

## “BECAUSE OF YOU”: BLACKMAIL AND EXTORTION OF GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN IN GHANA

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Homosexuals in Ghana lead a precarious existence. Section 104 of the Criminal Code criminalizes “unnatural carnal knowledge” between consenting adults, punishing it as a misdemeanor. The existence and enforcement of the law create an environment of impunity in which the rights of men who have sex with men (MSM) and women who have sex with women (WSW) are widely and routinely violated. In this environment, homosexuals are regularly subject to harassment, gay bashing, physical violence, and extortion. Often, these crimes occur at the hands of, or with the collusion of, the police or other agents of the state.

MSM and WSW are frequently subject to blackmail and extortion attempts in Ghana, and organizations like the Centre for Popular Education and Human Rights - Ghana (CEPEHRG) have started projects to better understand, defend against, and deal with the problem. The key to blackmail is the threat of disclosure, which causes panic among gay and bisexual men as they would be considered criminals under the current law. Disclosure about sex and sexuality can take a number of forms, including threats of exposure to police, employers, friends, spouses, families, communities, faith communities, or the press. Extortion typically involves direct threats to the victim, ranging from property damage to assault, rape, or murder. Both tend to target those who are especially marginalized or vulnerable to threats.

This chapter is based on a survey of the experiences of gay and bisexual men who have suffered or are subject to blackmail or extortion.<sup>1</sup> It draws from these experiences to think critically about how and why blackmail occurs, the types of threats that are used, the role of the police, and the ways that victims themselves have dealt with blackmail, whether successfully or unsuccessfully. The chapter concludes with highlights of the broader themes from the survey, especially those strategies that are commonly used to entrap unsuspecting victims – and precautions that might be taken to deter or deal with such attempts in the future.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 Only first names are used to protect the identity of the victims. CEPEHRG does not condone, support, or advocate for the behaviors described herein, but hopes that the experiences of these respondents will be helpfully used to better protect the rights of all Ghanaians.
- 2 The author would like to thank Fredrick Annobil, Hilary Afful, Nana Yaw Kusi, and Francis Carboo of the MSM HIV/AIDS Intervention Project for their work on this project.

## HOW DID THE BLACKMAIL BEGIN?

Blackmail can be committed by strangers, acquaintances, employers, colleagues, friends, or even family – virtually anyone who might have access to information that another person wants to keep secret. In a few cases, blackmailers or extortionists approached their victims without there being any prior relationship between the two parties. When strangers did not know a great deal about the victim, they often used extortion rather than blackmail to get money, property, sex, or services from them.<sup>3</sup> One interviewee, Paa, a 17 year-old student from James Town, was raped near a bus stop on his way to central Accra. His assailants threatened him at knifepoint demanding that he perform oral sex on one of them. His attackers knew that he would not scream or draw attention for fear of being exposed. It is common for “straight” men to find an effeminate gay man in the evenings and force him to have sex. Knowing that the victim would not want to be exposed, they threaten to report or beat him if he does not comply. There have been several episodes of such violence in the Eastern, Ashanti and Greater Accra regions of Ghana, where extortionists use the vulnerability of their victims to directly threaten them if they fail to comply with a set of demands.

In most cases in the survey for this chapter, however, blackmailers took the time to get to know their victims before their threats began. Often, they met on the Internet, which enabled the blackmailer to get key details about the victim in advance of any face-to-face meetings. Dei, an 18 year-old man from Accra, met his blackmailer online. After several conversations, the blackmailer demanded payment to keep silent about his homosexuality. This kind of relationship without a physical meeting has the added advantage of secrecy for the blackmailer, whose true identity may never be revealed.

The Internet has also been used to arrange sexual encounters, which were then used to blackmail the victim. T.J., an American visiting Accra, describes this kind of entrapment:

The blackmailer met me in my hotel room after I arrived in Ghana. We engaged in consensual sex with a condom. Approximately two days after the encounter, he came back to the hotel with two men.

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3 As defined in the Introduction to this volume, “the crime of extortion involves obtaining money, property or services from another person through, for example, intimidation or threats of physical harm. The crime of blackmail is similar, but involves threats to disclose information that a person believes to be potentially damaging to their reputation or safety.”

The men claimed to be his uncles. They demand I pay \$1000 US or they would report me to the police.

This is a common experience of tourists who visit Accra and meet gay partners. Often, these partners blackmail or extort their victims. This does not mean the person is necessarily gay, but simply that he wants money. Suein, a 50 year-old tourist from Norway, experienced a similar situation. Suein recalled: “We had oral sex, and afterwards I gave him the mobile phone, the clothes, and the football I had brought for him. In addition, I graciously paid for his transportation.” Similar to T.J., Suein was then blackmailed by his sexual partner. Suein remembers that “two days later he came with two other men and a police officer. They demanded that I pay \$5000 US or I would be arrested.”

Section 104 of Ghana’s Criminal Code allows blackmailers to operate in this way by essentially placing the victim beyond the protection of the law. Blackmailers often threaten to call the police and turn in their victims for being homosexual and victims know that they are likely to be treated badly whether or not the allegations can be proven. In many areas, police are widely believed to work with the blackmailers for a small fee. Police appear as soon as the blackmailer has trapped the victim in a compromising situation, then extort money from the victim by threatening to prosecute them if they are not paid. Blackmailers may also pay police to accompany them as they collect their payment, which places considerable pressure on victims to pay the blackmailer’s “fee.”

While the relationships described above were short-lived, many other interviewees described how their blackmailers befriended them or developed intimate relationships with them over a long period of time. In some relationships, the blackmailer may have planned to take advantage of the victim all along. But in others, they took advantage of the situation when they needed money, when the relationship soured, or when an opportunity for blackmail or extortion arose. Razak, a 20 year-old male from Abeka Lapaz, remembers taking a friend with whom he had been sexually involved to a local restaurant to have dinner. He asked his friend to hold his phone while he placed their order. When Razak asked for his phone back, his friend refused and threatened to cause a public scene over Razak’s sexuality, leaving Razak with no other option but to give him the phone.

Blackmail was also reported to have occurred when interviewees threatened to cool or end a relationship. Rashid, a 22 year-old student in

Mamobi, met the man who would later blackmail him through a mutual friend. The two had several sexual encounters, until one day Rashid refused to have sex with him. Upon hearing this, the blackmailer removed his clothes and started to yell throughout the communal residence about Rashid's sexuality. He would not stop until Rashid paid him 200,000 cedis. In these situations, blackmailers take advantage of the presumptive innocence that so often results from speaking up first – by announcing that they have been taken advantage of, the blackmailer immediately puts their victim on the defensive in front of a suspicious public.

In many cases, past relationships between the blackmailer and their victim led to accusations that the victim has given them a sexually transmitted infection and must give them money to pay for treatment. Kweku, a 37 year-old gay man from Adabraka, was confronted by a sexual partner who came back to him complaining of an STI infection. On several different occasions, Kweku gave his partner money for treatment, and his partner began using threats to maintain the payments. Kweku recalls how “[h]e came back from time to time to threaten to disclose my identity if I did not give in to his demands,” turning Kweku's support into a regular source of income. Kelvin's blackmailer was more straightforward. Kelvin, a 30-year old from Adabraka, met his blackmailer at a party at the home of a mutual acquaintance. After the two had sex, his blackmailer demanded money to treat an STI – and threatened to report him to the police if Kelvin failed to comply. The blackmailer brought the police to him on one occasion, intimidating Kelvin by making sure he was aware of the seriousness of his threat.

## WHAT TYPES OF THREATS WERE USED?

Many of the most extreme threats were made by extortionists. Victims who did not comply with their demands were not only threatened with disclosure, but were also threatened with assault, rape, attacks on friends or family, damage to property, or murder if they did not comply with a set of demands. K.K., a 37-year old bar attendant, was raped at knifepoint for several nights by a customer from his shop. K.K. remembers how the customer “came with a knife and fucked me every night,” using the threat of mutilation or murder to force K.K. to have sex with him. The kinds of threats that extortionists made were patently illegal, but without access to the police or the full protection of the law, gay and bisexual men were often helpless to stop them.

Blackmailers threaten to disclose the victim's secret to a variety of people. Sometimes, the threat is to disclose one's homosexuality to police

or authorities that might prosecute the victim. Rashid said his blackmailer “told the police I had sexual intercourse with him and promised to pay him some money but after the sexual encounter I refused to pay him the said money,” framing Rashid as the responsible party when the sex was consensual and it was Rashid who ended the relationship. When T.J. and Suein were blackmailed, both were threatened with disclosure to the police. T.J. recalls how “they came to tell me I have infected their nephew with a sexual transmitted disease, ‘gono’ [a slang term for gonorrhea], and so I have to pay them \$1000 US for his medication or else they would report me to the police.” Suein was also accused of infecting a partner with whom he had protected sexual intercourse, who complained that he was suffering from complications from having anal sex. Suein was asked to pay \$5000 US in exchange for not reporting the allegations.

The police may be a prime audience for disclosure in instances where the blackmailer does not know the victim’s family, friends, employer, or community – for instance, when the blackmailer has just met the victim or the victim is not resident in the area. Police are, however, not the only people who exercise power over gay and bisexual men. Blackmailers who could use other points of leverage often threatened disclosure to employers, teachers, families, friends, and other important people in their victims’ lives. Adjeley, a 23-year old male, was blackmailed by a friend from school. When the friend demanded money for his silence and Adjeley refused to pay, Adjeley was reported to the school authorities for engaging in homosexual activities. He faced expulsion as well as potential criminal prosecution. At the time, he was unaware of the consequences that he might face for engaging in homosexual activity, let alone that a trusted friend could betray him. Yaw, a 28 year-old Christian, was alarmed when someone he met through church threatened to inform other members of the faith community about his homosexuality. According to Yaw, “he threatened to report me to the church’s elders – saying that I raped him and paid him off with the things he actually stole from my room – if I kept on demanding them back from him.”

If a person’s sexual orientation is not known to the wider community, the potential targets are virtually endless. Isaac, a 21 year-old from Dansoman who met his blackmailer through friends, found himself faced with threats to reveal their relationship indiscriminately:

He threatened that if I didn’t remain silent and give him my phone, he was going to tell the whole community that I had sex

with him, so I gave him my phone. He also threatened to tell everyone that I [had] forced him to sleep with me, and that when he refused I wanted to have my phone back.

In a few instances, victims were threatened with disclosure to whoever was nearby, whether they knew them or not. In settings where homophobia is widespread, the threat of a homophobic response from strangers in the vicinity can force the victim to comply with a blackmailer's demands. Razak was threatened with exposure of his sexual orientation unless he gave his phone to the blackmailer. In the public setting of a restaurant, he was told, “if you do not let go of the phone, I will let people know about you.” As shocking as it is to see your friend or partner turn against you in public just to get your phone from you, interviewees suggest that this kind of behavior happens every day in Ghana.

## HOW DID VICTIMS RESPOND?

The responses to blackmail varied widely. Although the majority of victims complied to avoid the blackmailer's threats, a few people opted to be open about their sexuality in order to remove the blackmailer's leverage. As one interviewee put it, “don't dare me – if you dare me, I will dare you!”

One respondent, Prince, detailed how this was done:

Someone tried to have sex with me by force under threat that if I rejected him, he was going to let neighbours know about my sexual orientation and what I do in my bedroom. I asked him to follow me to the police station since I did not want any embarrassment in my house or surroundings. He went straight into the police station and the policeman asked “why are you here?” He quickly came out to tell the police he had some monies with me and any time he comes for the monies I refuse him entry into my room to talk. He thought he was wise and would get me to panic and pay him or ask him to get back to the house for sex.

I quickly thought of what to do and decided to tell the policeman the truth before he opened his mouth. The first person to speak the truth will be believed, I thought. So I said, “we were engaging in homosexual activity when we were in school and have now stopped, but he keeps coming to me asking for sex and when I

refused he threatened to disgrace me.” The police officer then realized the seriousness of the case and asked him if what I said was true. He was shocked about my openness and did not know what to say.

Others also went directly to those the blackmailer was threatening to tell, notifying them that they were being blackmailed and depriving the blackmailer of their leverage. When the blackmailer does not have proof of what he is threatening to disclose, this can be a particularly useful strategy.

Knowing how school authorities look down on homosexuality, Adjeley’s blackmailer used the threat of disclosure to get him to do whatever he wanted. Most people in the school would never discuss these problems, or the abuses the seniors inflicted on the juniors they knew to be homosexual. When a senior demanding money blackmailed Adjeley, he called attention to it and they were both taken to the school’s authorities. As Adjeley recalls:

When he was called by the head master, he accused me of being a homosexual and said that I tried to sleep with him. This forced me to reveal all his threats and intimidations when he comes to me or other students to collect our food. I was very lucky to have a student from another school come to my school to testify that the senior was a homosexual and that he had been seen in various places with other homosexuals.

The student went on to accuse the senior of sleeping with him and other students on campus. This prompted the school’s authorities to suspend the senior for two weeks and to ask him to leave the boarding house and become a day student after his suspension. He was ordered to remain a day student until he completed his education at the school. The senior was suspended for being gay. This kind of mutual exposure goes a long way to affect the homosexual or gay community negatively, as both parties seek to have other gay men prosecuted using homophobic laws.

Adjeley was able to go to the authorities both because his blackmailer lacked proof and because other students were willing to testify that the blackmailer was abusing his power to take advantage of other students. When homosexual men do not have sufficient evidence to legally expose their blackmailer, they can defend themselves by invoking clauses in the Constitution relating to human rights and freedoms – for example, their rights to property, to privacy, and to be free from slavery and servitude as

enshrined in Chapter Five of the 1992 Constitution. The confidence and apparent willingness of victims to follow the case to court often scares the blackmailer or extortionist and forces them to rethink and often refrain from pursuing the blackmail threat.

A few of the interviewees had gone to the police, hoping that they would put a stop to the threats and protect the victim. For some, the police were helpful. Nketia, a 24 year-old bisexual male, was blackmailed by his neighbour. He initially paid the money the blackmailer demanded, but then reported the blackmail to a trusted friend in the police force. Nketia recalls that the officer promised him justice, and "assured me that they would arrest him the following morning." Indeed, the blackmailer was arrested by the police. Suein also initially gave into the blackmailers, but a friend contacted the police. As Suein recalls:

I did not report them immediately. I became very scared and agreed to go with them to the bank for money from the ATM machine. On our way, I texted another friend in Ghana and told him what had happened to me, and he arranged a police man to meet us at the bank. All of us were sent to the Tema police headquarters where I was asked to leave after writing my statement and the two boys were detained.

Nketia and Suein were lucky – not many persons know or trust law enforcement, and these cases were the exception and not the rule. Most of the interviewees did not report their attackers to the police. Many were worried about whether they would be treated fairly if they were implicated in homosexuality. Others have had negative experiences with the police in the past and did not think they would be treated fairly and impartially.

From the testimonies offered by respondents, these fears were well-founded. In the cases surveyed, the police were frequently unhelpful, and often exacerbated the problem. After K.K. was raped multiple times, he reported the incident to the police and was told the attacker was a wanted criminal. Nonetheless, the police did not know where to find him, and could not guarantee K.K.'s safety. K.K ultimately quit his job, moved from the place he was living, and started over elsewhere to escape the extortionist who was threatening him.

T.J. was also frustrated by the police response. He recalls how "the police took my statement and asked me to go and come back later to



check... but nothing was done to the boys, who were allowed to come over to my hotel from time to time to threaten me.” T.J. eventually changed to a different hotel, then, when the harassment became unbearable, left the country to return to the United States earlier than he had planned.

The only gay Ghanaians who felt compelled to report blackmail were either harassed by the police or put behind bars with their blackmailer. When Isaac’s friend kept his phone and threatened to tell people about his sexuality, for example, Isaac reported the blackmailer but ended up being arrested. At the end of the ordeal, the police told Isaac that because his assailant was his boyfriend, he should solve the problem himself.

In light of this treatment, it is understandable that many of the respondents did not feel comfortable going to the police at all, fearing that they would be laughed at, exposed by the police, or arrested themselves. Bernard, a 26 year-old man who was entrapped by a man he met at Labadi Beach in Accra, did not report the incident to the police for fear of being victimized. He explained, “I didn’t report it to the police because I was afraid to. Since gay life is not legalized in Ghana, I’m afraid I might be arrested by the police if I do go and make a report... I decided to risk my life and collect my phone myself.”

Others felt that reporting a crime would expose their secret, remaining skeptical of the confidentiality of the police. When Yaw was threatened with exposure to other members of his church, he says, “I didn’t report the crime to the police because I am discreet and didn’t want the problem to affect my church and home.” Though Yaw generally believes blackmailers should be arrested and reported in the media, he remained silent when he was blackmailed.

Others feared the psychological trauma of reporting terrible ordeals to police who would react with disbelief, mockery, or condemnation. When Paa was viciously raped and stabbed by his attackers, he opted not to make a formal complaint to the police. As often happens in cases of rape, Paa says he feared being told he was asking for it. Even though the attacks, theft, and extortion described above are crimes in Ghana, most go unreported. As Razak remarked about his blackmailer, “Why would I report him to the police when everyone at the scene blames me?”

Given the threat of prosecution and the stigma that victims faced, many felt that confronting the blackmailer’s threat or reporting them to the police were not realistic options. Many simply attempted to meet the blackmailer’s demands. Rashid, for example, chose not to defend himself. He believes that homosexuality is against the culture of Ghana and he

fears that most people do not accept it. He paid money to his blackmailer, saying, "I just gave him 200,000 cedis just to bring peace." Of course, there is considerable pressure on victims to comply in this manner. Victims offered many examples of such pressure including blackmailers and extortionists being accompanied by a police officer, outnumbering the victims, having weapons, being unclear about what was happening, or making veiled threats and creating uncertainty for victims as to what might happen if the demands were not met.

Even many of those who ultimately went to the police to report the blackmail at first attempted to meet the demands made. Nketia paid off his blackmailer, who thanked him for his generosity and left before Nketia reported him to the police and had him arrested. T.J. reported the boys who were blackmailing him, but admits, "I gave them \$200 US dollars as a first installment of the payment they were demanding." The extortionist who targeted K.K. not only raped him at knifepoint, but demanded \$400 US. K.K.'s friends contributed over 900,000 cedis to help him pay off his extortionist.

When the police were not involved, the blackmail rarely stopped with a single payment. Kweku and Kelvin, the two men whose former lovers accused them of giving them STIs, found that this quickly became a pretense for blackmail. Kweku paid for the hospital bills of his blackmailer as well as money to keep him silent, but the blackmailer kept coming back for money. Kelvin also paid a lot of money to his blackmailer to avoid having his identity revealed to the public. His blackmailer still complains of an STI infection and uses that excuse to return for more money. Since Kelvin does not want anyone to know about this relationship and the fact that he had unprotected sex with this man, he paid – and continues to pay – his blackmailer. Kelvin's anxiety is apparent to his blackmailer, signaling that he can use Kelvin as a bank and go back for money whenever he needs it.

When gay and bisexual men offer inducements for others to keep their secrets, this shows their desperation and exacerbates the problem. In these scenarios, blackmailers are encouraged by money, gifts, and pleas to continue their blackmail, either by increasing the money demanded from their victim or by targeting other gay and bisexual men.

Even with payment, the blackmailer may fail to keep his promise and act on the threat anyway. Alhassan, a 23 year-old student in James Town, was blackmailed by a friend at his prep school. One night, this friend asked him to perform oral sex on him. After he had begun, the lights switched on

and he found the room full of dormitory mates who immediately started clapping and yelling “well done.” After he begged several times for the case not to be reported to the school’s authorities, the blackmailer requested a huge sum of money to be paid to him to keep quiet. Alhassan was able to pay him only 400,000 cedis. The blackmailer insisted the amount was too small, and went ahead to report to the school’s authorities. As a consequence, Alhassan was expelled from the school. Paying the blackmailer does not ensure that the blackmail will stop or that the secret will be kept.

### **WHAT FACILITATES BLACKMAIL AND EXTORTION?**

When asked why people blackmail, respondents identified a number of factors that facilitate the victimization of gay and bisexual men in Ghana. Respondents felt that the biggest factor facilitating blackmail is the illegality of same-sex activity, as well as the social prohibitions that punish people for being homosexual and encourage them to keep their homosexual behavior secret. Many also pointed out that blackmail is facilitated by the poverty in which many of the blackmailers live, the lack of opportunities for them, and the emphasis on “fast money” in Ghana. Respondents said that laziness, poverty, greed, selfishness, and opportunism make blackmail seem like a quick and easy way to become wealthy while doing very little work.

Many people believe that gay and bisexual men are wealthy, making them a prime target for blackmailers. They may have knowledge of others who have become rich through extortion and blackmailing of gay and bisexual foreigners and Ghanaians. Alhassan, for example, believes people are lazy and that is why they engage in blackmail and extortion, but he also mentions that the easiest way people find making money is to extort from gays: “If they move from place to place extorting for a day, imagine the amount of money they will make!” Bernard says that gay guys are thought to be fabulously rich in Ghana, and blackmailers will always want to extort from them. Nketia agrees, saying that blackmailers “know that gay guys are well to do, meaning that they’re hard working people who make lots of money just to have fun. Blackmailers want to use that opportunity to take what does not belong to them – they’re opportunist!” Suein, who is a foreigner, thinks his blackmailers took advantage of him because they knew he was a foreigner and perceived him to be rich or wealthy. Foreigners – especially any “white” or fair-skinned person – are perceived to be rich in Ghana, and are often perceived to be gay or homosexual.

The ability to target gay and bisexual men is facilitated by the transactional aspect of many sexual encounters in Ghana. A monetary element in sex is not only present within the gay or homosexual community, but also within the heterosexual community. After sex, whoever is employed or set up the encounters typically gives a small token of appreciation to their partner, either in the form of a gift or money for transportation. When gifts or money are exchanged after sex, it becomes easy for blackmailers to take advantage of the ambiguity of this transaction to victimize their partners. Many blackmailers express disappointment at whatever initial gesture is offered, and then proceed to demand huge sums.

The prevalence of transactional sex allows many "straight guys" in Ghana – masculine men who have sex with men – to treat sex with gay or bisexual men as their job, moving from one place to another having sex with other men for money. Often, they make enough in this trade to become richer than their victims, who work in offices and receive far lower weekly or monthly wages. The custom of giving gifts or money after sex has led many people to expect large sums of money after a sexual encounter, and those who are disappointed by what they receive may attempt to extort the maximum amount of money possible from their partners.

Many blackmailers also take advantage of their partner's HIV status, lack of access to HIV and STI testing, or failure to practice safe sex to blackmail them at a later date. After sex, blackmailers may accuse a person of giving them HIV or another STI, then demand payments for treatment whenever they are in need of money. Kelvin and Kweku both experienced this kind of blackmail, and were less able to deal with it because they were initially unsure about the validity of the allegations. It was only when Kelvin and Kweku's partners began demanding regular payments that it became clear that they were being blackmailed.

In some cases, blackmailers may also target gay and bisexual men because they have convinced themselves they can do it with moral impunity. Dei, like most people, believes that gay and bisexual men are wealthy and therefore natural targets for blackmailers. He added that blackmailers also say that "Ghana is a Christian nation and so blackmailing homosexuals is right," using allegations of immorality to justify their own acts of intimidation, theft, and violence. T.J. suggested that the converse might also be true; if victims lack self-esteem, feel they are doing something wrong, and find that their behavior is widely condemned by their family, religion, and government, they become particularly inviting targets.

Indeed, amid all these factors, the one that respondents overwhelmingly identified as a facilitator of blackmail was the presence of the sodomy law and the belief that gay and bisexual men could be victimized with impunity so long as it remained in place. As Yaw suggested, blackmailers “know the law of Ghana does not permit homosexuality, and therefore a homosexual has no rights under such law. You cannot depend on such law as a homosexual!” Kweku agrees, asking, “Who are you to report to the police that you were blackmailed about your ‘gay life’? Nobody! So they know blackmailing is safe.” Israel, a 27 year-old gay man from Abeka Lapaz, agreed. He had no idea why people would blackmail, but believes that people are able to commit such acts because the gay community is a minority and the laws in Ghana do not defend or favour gay and bisexual people.

The respondents’ assessments seem accurate. Although all participants in the survey responded that they would want their blackmailers to be brought to justice, the vast majority did not report the crimes. This situation is not helped by the fact that many gay and bisexual men do not know that blackmail and extortion are illegal in Ghana and will thus not report it to the police.

It has also been well-demonstrated that it is likely that the police will fail to help gay and bisexual men when they do report being blackmailed. According to K.K., blackmailers and extortionists also know that the police themselves are committing these offenses, and will help their perpetrators evade justice. Gay and bisexual men risk exposure and condemnation when they go to the police – often, of the same behavior the blackmailer threatened to reveal – and blackmail and extortion are thus underreported. Many of the survey respondents felt they would be mocked, blamed, or even arrested by the police for reports of blackmail. Instead of following up on cases, Dei noted that police frequently tell gay and bisexual men to “investigate it, and when you find the person, call me.” These factors within the legal system that put gay and bisexual men at particular risk are exacerbated by broader problems of corruption and lack of transparency in the Ghanaian criminal justice system. There are reports of police officers demanding fees to investigate crimes, making victims wait for hours and then demanding payments to take complaints and of police requiring victims to underwrite the costs of investigation. Victims do not always have the means to pay these “costs,” and when they do, these add another financial and psychological burden in addition to the blackmail and extortion itself.

Claims that homosexuality is “un-Ghanaian” have also fostered a belief that the police, the judiciary, and the state will not help its citizens if they engage in homosexuality or identify as gay or bisexual. As Yaw argued, there have not been any well-publicized arrests of blackmailers or extortionists who target gay and bisexual men, and that is why people believe they can operate with impunity. Paa agreed. He suggested that if one or two individuals were charged with blackmail and extortion, the rates of these crimes would decrease. Without that deterrent, more and more youth are finding these crimes to be both easy and profitable. Without some signal of culpability, the gay and bisexual men in the survey agreed that the problem of blackmail and extortion would only get worse.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the people interviewed for this survey were uncomfortable sharing their past experience as victims of blackmail because of the pain they went through during the incident. Many people who did not participate in the survey had similar experiences, but they did not want to be interviewed because they felt the incidents were in the past and life goes on. Others would not admit to having been robbed or blackmailed, as they would feel “foolish.” Those who shared their story did so to inform the public about blackmailers and extortionists’ practices in the gay and bisexual community.

In order to encourage the reporting of crimes, all of the above must be addressed. The types of blackmail and extortion identified by respondents are unlikely to stop unless sodomy laws are revoked and gay and bisexual men know that blackmail and extortion are illegal under Ghanaian law, feel that their complaints will be respectfully heard and not dismissed out of hand, and are confident that the police will act upon the allegations and do their best to see that justice is served. By sharing their experiences, the gay and bisexual men in this survey have shed light on a problem that is almost never acknowledged in Ghana – and have pointed the way for NGOs, the police, the government, and others to work to ensure that the problem is addressed.