

Screens and Schemes: Hong Kong's New Video Chat Blackmail Epidemic



It begins with a simple video chat, the quickly escalates into a full blown scam.

A concerning trend has emerged in Hong Kong's cybercrime landscape as police report that 59 residents, including four women, fell victim to online extortion schemes involving compromising video chats. The scams resulted in victims being coerced into paying over HK\$1.9 million (US\$244,430) in just one week.

A Calculated Pattern Of Deception

The sophisticated scheme typically follows a calculated pattern. Scammers, predominantly posing as women, initiate intimate video calls where they disrobe to persuade male victims to do the same. Unknown to the victims, these interactions are secretly recorded and later used as leverage for extortion, with criminals threatening to distribute the footage to the victim's social circles and family members.

Now Women Are Being Targeted With A Different Approach

Now female victims are being targeted through a different and slower approach to gain their confidence.

Fraudsters create fake profiles presenting themselves as successful, attractive men with high-level education and impressive careers. These criminals employ psychological manipulation tactics, building trust through detailed conversations about their victims' personal lives and interests before executing their extortion schemes.

An Epidemic Brewing?

"In the span of just one week, we documented 59 cases of what we're terming 'naked-chat blackmail,'" a police spokesperson revealed. "The total losses exceeded HK\$1.9 million, with four of these cases involving female victims."

These video chat scams contribute to a larger pattern of growing cyber fraud in Hong Kong. The first seven months of this year saw 24,407 reports of various deception cases, marking a 12% increase from the 21,798 cases recorded during the same timeframe in 2023. The financial impact has been severe, with losses surging by more than 50% to reach HK\$5.14 billion.

Law enforcement has not remained passive in the face of this crisis. Police have already arrested over 6,000 suspects connected to these scams and related criminal activities this year. However, authorities continue to emphasize the importance of preventive measures and digital awareness among Hong Kong residents.