executives', 'Non-governmental organisations', 'Journalists', 'Bankers' and 'Members of the national legislative assembly'. Response categories were 'None', 'Some of them', 'Most of them' and 'All of them'. The category 'Don't know/ Haven't heard' is coded as missing.

^{xvi} To illustrate, this issue is urgent in countries such as India, where people from a distinct transgender community, the *hijras*, are known to be routinely abused and extorted by police (Human Rights Watch 2015).

^{xvii} <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2020/03/09/noticing-and-combating-sextortion-an-interview-with-nancy-hendry/>