



School Safety  
Center

# Social Media Bulletin

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## (U) Social Media Alert for February 2024



(U) The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has reported that “financial sextortion” of teens has become a rapidly escalating threat. Financial sextortion generally involves someone tricking a minor into sending them sexually explicit photos or videos, which they then use to blackmail the teens into sending them money or gift cards to prevent the images from being released to friends and family. According to the Network Contagion Research Institute, sextortion cases in both North America and Australia have rising by 1,000% in the last 18 months.

(U) The statistics show that males aged 14 to 17 have become the most common victim of this crime, as individuals will contact them, and pose as “alluring young girls”, sending the teen boys explicit images of the “girls” and requesting that they send nude or suggestive selfies back in exchange. The blackmailers then threaten to release the content to the teen’s contacts on social media, and their families if their demands are not met.

(U) In January 2024 both Apple and Google Play Stores removed the app “Wizz” from their systems over concerns of sextortion. The app, based out of France, was crated to allow children ages 13 and up to connect with other children living near to them and of a similar age. The app is set up similar to the popular dating app “Tinder” and has been downloaded more than 14 million times since 2019. The downside to the app is that there are no parental controls, and some victims reported that they were targeted by sextortion attempts withing “minutes” of joining the app.

(U) The FBI recommends parents and guardians take the following steps to ensure their child’s safety: Don’t assume your child is safe online, as the children affected by sextortion have been as young as 8 years-old and have crossed all ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Know that all forms of social media, gaming and digital platforms can pose a risk to children. Review internet and social media use and their settings by spot checking your child’s apps, keep their profiles private, and consider banning the use of connected devices in bedrooms.

### References:

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