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Sextortion in Zimbabwe: A Silent Corruption Undermining Women's Rights and Access to Public Services

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ABSTRACT

Women in Zimbabwe are disproportionately affected by corruption, particularly in terms of access to critical public services such as healthcare, education and justice. Sextortion is a commonly overlooked form of corruption in which sexual favours are demanded in exchange for public service access, job prospects, or avoiding law enforcement consequences. Although sextortion is becoming recognised as a human rights violation globally, Zimbabwe's legal and regulatory mechanisms, such as the Prevention of Corruption Act (Chapter 9:16), and the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission, fall short of tackling gendered corruption. Using information from Transparency International Zimbabwe's 2019 gender and corruption report, insights from the Zimbabwe Gender Commission and United Nations Development Programme Zimbabwe's analysis (2020), this paper highlights how sextortion undermines women's fundamental rights, such as dignity, equality and access to justice. It investigates the structural barriers that prevent victims from reporting sextortion, including shame, fear of reprisal, and the normalisation of sexual exploitation in public institutions. Furthermore, the study criticises Zimbabwe's anti-corruption programmes for failing to take a gender-sensitive, human rights-based approach, hence perpetuating impunity and marginalising vulnerable women. This paper advocates for policy reforms that are consistent with Zimbabwe's domestic obligations and international commitments, particularly the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the United Nations Convention against Corruption. It argues for the inclusion of sextortion in Zimbabwe's anti-corruption legislative framework, stronger whistle-blower protections, and the development of gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting procedures. By presenting sextortion as a human rights violation, this article aims to connect gender equality, anti-corruption activities, and human rights protection in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: *Corruption, women, public services, sextortion, Zimbabwe*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women in Zimbabwe are disproportionately affected by corruption, particularly in terms of access to critical public services such as healthcare, education and justice.[1] Sextortion is a commonly overlooked form of corruption in which sexual favours are demanded in exchange for public service access, job opportunities, or protection from law enforcement consequences.[2]

1.1 Unmasking Sextortion as a Gender-Based Form of Corruption in Zimbabwe

Sextortion, also referred to as sexual corruption, has been increasingly recognised as a distinct form of corruption that intertwines sexual exploitation with abuse of authority. Bjarnegård et al define sextortion as "when a person abuses their entrusted authority to obtain a sexual favour in exchange for a service or benefit connected to that authority".[3] According to the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ), sextortion refers to the abuse of power to obtain sexual favours in exchange for services or protection and is widely recognised as a gendered form of corruption.[4] The U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre similarly defines it as abuse of power to obtain a sexual benefit or advantage, related to the concept of extortion; in this sense, for example, sex, rather than money, functions as the form of gratification in the corrupt exchange.[5]

The term "sextortion" gained prominence through the work of IAWJ, which played a key role in bringing international attention to this form of corruption.[6] Sexual corruption, therefore, encompasses both extortive and collusive exchanges involving services or benefits

1 Tshuma N (11 September 2025) *Corruption in Health and Education Fuels Gender Inequality* Centre for Innovation & Technology, available at https://cite.org.zw/corruption-in-health-and-education-fuels-gender-inequality/ (visited 15 October 2025).

2 Bjarnegård E, Calvo D, Eldén Å & Lundgren S (2022) "Sextortion: Corruption Shaped by Gender Norms" in Kubbe I & Merkle O (eds) *Norms, Gender and Corruption: Understanding the Nexus* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing 252-267 at 254.

3 Bjarnegård et al (2022) at 254.

4 IAWJ (2012) *Stopping the Abuse of Power through Sexual Exploitation: Naming, Shaming and Ending Sextortion – A Toolkit* Washington, DC: IAWJ, available at https://iawj.org/sextortion-toolkit (visited 25 June 2025) at 9.

5 U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (2024) "Sexual corruption is abuse of power – and there's more to it than 'sextortion' alone", available at https://www.u4.no/blog/sexual-corruption-is-abuse-of-power-and-theres-more-to-it-than-sextortion-alone (visited 28 June 2025).

6 IAWJ (2012) at 9.

such as academic grades, employment opportunities, or government permits.[7] Documented incidents indicate that women are disproportionately targeted; nevertheless, males, transgender individuals and gender non-conforming persons are also victimised.[8] Familial and patriarchal ties can occasionally contribute to sexual corruption dynamics, when women and girls are exploited to "settle" payments that relatives are unable to afford.[9] Men can also be victims of sexual corruption, as evidenced by documented incidents of male migrants being sexually abused during their movement.[10] According to some studies, abusers purposefully exploit gendered hierarchies and entrenched societal beliefs surrounding sextortion and sexual violence experiences to impose shame and disgrace on their male identity.[11]

The 2020 Transparency International report highlights the widespread yet often overlooked nature of sextortion.[12] Frank Vogl, co-founder of Transparency International, describes it as "the worst form of corruption across the globe",[13] yet it remains largely invisible in legal definitions and unpunished in practice. This silence reflects systemic gender-blindness in anti-corruption frameworks. Many anti-corruption laws define corruption loosely, referring to bribes or "other benefits" without explicitly mentioning sexual exploitation.[14] As a result, anti-corruption[15] efforts tend to focus on financial corruption while

7 Feigenblatt H (2020) *Breaking the Silence around Sextortion: The Links between Power, Sex and Corruption* Berlin: Transparency International, available at https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/breaking-the-silence-around-sextortion (visited 15 October 2025) at 11.

8 Feigenblatt (2020) at 11.

9 Feigenblatt (2020) at 12.

10 Bossière L (2023) "The Perpetration of Sextortion Against Migrant Men: Analysis of the Experience of Survivors Through the Lens of Masculinity" *Centre for Gender and Migration Blog*, available at https://centreforafricanjustice.org/the-perpetration-of-sextortion-against-migrant-men-analysis-of-the-experience-of-survivors-through-the-lens-of-masculinity/ (visited 15 October 2025).

11 Bossière (2023).

12 Feigenblatt (2020) at 11.

13 Mvelase Z & Mvuvu T (2021) "Sexual Extortion: The 'Silent' Corruption Across Sub-Saharan Africa" Centre for African Studies, Harvard University, available at https://africa.harvard.edu/news/sexual-extortion-"silent"-corruption-across-sub-saharan-africa (visited 13 October 2025).

14 Sebastian-Lira YA (2024) "Police Corruption and the Filipino Culture of Gift Giving" in Dogan KH (ed) *Global Issues* London: IntechOpen at 67-75 at 71, available at https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/1173334 (visited 13 October 2025).

15 Traditional anti-corruption frameworks primarily focus on financial offences such as bribery, embezzlement, fraud and illicit enrichment. See e.g. arts 15-23 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (2003); Goetz AM (2007) "Political Cleaners: Women as the New Anti-Corruption Force?" 38(1) *Development and Change* 87-105 at 89.

neglecting sex as a harmful transactional currency, one for which women pay the highest price.[16] This oversight marginalises women's experiences and prevents sextortion from being included in data collection, legal action, and institutional responses. Even when women do report abuse, it is rarely classified as sextortion, hindering accountability and discouraging other survivors from speaking out.[17]

In Zimbabwe, sexual favours have at times been used as an informal means of exchange in corrupt transactions, particularly where officials control access to services or opportunities, and women have been disproportionately affected.[18] This phenomenon stems primarily from institutionalised patriarchy and systemic gender inequality. Existing literature shows that women's experiences of corruption differ significantly from those of men, both in nature and in consequence. Women, particularly those with minimal economic means, frequently lack the political and institutional capacity to reject corrupt demands, leaving them vulnerable to non-monetary extortion, such as sextortion.[19] This vulnerability is intensified by patriarchal norms embedded within public institutions, where men hold disproportionate decision-making authority and sexual harassment is frequently tolerated or trivialised.[20] Transparency International Zimbabwe's 2019 Gender and Corruption Report emphasises the scope of the problem.[21] Over 57% of female respondents stated that women are more likely than men to face corruption in the form of sexual exploitation.[22] Women seeking access to basic services in the form of identity cards, property allocations, jobs and health care are regularly pressured into giving sexual favours by government personnel.[23] These

16 Mvelase & Mvuvu (2021).
17 Mvelase & Mvuvu (2021).
18 Transparency International (2019) *Gender and Corruption in Zimbabwe 2019* Berlin: Transparency International, available at https://www.tizim.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Gender-and-Corruption-in-Zimbabwe-2019.pdf (visited 15 October 2025),
19 Transparency International (2019) at 32.
20 Gukurume S & Shoko M (2023) "Policing Toxic Masculinities and Dealing with Sexual Violence on Zimbabwean University Campuses" 79(3) *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 1-9 at 4, available at https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i3.8625 (visited 13 October 2025).
21 Transparency International (2019) at vii.
22 Transparency International (2019) at 21.
23 Transparency International (2019) at 33.

transgressions are not isolated events, but rather part of a larger pattern of abuse ingrained in service delivery and governance mechanisms.[24]

Despite empirical evidence, Zimbabwe's legislative frameworks offer inadequate protection against sextortion. The Prevention of Corruption Act (Chapter 9:16)[25] and the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission Act (Chapter 9:22)[26] are primarily concerned with financial and material corruption and do not specifically identify sextortion as a criminal offence.[27] Consequently, many acts of sextortion fall through legal and procedural gaps, leaving survivors without redress and perpetrators unaccountable.

This article examines how sextortion operates within Zimbabwe's public service delivery system, focusing on its systemic character, its impact on women's rights, and the barriers survivors face in seeking justice, particularly in sectors such as education, healthcare, law enforcement and access to administrative services, where individuals often depend on public officials for essential services. Using a gendered anti-corruption framework, the article examines the conceptual tension between corruption law and sexual offences law, showing how this legal separation creates regulatory gaps that allow sextortion to persist within Zimbabwe's public institutions. It analyses existing legal and policy instruments to show how sextortion undermines governance, deepens inequality, and obstructs sustainable development.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: GLOBAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL TRENDS IN ADDRESSING SEXTORTION

Sextortion is a global challenge that has harmful effects on women and other genders, depriving them of dignity and opportunity and weakening trust in public institutions.[28]

24 Mvelase & Mvuvu (2021).
25 Prevention of Corruption Act 5 of 1985.
26 Anti-Corruption Commission Act 22 of 2004.
27 Sections 3–5 of the Prevention of Corruption Act 5 of 1985 (offences relating to bribery and corrupt practices), which primarily address monetary or material gratification. See also Sections 5–6 of the Anti-Corruption Commission Act 22 of 2004, which outline the functions and powers of the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission but do not explicitly address sextortion or sexual forms of corruption.
28 Chingono N (8 February 2020) "More than Half of Women in Zimbabwe Have Faced Sextortion, Finds

However, there is little scholarly literature on this discourse. Nevertheless, a small but growing body of academic research has begun to examine the prevalence, patterns and correlates of sextortion across different countries and institutional contexts. Recent studies highlight how sextortion intersects with gender inequality, corruption and abuse of authority within public institutions.[29] Existing literature reveals three patterns: the discourse is largely driven by advocacy organisations rather than academia; African regional frameworks provide normative guidance but weak enforcement; and Zimbabwe lacks strong legal and institutional responses to sextortion. Against this backdrop, this section critically examines existing debates, evidence, and knowledge gaps within global, regional and national (Zimbabwean) scholarship on sextortion. It explores how the concept has evolved in international policy discourse, how African legal frameworks have incorporated (or overlooked) the issue, and what the emerging Zimbabwean literature reveals about local manifestations of this gendered form of corruption.

2.1 Global Trends

Sextortion has only recently entered mainstream debates on corruption and human rights, marking a shift from traditional understandings of bribery as purely financial to recognising that sexual favours function as a form of corrupt gratification.[30] Building on earlier definitions discussed in the introduction, the IAWJ played a central role in bringing global attention to sextortion as a form of corruption involving the abuse of authority for sexual benefit.[31] This framing positioned sextortion at the intersection of gender inequality, power abuse and

Survey" *The Guardian*, available at https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/08/more-than-half-of-women-in-zimbabwe-have-faced-sextortion-finds-survey (visited 15 October 2025).

29 Henry N & Umbach R (2024) "Sextortion: Prevalence and Correlates in 10 Countries" 158 *Computers in Human Behavior* 108298, available at https://research.google/pubs/sextortion-prevalence-and-correlates-in-10-countries/ (visited 13 October 2025); Aja-Eke D, Gillanders R, Ouedraogo I & Maiga E (2023) *Sextortion and Corruption* Corruption, Gender, and Sustainable Development Policy Brief No 1 Dublin: Dublin City University, available at https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/inlinefiles/Sextortion%20and%20Corruption%20for%20web.pdf (visited 13 October 2025) at 3.

30 Feigenblatt (2020) at 13.

31 Dolch S (2023) "Sextortion: The Impact on Judging and Courts" *IAWJ*, available at https://www.iawj.org/sextortion-impact-on-judging-and-courts-asean (visited 26 June 2025).

institutional corruption. In 2012, the IAWJ's *Stopping the Abuse of Power through Sexual Exploitation: Naming, Shaming and Ending Sextortion* toolkit deepened this discourse by identifying sextortion's dual harm: first, as a form of sexual exploitation; and second, as a denial of rights and services that should be freely accessible.[32] The toolkit became a foundational resource for legal practitioners, gender advocates, and anti-corruption agencies seeking conceptual clarity and practical responses.[33] Following these developments, international organisations such as Transparency International began to integrate sextortion into their broader gender-and-corruption frameworks, acknowledging that women are disproportionately affected due to systemic gender hierarchies. Resolution 10/10, adopted at the 10th Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), recognised sexual corruption as a form of abuse of power and encouraged States Parties to strengthen measures addressing such practices.

Although UNCAC does not explicitly refer to sextortion, several of its provisions are relevant to understanding this form of abuse of power. Article 15 criminalises the bribery of national public officials, while Article 17 addresses the embezzlement or misappropriation of public resources by public officials. These provisions broadly define corruption as the abuse of entrusted authority for private benefit, a definition that scholars increasingly interpret to include non-monetary benefits, such as sexual favours, when public officials misuse their positions of power. While UNCAC does not explicitly codify sextortion, international policy discussions and training materials developed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), such as *The Time is now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption* (2020)[34] and the Education for Justice (E4J) Anti-Corruption Module on Gender and Corruption[35], increasingly recognise sexual exploitation, including sextortion, within corruption

32 IAWJ (2012) at 9.

33 IAWJ (2012) at 9.

34 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020) *The Time is Now: Addressing the Gender Dimensions of Corruption* Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2020/THE_TIME_IS_NOW_2020_12_08.pdf (visited 15 June 2025) at 96.

35 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) *Education for Justice (E4J) Anti-Corruption Module 8: Gender and Corruption* Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, available at https://grace.unodc.org/grace/uploads/documents/academics/AntiCorruption_Module_8_Corruption_and_Gender.pdf (visited 15 October 2025) at 30.

frameworks. Goetz argues that global anti-corruption programmes are gender-blind, relying on technocratic approaches that fail to consider how corruption emerges differently for women.[36]

Transparency International has shown that women are more likely to experience corruption in service delivery environments and that their vulnerability to sextortion is driven by structural disadvantages such as economic marginalisation, a lack of legal knowledge, and social shame.[37] Notably, global corruption indices such as the Corruption Perceptions Index and the Global Corruption Barometer seldom break down data by gender or contain questions concerning sexual exploitation, making it impossible to assess the prevalence of sextortion.[38] Feminist scholars have criticised the epistemological gap in global anti-corruption research, arguing that conventional corruption frameworks often overlook gendered experiences of power and exploitation.[39] Scholars such as Goetz highlight that anti-corruption approaches frequently rely on technocratic solutions that fail to account for how structural gender inequalities shape women's encounters with corruption in public institutions.[40] From an intersectional perspective, sextortion illustrates how gender, economic vulnerability and institutional power hierarchies interact to expose women to coercive exchanges when seeking access to public services. Intersectionality helps explain how overlapping inequalities such as poverty, gender discrimination and institutional power asymmetries shape women's experiences of corruption and increase their vulnerability to sexual exploitation in public service delivery.

While these initiatives represent significant progress, scholars such as Rheinbay and Chêne note that the global discourse remains fragmented and advocacy-driven, with limited

36 Goetz (2007) at 89.

37 Transparency International (2019) at 3.

38 Transparency International (2024) *Corruption Perceptions Index 2023* Berlin: Transparency International, available at https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023 (visited 15 October 2025), which measures perceived levels of public sector corruption but does not include gender-disaggregated indicators on sextortion; see also Transparency International (2019) *Global Corruption Barometer – Africa 2019* Berlin: Transparency International, available at https://www.transparncy.org/en/gcb/africa/africa-2019 (visited 15 October 2025), which surveys citizens' experiences of bribery in public services but does not include questions specifically addressing sexual corruption or sextortion.

39 Goetz (2007) at 91.

40 Goetz (2007) at 93.

empirical research or theoretical integration within anti-corruption scholarship.[41] Consequently, there is a persistent gap between international recognition and local enforcement, particularly in developing contexts where socio-legal frameworks to address sextortion are either absent or weak.

2.2 Regional Trends in Africa

Sextortion is increasingly recognised as a gendered form of corruption across Africa.[42] It is a combination of "sex" and "extortion", reflecting situations where individuals abuse positions of authority to demand sexual favours in exchange for services or opportunities.[43] The Maputo Protocol establishes a legal framework addressing violence against women in both public and private settings. Article 4 mandates that governments implement legislation to prevent all types of violence, including sexual harassment and exploitation. Article 4(2)(a) mandates states to "[e]nact and enforce laws to prohibit all forms of violence against women, including unwanted or forced sex, whether the violence takes place in private or public".[44] Despite this apparent responsibility few states have addressed sextortion under their national anti-corruption or criminal justice systems.[45]

Sextortion is pervasive in key sectors, including education, law enforcement, immigration and access to basic public services.[46] For instance, in West Africa, allegations of sexual harassment by lecturers are prevalent but rarely proven, as was exposed by BBC Africa Eye when they sent undercover journalists posing as students inside the University of Lagos and the University of Ghana.[47] In Tanzania, female students have reported being offered

41 Rheinbay J & Chêne M (2016) *Gender and Corruption: Topic Guide,* Anti-Corruption Helpdesk, Berlin.
42 UNCAC Coalition (22 December 2022) "9th Regional UNCAC Coalition Meeting for Sub-Saharan Africa – Sextortion: The Anatomy of a Secretive Form of Corruption" UNCAC Coalition, available at https://uncaccoalition.org/ssaregionalmeeting_genderandcorruption/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (visited 15 October 2025).
43 UNCAC Coalition (2022).
44 Article 4 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), available at https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa (visited 15 October 2025).
45 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020) at 96.
46 Henry & Umbach (2024).
47 BBC News (7 October 2019) "Sex for Grades: Undercover in West African Universities" *BBC News*, available at https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-49907376 (visited 15 October 2025).

marks in return for their grades.[48] In Liberia and Kenya, women have reported being approached by police or municipal staff in return for market licences or protection from penalties.[49] In Kenya, over 40% of women have experienced sextortion according to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, with the water sector recording an unprecedented number of women reporting being forced to sextortion.[50]

Research in Madagascar also documented widespread sextortion in schools, identifying teachers as the primary perpetrators and highlighting victims' lack of awareness and reporting mechanisms.[51] According to Mpedi, in South Africa, 84% of victims of sextortion were women, particularly those seeking a job or a promotion.[52] More recently, scholars observed that as intra-African migration grows, so does migrant worker sextortion.[53] Using South Africa as a case study, where the prevalence of gender-based violence is higher than in war-torn countries, it was suggested that migrants face a heightened risk.[54] Sextortion is also observed in Mozambique, especially in the aftermath of Cyclone Idai. It was observed that local authorities, including some affiliated with the ruling Frelimo party, exploited needy women by demanding sex in exchange for food.[55] Victims, villagers and aid workers said that women who could not pay bribes were forced into sexual activities to obtain basic help, such as a bag of food.[56]

48 Morley L (2011) "Sex, Grades and Power in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania" 41(1) *Cambridge Journal of Education* 101-115 at 107, available at https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2010.549453 (visited 15 October 2025).

49 The Morning (14 December 2022) "Sexual Harassment, Sexual Bribery to Be Criminalized" *The Morning*, available at https://www.themorning.lk/articles/2ZyRL04aRWIKvvpxDEJQ (visited 28 June 2025).

50 Mpedi LG (2024) "African Nations Need to Develop Clear Policies to Combat the Growing Scourge of Sextortion" *University of Johannesburg News*, available at https://news.uj.ac.za/news/opinion-african-nations-need-to-develop-clear-policies-to-combat-the-growing-scourge-of-sextortion/ (visited 29 June 2025).

51 UNCAC Coalition (2022).

52 Mpedi (2024).

53 Bicker Caarten A, van Heugten L & Merkle O (2022) "The Intersection of Corruption and Gender-Based Violence: Examining the Gendered Experiences of Sextortion During Migration to South Africa" 26(6) *African Journal of Reproductive Health / La Revue Africaine de la Santé Reproductive* 45-54 at 48, available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/27231533 (visited 15 October 2025).

54 Mpedi (2024).

55 Human Rights Watch (25 April 2019) "Mozambique: Cyclone Victims Forced to Trade Sex for Food" *Human Rights Watch*, available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/25/mozambique-cyclone-victims-forced-trade-sex-food (visited 15 October 2025).

56 Human Rights Watch (2019).

Therefore, there is a need to include gender in anti-corruption operations, although national anti-corruption commissions frequently lack the resources, training and mandates to effectively investigate sextortion. There is also limited empirical research on how sextortion interacts with broader structural factors such as economic instability, political marginalisation and weak public accountability, all of which disproportionately affect women on the continent.[57] While there is a growing amount of research on gender-based violence and public sector corruption, few studies examine sextortion as a unique and complicated problem. As Sundström and Wängnerud point out, corruption in Africa tends to strengthen male-dominated power networks, making it especially difficult for women to navigate institutions without exploitation.[58]

2.3 Local Trends in Zimbabwe

Sextortion in Zimbabwe is common, although it is a poorly documented type of corruption. Research evidence indicates that women are frequently subjected to sexual coercion when seeking services such as healthcare, employment, education and public documentation.[59] Examples include nurses soliciting sex for hospital admittance, government workers requesting sexual favours for birth certificates and police officers extorting sex from women in exchange for leniency.[60] The Prevention of Corruption Act (Chapter 9:16),[61] the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act[62] and even the mandate of the Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (ZACC) do not consider sex-for-services as a form of bribery or abuse of

57 Goetz (2007) at 93; Bjarnegård et al (2023).

58 Sundström A & Wängnerud L (2016) "Corruption as an Obstacle to Women's Political Representation: Evidence from Local Councils in 18 African Countries" 22(3) *Party Politics* 354-369 at 356.

59 Mukwidigwi T (2019) *Gendered Asymmetries: Probing Experiences of Sexual Coercion among Female Students at a Zimbabwean University* Master's thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, available at https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/4eb47804-9105-4538-8a92-ab949fd02c29/content (visited 15 October 2025) at 34.

60 Mundopa M (15 April 2020) "Challenges of Confronting Sextortion in Zimbabwe" *Voices for Transparency (Transparency International Blog)*, available at https://voices.transparency.org/challenges-of-confronting-sextortion-in-zimbabwe-6836ce72479d (visited 28 June 2025).

61 Prevention of Corruption Act 5 of 1985

62 Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act 23 of 2004.

authority.[10] Despite Zimbabwe's international commitments to anti-corruption and gender equality frameworks, domestic implementation remains limited and fragmented.[11]

The Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) has received allegations of sextortion in government agencies and parastatals. Still, it lacks prosecution authority and relies on referrals to law enforcement, which is biased and ineffective.[63] Furthermore, survivors are reluctant to disclose sextortion for fear of vengeance, embarrassment, or disbelief in the legal system. According to United Nations Development Programme Zimbabwe, underreporting is worsened by the lack of legal definitions and procedural standards for investigating and prosecuting these incidents.[64]

2.4 Gaps in Literature and Relevance of the Study

Despite increased worldwide acknowledgement of sextortion, there is still a significant conceptual gap in how it is defined and addressed in academic, legal and policy literature. Sextortion combines corruption and sexual exploitation.[65] However, most legal systems consider these matters separately. As a result, sextortion is either under-classified as a sexual offence or completely ignored under anti-corruption legislation. This uncertainty affects prosecution and policy creation, particularly in nations such as Zimbabwe, where corruption is still primarily financial.[66] Goetz has noted the masculinised aspect of anti-corruption discourse, which ignores gendered abuses of power in favour of grand corruption and elite accountability.[67] Secondly, data on sextortion is limited. There are no dedicated government or institutional statistics tracking sextortion instances worldwide or in Africa. Available literature originates from qualitative interviews, civil society surveys, or media exposés. For example, Transparency International Zimbabwe's 2019 report provides some of the few quantitative insights on how sextortion occurs in the country.[68] However, there is little to no

63 Zimbabwe Gender Commission (2020) *ZGC Annual Report 2020* Harare: Zimbabwe Gender Commission, available at https://zgc.co.zw/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ZGC-2020-Annual-Report.pdf (visited 15 October 2025) at 10.
64 Transparency International Zimbabwe (2019) at 10.
65 Dolch (2023).
66 Zimbabwe Gender Commission at 23 (2020).
67 Goetz (2007) at 93.
68 Transparency International Zimbabwe (2019) at 5.

academic literature on the subject that systematically examines how sextortion is addressed within national legal and institutional systems.

While existing scholarship has significantly advanced the conceptual understanding of sextortion as a form of gendered corruption, there remains limited research examining how these frameworks operate within specific national legal and institutional contexts. In particular, there is little analysis of how sextortion is addressed within Zimbabwe's anti-corruption and criminal justice systems. This article therefore, contributes to the literature by examining how Zimbabwe's legal and institutional architecture shapes the recognition, reporting and regulation of sextortion, and by analysing the legal tension between corruption law and sexual offences law in regulating this form of abuse of power.

3. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a qualitative desk-based research approach combining documentary analysis with doctrinal legal analysis to investigate the phenomenon of sextortion in Zimbabwe. This approach is suitable for analysing sensitive and under-reported phenomena such as sextortion. The methodology draws upon an extensive review of primary and secondary sources, including reports, academic journal articles, non-governmental organisations' publications, newspaper articles and blogs from reputable organisations such as Transparency International Zimbabwe and Reuters. These sources provide insight into how sextortion manifests across public sectors such as education, healthcare, housing and criminal justice.[69] A thematic content analysis was used to synthesise the various dimensions of sextortion as documented in existing literature.[70] The analysis pays close attention to recurring patterns of abuse and systemic failure in addressing complaints made by women who were coerced into sexual acts in exchange for services that should be freely available under Zimbabwean law.[71]

69 Transparency International (2019) at 17.

70 Braun V & Clarke V (2006) "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology" 3(2) *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 77-101 at 80, available at https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa (visited 15 October 2025).

71 Transparency International (2019) at 17.

The study also analyses Zimbabwe's legal and policy framework governing corruption and gender-based violence to assess how existing laws and institutions respond to sextortion. This doctrinal analysis examines relevant statutory provisions, institutional mandates and regulatory gaps within Zimbabwe's anti-corruption and criminal justice framework**.** Together, these documents help situate Zimbabwe's sextortion problem within a broader continental and global context. This desktop research contributes to emerging scholarship that positions sextortion as a critical issue at the intersection of corruption, gender inequality and human rights.

4. UNDERSTANDING SEXTORTION IN THE CONTEXT OF ZIMBABWE

Sextortion emerges in Zimbabwe's public service sectors through power disparities and weak accountability mechanisms. Women, particularly those from low-income, rural, or informal backgrounds, face sexual coercion when attempting to access constitutionally protected services. This includes public healthcare, education, employment possibilities, housing programmes, legal identification cards and even assistance from the police.[72] According to Chingono, sextortion was the most common non-monetary bribe paid by various officials to women in the informal sector.[73] Approximately 57.5% of women reported receiving demands for sexual favours to gain access to a service and 15% used sex to obtain employment.[74] Women in business may also face sexual objectification within male-dominated power structures, where access to opportunities is shaped by gendered stereotypes and unequal power relations.[75] This illustrates how sextortion operates as a systemic barrier to women's access to essential services and economic opportunities.

A 2014 investigation at Dr George Mukhari Hospital revealed that employment between 2007 and 2014 was often offered in exchange for sexual acts with senior officials. Sextortion also cuts across borders. In 2017, the United States Equal Employment

72 Rheinbay & Chêne (2016).
73 Chingono (2020).
74 Transparency International Zimbabwe (2019) at 11.
75 Szymanski DM, Moffitt LB & Carr ER (2011) "Sexual Objectification of Women: Advances to Theory and Research" 39(1) *The Counseling Psychologist* 6-38 at 10-16, available at APA PDF Article (visited 15 October 2025.

Opportunity Commission investigated a regional supervisor accused of demanding sex from male subordinates in return for workplace benefits, illustrating that this form of corruption transcends geography and gender.[76] More recently, digital technologies have created additional avenues for sextortion, including online scams and technology-facilitated sexual extortion schemes in which perpetrators threaten to distribute intimate images or personal information unless victims comply with their demands. Together, these examples reveal that sextortion is not an isolated moral failure but a structural abuse of power embedded within governance systems. In Zimbabwe, its impact is magnified by economic precarity, patriarchal norms and the absence of robust accountability mechanisms that protect women's rights in public service delivery.[77]

Women seeking land, especially single women and widows, are particularly exposed to sextortion in exchange for being allocated a small piece of land for residential, commercial, or agricultural purposes.[78] One illustrative case is that of Catherine Mazorodze, a former farmworker in Manicaland Province who sought a small plot of land after losing her job and home.[79] A local traditional leader informed her that, because she was young, she did not qualify for allocation unless she agreed to have sex with him. Out of desperation and poverty, she complied. Her experience mirrors that of many rural women who are coerced into sexual relationships with local gatekeepers to access land or basic livelihood opportunities.[80] Transparency International Zimbabwe has documented similar abuses across sectors: women forced into sexual exchanges for gold-mining rights in Matabeleland South, vending spaces in Bulawayo, and inclusion in urban housing schemes.[81]

These patterns are replicated in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning. Financial insecurity and academic power dynamics make female students especially vulnerable to coercion.[82] A 2011 study by Morley found that students often enter transactional sexual

76 Feigenblatt (2020) at 14.
77 Chingono (2020).
78 Transparency International Zimbabwe (2019) at 05.
79 Ndhlovu L (3 October 2019) "Zimbabwean Women Struggle to Shake off Sex-for-Land Corruption" *Reuters*, available at https://www.reuters.com/article/world/zimbabwean-women-struggle-to-shake-off-sex-for-land-corruption-idUSKBN1WI00A/ (visited 13 October 2025).
80 Ndhlovu (2019).
81 Transparency International Zimbabwe (2019) at vii.
82 Mupakaviri P (11 November 2019) "Zimbabwean Students Are Being Sexually Exploited to Pay Their

relationships to afford rent, food, and tuition.[83] A 2018 study by Mukwidigwi revealed that some lecturers solicit sex in exchange for academic favours, such as better grades.[84] Thus, many female students in higher education had experienced sexual harassment by male staff, often in exchange for "exam passes".[85] The lack of legal recognition of sextortion and weak university reporting systems exacerbate this abuse.[86] Thandie, a former university student, reported how she was propositioned by a lecturer in exchange for continued high marks. As class representative, she was called to his office under a pretence and was later harassed.[87] After reporting the incident to university authorities, she was re-traumatised by an all-male investigative panel, unclear procedures, and a lack of support. "I reported my case, but nothing was done. They made it feel like it's all my fault," [88] she said. Ultimately, she dropped out due to the trauma and familial pressure. Her story exemplifies how survivors are failed by institutions that lack gender-sensitive and confidential reporting systems.[89]

This phenomenon is not confined to Zimbabwe. Globally, extortion of girls by their teachers is one of the best-documented forms of sextortion. A 2014 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report on school-related gender violence found that sextortion, alongside other types of sexual abuse, is widespread across multiple regions.[90] In the Central African Republic, the Pulitzer Centre documented that the

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Tuition" *Women's Media Centre*, available at https://womensmediacentre.com/fbomb/zimbabwean-students-are-being-sexually-exploited-to-pay-their-tuition (visited 14 October 2025).

83 Morley (2011) at 107.

84 Mukwidigwi (2018) at 34.

85 See Mugodzwa T & Ngwerume M (2023) "The Prevalence of Sexual Harassment in Institutions of Higher Learning in Zimbabwe in the Twenty-First Century: Perceptions from Students and Lecturers in Zimbabwe State Universities" 16(2) *The Dyke* 1-23 at 10, 15 available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/397215969_The_prevalence_of_sexual_harassment_in_institutions_of_higher_learning_in_Zimbabwe_in_the_twenty-first_century_Perceptions_from_students_and_lecturers_in_Zimbabwe_State_Universities (visited 15 October 2025).

86 Mupakaviri (2019).

87 Mundopa (2020).

88 Mundopa (2020).

89 UNCAC Coalition (2022).

90 Leach F, Dunne M & Salvi F (2014) *School-Related Gender-Based Violence: A Global Review of Current Issues and Approaches in Policy, Programming and Implementation Responses to School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) for the Education Sector* Background Research Paper prepared for UNESCO, available at https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/schoolrelatedgenderbasedviolenceunescoglobalreviewjan2014.pdf (visited 15 October 2025) at 16.

practice is so entrenched that students refer to it as "sexually transmitted grades." According to the report, girls who reject teachers' advances risk exam failure, punishment, or public humiliation, while those who comply are often rewarded with money, gifts, food, good grades, or even promises of marriage.[91] Developed countries are not immune: in the United States, for example, a high school teacher in Alabama operated a "sex-for-grades" scheme so notorious that female students warned one another to bring their boyfriends to class as protection.[92]

These examples demonstrate that sextortion in educational institutions reflects a universal abuse of power, not limited by geography or development status. However, in contexts like Zimbabwe, where gender inequality and institutional silence remain entrenched, the absence of legal frameworks and reporting systems leaves female students uniquely exposed, normalising sexual coercion as an informal mode of exchange within academic institutions.[93] Female students experience academic gatekeeping when they are propositioned by academic staff or administrators in return for marks or progression.[94] Most Zimbabwean schools and universities lack a defined procedure for identifying and handling such issues, further discouraging victims from reporting abuse.

Also, some police officers require some form of payment to help victims.[95] They may ask for transport or fuel to enable them to investigate; in other instances, they also get bribed by the perpetrators.[96] Some prison wardens ask for sexual favours from women in exchange for time away from the prison or getting bail in court.[97] Women operating in informal markets are frequently obliged to engage in sexual activity to avoid harassment or imprisonment.[98] However, none of these abuses are handled by particular legislation or institutional processes.

91 Feigenblatt (2020) at 14.
91 Feigenblatt (2020) at 14.
92 Feigenblatt (2020) at 15.
93 Mundopa (2020).
94 Zimbabwe Gender Commission (2020) at 23.
95 Chingono (2020).
96 Chingono (2020).
97 UNCAC Coalition (2022).
98 UNCAC Coalition (2022).

The public acceptance of gendered power disparities exacerbates the situation.[99] Because many instances of sextortion take place behind closed doors and are difficult to establish, they are frequently rejected as "consensual" acts, even when compulsion is evident.[100] Cultural norms also discourage reporting, since women who speak up risk being ostracised or stigmatised.[101] Furthermore, institutional actors, such as police and anti-corruption personnel, regularly fail to act on allegations, either owing to a lack of training or direct complicity.[102] These factors make sextortion more than simply a type of corruption; it is a systemic kind of gender-based violence that operates with legal impunity.

5. THE IMPACTS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES

Sextortion has serious consequences for women's rights, government integrity and social equality in Zimbabwe.[103] The combination of corruption and gender-based violence violates both constitutional guarantees and international human rights commitments. By coercing sexual acts in return for critical public services, abusers effectively deprive women of their rights to dignity, equality and justice.

The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act 20 of 2013 protects the rights to dignity, equality and freedom from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and prohibits discrimination based on sex or gender.[104] However, these rights remain illusory for women who face sexual extortion by public authorities, with service delivery contingent on submitting to abuse. Such tactics perpetuate male domination and undermine trust in governmental institutions. From a human rights perspective, states must prevent, investigate and remedy abuses committed by public officials.

Sextortion is a serious infringement on bodily autonomy and human dignity. Victims face coercive and demeaning treatment from individuals in positions of authority, with few

99 Oppong D & Bannor RK (2022) "Gender and Power Work Relationships: A Systematic Review on the Evidence from Africa and Asia" 8(1) *Cogent Social Sciences*, available at https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2031686 (visited 15 October 2025) at 2.
100 Oppong & Bannor (2022) at 17.
101 Transparency International Zimbabwe (2019) at 23.
102 Chingono (2020).
103 Chingono (2020).
104 Sections 51, 53 & 56 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act 20 of 2013.

options for remedy.[105] The coercive aspect of sextortion causes significant psychological suffering. Victims frequently suffer anxiety, humiliation, despair, and a low sense of self-worth.[106] Many people remain silent for fear of stigma, fear, reprisal, public humiliation, or being discredited by law, police, religious leaders, or their communities.[107] This anxiety is heightened in Zimbabwe, where socio-cultural norms frequently stigmatise victims of sexual exploitation rather than supporting them. As a result, women who have been sextorted may withdraw from public life, schooling, or work opportunities, exacerbating their marginalisation.[108] Survivors often struggle to obtain justice due to weaknesses in the legal and institutional response. Law enforcement agents who lack gender-sensitive training frequently dismiss women's reports or re-traumatise them. This impunity sends a strong message that abusing authority for sexual gain is acceptable, legitimising sexual exploitation in public life.

Also, sextortion has an economic and social impact on women and communities. Research indicates that women are often denied or face barriers to accessing essential public services, including healthcare, education, employment opportunities and justice, due to gendered forms of corruption and coercion.[109] Sextortion can therefore also be understood as a form of structural discrimination, as gendered power imbalances within public institutions disproportionately expose women to coercive exchanges when seeking access to essential services. This exclusion exacerbates gendered poverty, perpetuates reliance, and limits women's economic participation.[110] Girls who are sextorted at school are more likely to drop out, continuing cycles of marginalisation and restricting their life opportunities.[111] Sextortion reduces educational achievement and career chances, leading to long-term economic inequality and a wider gender gap in income and representation.

Moreover, sextortion has significant and largely under-recognised implications for sustainable development. Beyond individual trauma, it hinders the advancement of gender

105 Oppong & Bannor (2022) at 17.
106 Mvelase & Mvuvu (2021).
107 Mvelase & Mvuvu (2021).
108 Chingono (2020).
109 Feigenblatt (2020) at 20.
110 Feigenblatt (2020) at 20.
111 Feigenblatt (2020) at 20.

equality and obstructs women's full and equal participation in society. As a gendered form of corruption, it distorts decision-making, leads to inefficient resource allocation, and undermines good governance.[112] This is particularly damaging in Zimbabwe, where institutional fragility already challenges equitable development. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges these intersections by positioning gender equality (SDG 5)[113] and the fight against corruption and bribery (SDG 16.5)[114] as cross-cutting goals fundamental to the realisation of all other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[115]

Sextortion also erodes institutional credibility. When citizens regard public officials as predators rather than protectors, the rule of law suffers.[116] Women's trust in the court system decreases and they lose faith in the state's protective measures. Sextortion persists, indicating institutional weakness and tolerance for abuse. These practices undermine Zimbabwe's international obligations relating to anti-corruption, gender equality and the protection of women from violence.[117] Similarly, Zimbabwe is required by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to protect women from gender-based violence, provide access to justice, and implement appropriate remedies.[118] Failure to handle sextortion not only violates these principles but also indicates a lack of political will to combat gendered forms of corruption and protect women's dignity and rights.

Finally, institutionalising sextortion encourages gender inequity and maintains impunity.[119] In environments with significant unemployment and inadequate service delivery, sexual exploitation is frequently justified as a survival tactic or as part of the "cost" of getting

112 Feigenblatt (2020) at 20.
113 United Nations (2015) *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, A/RES/70/1, Goal 5 — Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls, available at https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda (visited 15 October 2025).
114 United Nations (2015) Target 16.5.
115 United Nations (2015) Target 16.5.
116 Feigenblatt (2020) at 20
117 Articles 2, 3, 4 & 8 of the Maputo Protocol (2003).
118 United Nations (1979) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women (visited 15 October 2025).
119 Feigenblatt (2020) at 20.

services. This societal acceptability hides sextortion and hinders reporting.[120] Addressing sextortion, therefore, requires effective accountability mechanisms, including accessible reporting procedures, independent oversight institutions and legal frameworks capable of recognising and prosecuting abuses of power involving non-monetary benefits. To address this issue, societal norms must be changed via education, accountability, and survivor-centred justice processes, in addition to legal reforms. Inaction has structural consequences: sextortion perpetuates systemic inequality, undermines public institutions, and breaches Zimbabwe's commitments to preserve gender justice and integrity in governance.[121]

6. LEGAL AND POLICY ANALYSIS

Although Zimbabwe has adopted several institutional, legal and policy frameworks promoting gender equality, the country ranks low on the United Nations gender inequality index.[122] Sexual extortion is not recognised as a specific form of corruption within Zimbabwe's anti-corruption legal framework.[123] Zimbabwe's current legal and institutional framework remains insufficient to adequately identify, prevent and prosecute sextortion. This deficiency reflects a systemic inability to examine the gendered components of corruption, particularly when people in positions of power seek non-monetary transactions, such as sexual favours, in exchange for access to essential rights and government services. Zimbabwe's anti-corruption legislation is primarily structured around financial or material forms of bribery. Statutory provisions addressing corruption generally focus on the exchange of money, gifts or other tangible benefits as the basis of corrupt conduct. Consequently, sextortion does not easily fall within existing bribery provisions, even though it clearly constitutes an abuse of entrusted power for private gain. This doctrinal gap illustrates how existing corruption legislation remains conceptually ill-equipped to address non-monetary forms of corruption rooted in gendered power relations.

120 Mundopa (2020).
121 Mupakaviri (2019).
122 United Nations Development Programme (2024) *Human Development Report 2023/2024: Breaking the Gridlock – Reimagining Cooperation in a Polarized World* New York: United Nations Development Programme, available at https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2023-24 (visited 1 May 2026) at 289.
123 Mpedi (2024).

The major anti-corruption legislation, the Prevention of Corruption Act (Chapter 9:16), criminalises acts of bribery and abuse of public office that involve cash or material inducements. However, it does not expand its scope to include sexual favours as a kind of corrupt satisfaction.[124] This restricted conception of corruption reflects a traditional legal paradigm that sees corruption only in economic terms, failing to capture gendered and power-based forms of abuse that are not financially motivated.[125] In addition, the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (Chapter 9:23) handles sexual offences such as rape, indecent assault, and abuse of office.[126] However, the regulation needs proof of force, threat, or lack of consent, as conventionally characterised.[127] In the instance of sextortion, compulsion is often institutional or situational, rather than outwardly violent. Women may be informed that refusing to comply with a sexual demand may result in denial of a service, employment, or protection.[128] In such cases, consent is tainted by the power imbalance, but the law does not sufficiently appreciate this distinction. As a result, there is a legal void in which victims of sextortion are frequently unable to seek a remedy under either corruption laws or sexual offence legal frameworks. This legal gap highlights a broader conceptual problem within regulatory frameworks: sextortion falls between corruption law and sexual offences law, illustrating how existing legal categories struggle to address abuses of power that involve coercive exchanges rather than financial bribery or overt physical violence. The Zimbabwean case, therefore, illustrates how gendered forms of corruption challenge traditional legal distinctions between bribery and sexual violence.

Article 4 of the Maputo Protocol, to which Zimbabwe is a signatory, requires state parties to put in place laws that will punish perpetrators of violence against women, particularly those in official positions.[129] The article mandates that states should protect women from abuse in both public and private dimensions and it specifically mentions the responsibilities of public authorities. Sextortion constitutes a form of gender-based violence

124 Prevention of Corruption Act (Chapter 9:16).
125 Transparency International (2019) at 09.
126 Sections 65, 66 & 174 of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23].
127 Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23].
128 IAWJ (2012) at 12.
129 Article 4 of the Maputo Protocol (2003).

when public officials abuse their authority to demand sexual favours. Zimbabwe violates its Protocol responsibilities by failing to specifically criminalise sextortion. Zimbabwe is also a signatory to the UNCAC, which it signed in 2007. Article 5 of the UNCAC requires nations to develop and execute effective anti-corruption measures that promote accountability and integrity in public administration.[130] Although the UNCAC does not expressly mention sextortion, interpretations by UNODC confirm that sexual exploitation in the performance of public tasks is a type of corruption that must be addressed by legislative and institutional change.[131] The inability to include sexual coercion in anti-corruption frameworks not only violates UNCAC principles but also hinders broader development goals, notably those related to gender equality and access to justice.

From an institutional standpoint, the present architecture is unable to deal with sextortion. Legally, ZACC is obligated to investigate and prevent corruption, although its concentration remains mostly on financial crimes such as embezzlement and procurement fraud.[132] According to Chingono, the lack of political will to deal with corruption has frustrated the efforts of ZACC, which has a mandate to investigate corruption cases in the country.[133] It lacks a gender desk, educated people in sexual exploitation, and standards for dealing with sextortion accusations. As a result, incidents of sexual coercion are either ignored, disregarded, or misclassified, resulting in minimal responsibility.

In contrast, the ZGC is tasked with monitoring and promoting gender equality, as well as investigating systematic gender-based discrimination. While ZGC has received complaints in recent years alleging sextortion, such as women being solicited for sex in exchange for job placements or police protection, its powers are restricted to inquiry and suggestion.[134] It lacks prosecution jurisdiction and is frequently reliant on law enforcement authorities like the Zimbabwe Republic Police, which lack the sensitivity and ability to probe sexual corruption.[135]

130 Article 5 of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (2004).
131 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020) at 97.
132 Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (2022) *ZACC Annual Report 2022* Harare: Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission, available at https://www.veritaszim.net/node/6190 (visited 15 October 2025).
133 Chingono (2020).
134 Zimbabwe Gender Commission (2020).
135 U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (2022) *Gender Transformative Approaches to Anti-Corruption* Bergen: U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, available

This separation of institutional mandates between a corruption commission that is not gender responsive and a gender commission that is unable to prosecute leaves a considerable vacuum in enforcement and victim protection. While memoranda of understanding exist between the two commissions, partnerships are limited, sporadic, and underfunded. The lack of inter-agency frameworks or standard operating procedures for sextortion exacerbates the fragmentation.[136] Another challenge is the lack of clear, survivor-centred reporting systems. Victims of sextortion must report to police stations or government offices, which are often the same institutions where the abuse happens. This leads to a double victimisation: women are obliged to repeat their experiences to possibly hostile or dismissive officials, with no promise of secrecy or safety.[137] In a situation where social stigma around sexual behaviour remains strong and reporting may jeopardise women's livelihoods or reputations, the lack of safe routes adds considerably to underreporting.[138] Furthermore, sextortion data is rarely gathered systematically, and instances are rarely broken down by gender or kind of abuse, making evidence-based regulation practically difficult. These challenges highlight the need for alternative approaches adopted in other jurisdictions, which provide useful models for Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe might benefit from reforming its anti-corruption legislation to be more gender-sensitive and victim-responsive.

Zimbabwe's refusal to identify and criminalise sextortion exposes a fundamental shortcoming in its battle against corruption and gender-based violence. While the state has made constitutional and institutional pledges to tackle these concerns, the absence of synergy between anti-corruption and gender justice frameworks ensures impunity. Without immediate legislative change, enhanced institutional coordination, and survivor-centred processes, sextortion will remain a hidden and unpunished crime, undermining women's access to rights, resources and justice.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

at https://www.u4.no/publications/gender-transformative-approaches-to-anti-corruption/fullversion (visited 15 October 2025).

136 Rheinbay & Chêne (2016).

137 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020) at 97.

138 Zimbabwe Gender Commission (2020).

Addressing sextortion in Zimbabwe requires coordinated legal, institutional and societal reforms. The following recommendations are based on international best practices, Zimbabwe's constitutional and treaty commitments and findings from anti-corruption and gender justice frameworks.

7.1 Legal reform

The Prevention of Corruption Act (Chapter 9:16) and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (Chapter 9:23) need to be modified to criminalise sextortion. This involves classifying sexual favours as a type of "gratification" and incorporating the use of institutional authority to obtain such favours in the definitions of both corruption and sexual violence. Current legal mechanisms fail to handle power-based coercion in situations where physical violence is not present, leaving victims without recourse.[139] Comparative examples from Tanzania, where legislation encompasses non-material inducements, and Mexico, where sextortion is dealt with under both corruption and gender-based violence statutes, give ideas for Zimbabwe to follow.[140] These measures are necessary to fully implement Zimbabwe's commitments under the Maputo Protocol and UNCAC.

7.2. Gender Mainstreaming in Anti-Corruption Institutions

ZACC must institutionalise a gender-sensitive strategy by establishing a separate Gender and Human Rights Desk. This section shall handle sextortion allegations and coordinate with the ZGC and other appropriate monitoring organisations.[141] Without institutional mandate harmonisation, victims will continue to fall through the gaps of a fragmented system. Inter-agency procedures, collaborative training, and data-sharing agreements should be formalised among ZACC, ZGC and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission.[142] Building such integrated systems would increase sextortion detection, referral and prosecution and enable evidence-based legislation.

139 Prevention of Corruption Act [Chapter 9:16], Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23].
140 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020) at 30.
141 Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission (2022).
142 Zimbabwe Gender Commission (2020).

7.3. Capacity Development and Strengthening for the Judicial System

The judicial system, particularly police, prosecutors and magistrates, must acquire extensive training in detecting, investigating, and prosecuting sextortion. Training should emphasise the legal frameworks that regulate both corruption and sexual exploitation, the nature of coerced consent, trauma-informed interviews, and survivor-sensitive procedures.[143] The Judicial Service Commission should include sextortion in judicial education and provide criteria for a suitable sentence. In many situations, frontline officers confuse sextortion with consenting sex, emphasising the significance of legal education and sensitivity training.[144] Interdisciplinary collaboration between anti-corruption professionals and gender-based violence specialists should be encouraged to increase investigative capability across sectors.

7.4. Reporting mechanisms should be safe and centred on survivors

Zimbabwe should establish reporting mechanisms that are anonymous, accessible and survivor-centred. Toll-free hotlines, secure SMS or WhatsApp services and digital applications related to legal help and psychosocial support are all possible options.[145] Reporting routes should be independently maintained and protected by strong whistle-blower legislation. Women frequently fear reprisal, scepticism, or institutional inactivity, particularly when the offender is in a position of authority.[146] Zimbabwe should adopt methods that protect dignity and ensure secrecy, drawing on the success of mobile-based reporting systems and survivor referral channels in the Philippines and Uganda.[147] These systems must be supported by trust-building community outreach.

7.5. Public awareness and change in societal standards

A nationwide awareness campaign needs to be undertaken to combat the social acceptance of sexual coercion in public service delivery. This campaign should be bilingual, multimodal,

143 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020) at 107.
144 U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (2022).
145 Transparency International (2019) at 23.
146 IAWJ (2012) at 11.
147 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020) at 83.

and culturally sensitive, reaching out to a varied audience through radio, television, social media, and community theatre. It should also work with religious leaders, traditional authorities, schools, and youth organisations to shift attitudes of gender, power, and accountability.[148] Sextortion should be addressed in the civic education curriculum in schools and colleges as a type of gender-based violence and corruption. Additionally, the state should publicise successful cases and protect whistle-blowers, giving a clear message that sextortion is a punishable crime rather than a negotiation.[149] All these suggested recommendations, legal reform, mainstreaming in institutions, judicial system training, survivor-centred methods and change of societal standards are all interconnected.

8. CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that sextortion in Zimbabwe operates as a systemic form of gendered corruption sustained by legal gaps, institutional fragmentation and entrenched patriarchal norms. This legal gap renders many acts of sextortion difficult to prosecute, thereby depriving survivors of effective legal remedies and institutional protection. By examining how the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Criminal Law Code fail to criminalise sextortion, along with the limitations of existing institutions like ZACC and ZGC, this article highlights the systemic nature of the problem**.**

If Zimbabwe aims to uphold the principles of justice, accountability, and gender equality outlined in its Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act 20 of 2013, the Maputo Protocol, and the UNCAC, sextortion must be addressed seriously. Legal reform must be supported by institutional coordination, survivor protection measures and public awareness campaigns. These recommendations on legislation, institutions, reporting and social change are essential. From a human rights perspective, addressing sextortion requires states to fulfil their positive obligations to protect individuals from abuses of power, ensure accountability and dismantle structural conditions that enable gendered corruption.

148 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2020) at 96.
149 Rheinbay & Chêne (2016).

Finally, combating sextortion is more than just eliminating a legal loophole; it is about ensuring that no woman is forced to choose between her body and her right to justice, education, healthcare, or a job. It is about restoring integrity to public service delivery and ensuring that Zimbabwe's anti-corruption and human rights framework protects all people, particularly those who are most susceptible to abuse of power. Addressing sextortion is therefore essential to strengthening the rule of law, protecting women's rights and promoting integrity in public governance.