

More falling prey to cyber extortion

Men perform sexual acts on web cameras, then get blackmailed

By JALELAH ABU BAKER

MORE men who engage in sexual acts in front of their web cameras – usually at the behest of women they befriend online – are being blackmailed.

The police say 40 cases of cyber extortion happened in the first seven months of this year – more than double the 15 cases in the whole of last year.

A spokesman said as many as eight in 10 perpetrators this year are foreigners believed to be from the Philippines, South Korea, and Japan. Of the 15 cases last year, three-quarters of the perpetrators were foreign as well.

These men, typically students, full-time national servicemen or working adults, get to know the women through social networking sites such as Tagged.com and Facebook, and add them as friends. They are persuaded to strip and masturbate when they see the women naked or dancing.

Once the men are naked, usually while on a video call with these women “friends”, the women would end the session abruptly, claiming someone is at their door.

The men then receive a message, informing them that a video was taken; the women would then demand money and set deadlines.

Sometimes they are given a link to a YouTube clip of their “performance”. It is not known how long these videos stay “live”

in each case. Sometimes, the victims never know where the video that was supposed to have been made went live, if at all. Some perpetrators back off on the demand for money when the victims say they will go to the police.

Only one woman was successful in her extortion bid this year. Her 27-year-old Singaporean victim transferred \$500 to her in June, the police spokesman said.

A technician aged 29 who went to the police, but declined to be named, said: “I was high on drinks. She lured me to the web chat. I was tempted when she took off her clothes.” He said he feels stupid for having fallen for it, and does not want to make new online friends, especially foreign ones, any more.

Last month, a 22-year-old man was sentenced to five years in jail and five strokes of the cane for extorting money from men this way. He had roped in his girlfriend to chat men up online and to convince them to strip.

Video clips made secretly were used to extort money from them.

Those found guilty of extortion can be jailed up to seven years and face caning.

Social media specialist Michael Netzley from Singapore Management University said these men may have an illusion of safety or privacy in their own room and behind a computer screen, but that they should not be putting their trust in strangers.

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NUMBER OF CASES
January to July this year
40
Whole of last year
15