

Case Study 1:

A Case of Online Sextortion

Kanthi, based in Anuradhapura, was targeted by her ex-partner after she discovered his infidelity and attempted to confront the other woman. Because her ex-partner was affiliated with the police, he was able to use his influence to twice prevent Kanthi from filing complaints about the threats and violence committed against her by his new partner. He then continued to harass and target her through various means: he distributed her phone number to other men, who would then call her and demand sexual favours; when she changed her SIM, he used his police contacts to track down her new number. He then attempted to blackmail her by threatening to edit another man's face into the intimate photos they had taken together and distribute them publicly unless she paid him 500,000 rupees.

Kanthi's attempts to report these incidents to the police were ultimately fruitless. A male police officer was assigned to take her statement, and this officer questioned her loudly and publicly about her relationship with her ex-partner, repeatedly asking her to share intimate details. Subsequently her ex-partner was called into the police station for an attempted mediation, where the police blatantly took his side, ridiculed and dismissed her, and refused to take the case further. This caused Kanthi significant mental distress and embarrassment and caused her to lose faith in the police entirely, deciding she would not go to them again.

What Kanthi experienced can be categorised as **online sextortion**. Since this incident, Kanthi has been ostracised by her family – her brother disowned her, while her parents verbally and physically abused her and she was shunned outright by her extended family. She is terrified of such an incident happening again, and especially of the impact on her daughter. She believes that the police need to be trained to not only understand TFSGBV and its impacts, but also how to sensitively and compassionately deal with victim-survivors.

Online sextortion is a form of technology-facilitated blackmail in which intimate images or private sexual information are used or threatened to obtain money, sexual acts, further intimate material or another benefit. It relies on the victim-survivor's fear of public exposure, and reputational harm to force compliance.

Case Study 2:

A Case of Non-Consensual Intimate Image Sharing

Malathi, based in Anuradhapura, began receiving text messages on WhatsApp from her ex-partner about three years ago, threatening to send photographs he had of her to her now-husband, as revenge for her having ended their relationship. He then continued to text and threaten her repeatedly; at some point, Malathi's husband saw these messages and beat her.

Malathi's husband is an addict who uses his wages from day labourer work to purchase alcohol and drugs, and had beaten her previously. But when she tried to complain against him at the police station, she had been turned away and chastised by his friends in the police force, who told her not to bring household arguments to the police. They then told her husband of her attempted complaint, leading to further beatings. Because of this, Malathi had no faith in the police's ability to help her. Instead, Malathi went to the Grama Niladhari with her complaint, hoping that he would intervene on her behalf.

Here, also, Malathi had a disappointing experience. The Grama Niladhari did not seem to take her complaint seriously, as he was of the belief that these were problems she had created for herself, and did not record it anywhere. She felt that he viewed her as being of bad character and loose morals. Malathi believes this perception is because her family is viewed as disreputable and poverty-stricken in the village. He did, however, tell her to go to the police, as this was a matter for them.

Malathi was a victim of **(threatened) non-consensual intimate image sharing**. Malathi did not try to complain to the police again, however, out of fear that they would inform her husband of the issue. Instead, she consulted with several friends and acquaintances and changed her SIM, which stopped the texts. Her husband also subsequently calmed down, but he still occasionally brings up the matter to abuse and harass her. Malathi believes that if any of the officials that she approached had been more compassionate and sensitive to her experience, her issue could have been resolved in a simpler manner.

Non-consensual intimate image sharing refers to the distribution, or threatened distribution, of a person's intimate photographs or videos without their consent. It is frequently used as a tool of control, retaliation, or intimidation, and can cause severe psychological and social harm to the victim-survivor.

Case Study 3:

A Case of Cyberflashing

Renuka, based in Anuradhapura, received a Messenger voice call request from a Facebook friend, someone that she had added because he had said they were from the same town. She did not answer the first request – however, the second time he called, she answered. As soon as she answered, the man turned his video on, and she saw that he was exposing himself to her. She was shocked but quickly closed the call.

The same person kept calling her repeatedly, over time, and this became a huge mental stressor to her. Renuka was estranged from her husband and reluctant to confide in him, fearing that he would misunderstand. She decided to seek advice from a woman police officer she was acquainted with.

However, this was not helpful for her. The woman police officer provided her with no information or support beyond telling her to go to the police station and make a complaint. When Renuka explained that she was reluctant to do this because she was worried about the consequences, the woman police officer told her that there was nothing more she could do to help her. She had hoped for a more proactive intervention, or at least additional advice on next steps, but this did not happen.

Renuka was also concerned about the possibility of having to speak to a male police officer about her problem, as she felt ashamed and embarrassed to discuss the case with a man. She feared that her character would be misrepresented and maligned, especially as she was a woman living alone and separate from her husband. Renuka believes the woman police officer did not see this as a serious matter, as she offered no further support and did not seem to understand or be sensitive to the distress and discomfort Renuka was experiencing. Instead, she eventually confided in her best friend, blocked the person, and deleted her Facebook account.

What Renuka experienced is categorised as **cyberflashing**. Renuka believes that police officers should receive more training on how to handle sensitive matters such as hers with confidentiality and compassion.

Cyberflashing is the act of sending or displaying unsolicited sexual images, or exposing oneself to another person through digital means such as video calls, messaging apps, or social media, without their consent. It is a form of technology-facilitated sexual and gender-based violence that can leave victim-survivors feeling violated, unsafe, and distressed, even though no physical contact occurs.

Case Study 4:

A Case of Sextortion and Non-Consensual Intimate Image Sharing

Rinaza's ex-husband began harassing her repeatedly via phone calls when she announced her plans to remarry after she was granted a divorce by the Quazi court. Despite having had no contact with her or their children for a long time, he demanded that she reconcile with him, threatening to post intimate pictures from their marriage on social media if she did not comply. At one point he did post one such photo on Facebook but removed it himself shortly thereafter.

Although her divorce had been granted legitimately, Rinaza, who is based in Batticaloa, found that society still viewed her as "damaged goods". She found herself unable to trust anyone after she was subjected to sexual harassment and attempted coercion by multiple men in her family and community, approaching her for sexual favours in exchange for support or monetary compensation. She began to wear a niqab (face covering) in an attempt to hide from public scrutiny and sought assistance from a women's rights group.

Rinaza did not approach the police or report her ex-husband's behaviour elsewhere, as on previous occasions where her ex-husband committed violence against her, the police had failed to act. She believes this was because her ex-husband's relatives had a great deal of social and financial influence and were able to pressure the people that she approached into denying her support. All of these issues led to her physical and mental health deteriorating as she feared for herself and her children constantly.

Rinaza was a victim of **non-consensual intimate image sharing and sextortion**. Although Rinaza did receive some degree of support from various sources, and was eventually able to get her children and herself into a safe situation, she believes that she was entitled to more support from State officials, such as the Grama Niladhari, The Divisional Secretary, and Women's Development Officers.

Online sextortion is a form of technology-facilitated blackmail in which intimate images or private sexual information are used or threatened to obtain money, sexual acts, further intimate material or another benefit, while non-consensual intimate image sharing refers to the distribution, or threatened distribution, of a person's intimate photographs or videos without their consent. Perpetrators often use both tactics together to intimidate victims and pressure them into complying with demands such as reconciliation or renewed contact.

Case Study 5:

A Case of Sextortion, Non-Consensual Intimate Image Sharing, Technology-facilitated Threats of Physical Violence, and Sexualised Reputational Abuse

In 2021, Jameela divorced her abusive husband overseas and returned to Sri Lanka with their two children to escape the physical and psychological violence he inflicted on her. However, as he was still allowed to stay in contact with their children after the divorce, her ex-husband began to use these calls to disparage and insult her to their children. He then escalated to sending her malicious voice messages, threatening to upload intimate photographs from their marriage online, and threatening her with violent retribution if she did not agree to reconcile with him. He escalated further when Jameela's parents began trying to arrange a second marriage for her, slandering her to prospective grooms and their families and threatening to kill her if she married anyone else.

Jameela, who is based in Batticaloa, reached out to a women's rights group on this matter and was advised to file a complaint with the police. However, she was initially turned away on the grounds that her ex-husband was not currently in Sri Lanka; her complaint was only taken down when she returned after he escalated to making death threats and interfering with her livelihood. When she informed the police that he had returned, they were both summoned to the police station, where her ex-husband was given a warning and released.

Jameela's experiences fall under the categories of **sex extortion, non-consensual intimate image sharing, technology-facilitated threats of physical violence, and sexualised reputational abuse**. Jameela believes that she was discriminated against because she is a Muslim woman, recounting how she was told to go to the Quazi court when she made her initial complaint, and having been redirected to multiple different desks at the police station. She also encountered language barriers as a Tamil speaker when she approached the Criminal Investigation Unit, where none of the staff knew Tamil; an interpreter was eventually brought in for her, but by then she had grown tired of recounting her story over and over to different people. She is no longer interested in obtaining support from the police after her experience, and believes that this kind of problem is best handled in a private, confidential manner, ideally online.

This case involves several overlapping forms of abuse: online sextortion is a form of technology-facilitated blackmail in which intimate images or private sexual information are used or threatened to obtain money, sexual acts, further intimate material or other benefits. Further, in some cases, such as this one, *technology-facilitated threats are used where digital platforms are used to threaten physical harm*. Together, these tactics are used to control, intimidate, and isolate the victim-survivor through fear of both physical harm and social ostracisation.

Case Study 6:

A Case of Sextortion and Non-Consensual Intimate Image Sharing

Amina, based in Batticaloa, sought a divorce from her drug-addicted ex-husband due to constant conflict, and his attempts to make her into an addict while she was pregnant. While the divorce proceedings were ongoing, he began to harass her via WhatsApp, calling and threatening her repeatedly. He shared a nude photograph of her with his friends and sent the same photograph to her relatives while threatening to post the image and others like it on social media. Unable to tolerate the environment this created, Amina fled to a different town with her parents where she gave birth to twins.

Although Amina's ex-husband provides no alimony and no support or care for the twins, who were born with health issues, he has since begun harassing Amina with demands to see the children. In response, she filed complaints with the police and with the Quazi court; however, both these institutions did not treat her issues with any sensitivity. The police treated her disparagingly, laying the blame on her for marrying young and dealing with her complaints in a mocking manner. The Quazi court, meanwhile, ordered her to resolve the issue by resuming living with her ex-husband – as he had not granted her a divorce – and told her to withdraw her police complaint.

Amina also faced significant social stigma and ostracization because of her experiences, with inappropriate comments and sexually suggestive advances being made by community members as well as police officers. She has also incurred significant financial losses as well in attempting to pursue justice for herself and has become deeply disillusioned with both the police and the Quazi court as a consequence.

Amina was a victim of **sexortion and non-consensual intimate image sharing**. Amina believes that she was discriminated against as a young Muslim woman, and also as a Tamil speaker, as in most cases she was not able to obtain support or services in Tamil. She identified these discriminatory practices, as well as the absence of female staff and a general lack of competence in dealing with TFSGBV cases, as major issues with the police and Quazi court response to her situation.

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Case Study 7:

A Case of Non-Consensual Intimate Image Sharing and Doxxing

Shanika, based in Galle, ended her relationship with her ex-boyfriend in 2020. When Shanika's ex-boyfriend found out that she had begun seeing someone new in 2024, he began to harass her new boyfriend with constant explicit messages, discussing Shanika's body and describing her private parts in detail in an attempt to create a rift between them. However, as she had been honest with her new boyfriend about her past relationship, this did not have the intended effect, and the messages eventually stopped.

But then, Shanika learned that a photograph of her had been shared on a page that shared obscene and explicit content, with an obscene caption attached – shortly thereafter she began to receive multiple, incessant calls from unknown numbers. She ignored them but eventually had her mother answer the phone on her behalf. The person that her mother spoke to informed her that Shanika's photo had been shared along with her phone number on another page. Although Shanika was able to get the photo taken down with the help of a relative who had some cybersecurity training, the same photo then reappeared not long after in a different page and was shared repeatedly in different pages.

At this point Shanika sought the support of an NGO focused on women's rights. The NGO staff listened to her story and provided her with support in planning and deciding her next steps. They provided her with support and accompaniment throughout the process of filing a complaint about the issue. In the intervening time, Shanika was able to discover the details of the obscene page's admin, using the phone number attached to the page, and found out that he was in the army, like her ex-boyfriend. On being summoned to the police the page admin confessed that he had done this at the request of someone else, and then identified her ex-boyfriend as the person who had made the request. Based on this confession, the police summoned her ex-boyfriend and issued a warning. Shanika has not had any further trouble since.

What Shanika experienced was **non-consensual intimate image sharing and doxxing**. Shanika feels that her experience was smooth and uncomplicated due to the support from the NGO staff, noting that the police were not as helpful or supportive, and did not even have a space where she could share her story confidentially. She believes that the police must be trained to be sensitive to the same degree as NGO staff.

Doxxing refers to publicly revealing or circulating a person's private information, such as their phone number, address, workplace or family information or other identifying details, without their consent and typically with malicious intent. When combined with non-consensual intimate image sharing, as in this case, it exposes victims to further harassment from strangers who gain access to both their images and personal contact information.

Case Study 8:

A Case of Non-Consensual Intimate Image Sharing and Online Sextortion

Poornashri's husband shared her intimate images with her family and friends to retaliate against her for confronting him about his infidelity with multiple women. He then threatened to post the pictures on Tiktok and Facebook as well.

Poornashri, who is based in Kilinochchi, felt a great deal of shame and embarrassment about the situation after her photos had been shared to her family and friends. This badly affected her mental health, leading her to develop suicidal ideation as well as attempt suicide. Her financial situation was also badly affected, as she was unable to find a job for a while, and this led to her family being driven to the poverty line for a brief time. However, her desire to care for her special-needs child and to obtain justice for herself drove her to choose life. Therefore she made a complaint to the Grama Niladhari, who then advised her to go to the police.

However, her experience in dealing with the police was very difficult. She noted that not all the officers were the same, and that some were respectful and supportive and maintained her confidentiality. However, she noticed that some officers looked at her differently after they saw her photos, and this made her feel more ashamed and embarrassed. This feeling was compounded by having to repeat her story multiple times to different officers in order to obtain the services she was entitled to. She was eventually able to have the photos taken down with the support of the police, but this required her to travel to a different district at serious financial cost to herself. Furthermore, some officers advised her not to file a complaint once the photos were taken down.

Poornashri was a victim of **non-consensual intimate image sharing and online sextortion**. Poornashri feels that she cannot fully trust that the police officers understood her situation, as the majority of officers she dealt with were Sinhala-speaking, and required an interpreter, and she was not sure that the interpreter was relating her story in her exact words or not, nor that the advice relayed to her was translated accurately. In hindsight she would have preferred to take a trusted person bilingual in Sinhala and Tamil with her. Poornashri believes that more Tamil-speaking police officers need to be assigned to her district.

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Case Study 9:

A Case of Non-Consensual Intimate Image Sharing

Kalyani's ex-partner, in retaliation for being rejected by her family, edited and published online all the photographs of her that he had from their relationship. He also sent these pictures to her husband. This had severely detrimental effects on Kalyani's mental and physical health – she developed suicidal ideations and attempted suicide at this time.

Although her husband did not leave her during this time, after she became pregnant, he became physically abusive towards her. Subsequently, a few months after the child was born, her husband left her, claiming that he could not believe the child was his. This caused her a significant degree of financial difficulty.

Kalyani, who is based in Kilinochchi, chose to file a complaint with the police to seek justice. However, when attempting to file her complaint, she faced a serious barrier in accessibility, as she had to travel a long distance from her home to be able to do so and had to wait a very long time. At the police station she also encountered a language barrier, as the only woman officer available was Sinhala-speaking and could not understand her. This led to the woman officer asking a male officer to translate for her, which made Kalyani uncomfortable as she was not willing to share her intimate details with a male officer.

Additionally, she felt left out of the conversations that were occurring between the police officers, as they were speaking to each other in Sinhala, and she was unsure if the translation that was being provided was accurate. Some officers also used offensive and derogatory terms when speaking to her. However, Kalyani felt the officers were well-trained, as they had a clear understanding of her issue and were able to guide her towards the right steps for taking the photos down. The photos were also taken down within a week, although she had to travel again to a different district for that process.

Kalyani's experience can be categorised as **non-consensual intimate image sharing**. Kalyani believes that while the process was arduous for her, recruiting or assigning more Tamil-speaking officers to her district would ease the process significantly.

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