The Governance Studies Program at Brookings

Sextortion
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Benjamin Wittes
Sextortion is Common

- 78 Prosecuted Cases
- 63 Federal Prosecutions
- 12 State Prosecutions
- 3 Foreign Prosecutions
Sextortion Victims

- 1,397 victims identified (not by name) or specifically counted by investigators.
- 3,000-6,500 Actual Victims, according to our best estimates.
- In 13 cases, prosecutors estimated that there were more than 100 victims.
- In two cases, prosecutors estimated that there had been “hundreds, if not thousands” of victims.
Sextortion, Age, and Gender

- 100 percent of the perpetrators in these cases are male.
- Nearly all of the adult victims are female.
- 85 percent of cases involve at least some minor victims, and 71 percent of cases involve only minor victims.
- 27 percent of cases involve minor male victims.
Sextortion Modalities

- Social Media Manipulation (85 percent of all cases, and 91 percent of cases involving minors).
- Computer Hacking (19 percent of cases all cases, but 43 percent of cases with adult victims).
Crossing State & International Lines

- 49 cases (63 percent) involve significant interstate elements.
- At least 6 cases involved more than 10 jurisdictions.
- 7 additional cases involved more than 5 jurisdictions.
- 16 cases crossed international borders.
Sextortion As Child Pornography

- Sexual Exploitation of Children (18 USC § 2251): 55 percent of cases
- Child Pornography Statutes:
  - 18 USC § 2252: 36 percent of cases
  - 18 USC § 2252A: 17 percent of cases
- Coercion/Enticement of a Minor (18 USC § 2242(b)): 24 percent of cases.
What if the Victims are Adults?

- Interstate Extortion (18 USC § 875(d)): 37 percent of cases.
- Stalking (18 USC § 2261A): 12 percent of cases.
- Hacking or Identity Theft (18 USC § 1030 and 18 USC § 1028A): 15 percent of cases.
Dramatic Sentencing Disparities

- Average sentence in federal cases (29 years) vs. average sentence in state cases (7 years).
- Average federal sentence in cases involving minor victims (29 years) vs. average sentence in cases with only adult victims (38 months).
- Average federal sentence for “sexual abuse” with adult victims (230 months) vs. average federal sentence for sextortion (38 months).