

# Cyber-extortion by foreign women

More cases of men lured into sex acts in front of webcam, then blackmailed

By JALELAH ABU BAKER

THE number of sexually-related cyber extortion cases in Singapore has more than quadrupled in a year.

Last year, there were at least 50 cyber-extortion attempts involving foreign women, compared to 11 in 2011, said the police in a media statement yesterday.

Victims are men who are typically students, full-time national servicemen or working adults, who meet the women on social networking sites such as Tagged.com and Facebook, and add them as friends.

They are then persuaded by the women 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 end the session abruptly, claiming someone is at their door.

The men later receive a message from the women, informing them that video footage had been taken of them in sex acts.

The women then demand money and set deadlines for payment.

Sometimes the men are given a link to a YouTube clip of their "performance". It is not known how long these videos stay "live" in each case.

Some perpetrators back off from demanding money when the victims say they will go to the police.

The foreign women, from countries such as the Philippines, South Korea and Japan, usually operate from their home countries.

The Straits Times reported in Au-

gust last year that the trend was on the rise. According to the police, more than \$1,200 was transferred by victims in 2011, while last year, they were cheated out of more than \$1,700 in total. The transfers were made using PayPal, they added.

A 29-year-old technician, 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 felt stupid for having fallen for the deception and that he no longer wanted to make new online friends, especially foreign ones.

The police urged the public to be wary of messages from unknown people who want to befriend them online.

The police statement added that Internet users should not fulfil any requests that put them in vulnerable positions, such as performing compromising acts in front of a webcam, or giving personal details

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FELL FOR DECEPTION

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— A technician, aged 29, who declined to be named

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about themselves.

Those who become victims of such attempts should call the police immediately and should not remit or transfer money that has been requested, the statement said.

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

In July last year, a 22-year-old man was sentenced to five years in jail and five strokes of the cane for extorting money from men in this way.

He had persuaded his girlfriend to chat to men online and to convince them to strip. Video clips made secretly were then used to extort money from them.

Commenting on the issue then, Singapore Management University social media specialist Michael Netzley had said these men may have an illusion of safety or privacy in their own room and behind a computer screen but they should not be putting their trust in strangers.

Associate Professor Paulin Straughan, a sociologist from the National University of Singapore, said the Internet is a fantastic medium for innovative criminal minds. "With just one Internet account, they can tap on millions of unsuspecting victims all over the world. We have to be more careful."

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