# Sextortion gangs in Scotland increasingly use AI deepfakes to blackmail victims



Sextortion gangs in Scotland are increasingly exploiting artificial intelligence (AI) technology to create manipulated nude images, known as 'deepfakes,' as part of their online sex scams, according to a warning from Advice Direct Scotland. This prominent charity has highlighted a growing threat as thousands of Scots fall victim to such scams, which typically involve criminals blackmailing individuals with the threat of releasing fake indecent images unless demands, usually for money, are met.

The alert follows recent data revealing that over the past five years, more than 2,000 people across Scotland have been targeted in extortion scams of this nature, with a concerning number of about 1,200 victims being children. The charity’s senior project lead, Hazel Knowles, emphasised the evolving nature of AI exploitation by criminals. Speaking to the Daily Record, she said, "When dealing with any scams, staying calm and composed is crucial. It is very important to seek help and avoid panic even though receiving such emails can feel invasive and alarming. Help is available and you’re not alone. Experts advise not to pay any ransom as criminals often persist with threats even after payment or may target people again, adding them to a list of previous payers. Paying does not guarantee that the images won’t be shared."

The modus operandi of these sextortion scams frequently involves perpetrators befriending victims online—predominantly young men—and coercing them into sending explicit photos or videos. In many cases, scammers then use AI to 'nudify' or alter images sourced from social media profiles or previous shared photos, sometimes gathered by former partners or individuals with false identities who have gained the victim’s trust.

Latest figures from Police Scotland show a marked increase in online threats and extortion crimes, with an estimated 2,080 incidents recorded in the 2023-24 period—a 14% rise compared to the previous year’s 1,830 cases. This represents a six-fold increase from an estimated 290 cases in 2019-20. Police Scotland has clarified that most of these incidents relate specifically to sextortion. However, official prosecution data from the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) records a contrastingly low number of charges, with just 10 reports in 2023/24 involving threats or extortion related to disclosure of intimate images. That same year saw only one conviction, with another case ongoing.

Concerns about the use of AI in these crimes have escalated recently, with warnings that paedophiles, scammers, hackers, and other criminals increasingly use AI tools to manipulate images and target victims in innovative and harmful ways. Alex Murray, the national police lead for AI in the UK, highlighted the urgency of responding to this threat, saying, "It can happen on an international and serious organised crime scale, and it can happen in someone’s bedroom."

Advice Direct Scotland has responded by offering guidance to help reduce the prevalence of these scams. Hazel Knowles stated, "Scams can lead to both emotional and financial turmoil, often leaving individuals feeling extremely vulnerable, totally betrayed and alone. However, it’s crucial to remember that being scammed is nothing to be ashamed of. If you’re feeling concerned or in need of assistance, our specialist advisers are here to offer free, unbiased, and practical support."

Tips provided to help prevent falling victim to sextortion scams include securing social media privacy settings, limiting shared information to trusted contacts, and avoiding sending private details or images to online acquaintances. Additional recommendations are to use strong, unique passwords with two-step verification across accounts and to be cautious about clicking links or providing sensitive information in unsolicited emails or messages.

Support and advice are available free of charge by contacting Advice Direct Scotland via phone at 0808 164 6000 or through web chat and email at www.consumeradvice.scot. Suspected scam incidents can also be reported through the ScamWatch Quick Reporting Tool at www.scamwatch.scot.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.scotland.police.uk/advice-and-information/internet-safety/sextortion> - Police Scotland provides detailed information on sextortion, including how criminals use online platforms to befriend victims and demand money or other actions under threat of releasing intimate images.
2. <https://www.scottishwomensrightscentre.org.uk/news/news/fake-images-real-crime-support-for-dealing-with-deepfakes> - The Scottish Women's Rights Centre discusses how AI technology is used to create manipulated images, known as 'deepfakes,' and the legal implications of such actions.
3. <https://www.scottishai.squarespace.com/news/deepfakes-what-are-they-how-to-spot-them-and-how-to-protect-yourself> - The Scottish AI Alliance explains what deepfakes are, how to identify them, and offers advice on protecting oneself from such manipulated content.
4. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2023-24/pages/14/> - The Scottish Government's report on recorded crime in Scotland provides statistics on cyber-crimes, including a 14% increase in threats and extortion cases in 2023-24 compared to the previous year.
5. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2023-24/pages/2/> - The Scottish Government's report on recorded crime in Scotland highlights that cyber-crimes accounted for an estimated 30% of sexual crimes in 2023-24.
6. <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/fearless/professionals/fearless-scotland/sextortion-in-scotland> - Crimestoppers UK provides information on sextortion in Scotland, including how criminals use AI to create fake images and the importance of reporting such crimes.
7. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/sextortion-gangs-using-ai-porn-35146137> - Please view link - unable to able to access data