

COPS: GIRL , 12 , BLACKMAILED BY BOY WHO EXACTED MONEY , SEX

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There was almost nothing this **12** -year-old wouldn't do to save her reputation.

She stole from her family. Went hungry. Submitted to sexual demands.

This school year, she was pressured into paying a 14-year-old **boy** up to \$2,000 over six months to keep him from spreading rumors that she wasn't a virgin.

"He's a **boy** . Everybody would believe him," said the **girl** , **who** reluctantly agreed to tell the Free Press her story.

"And I was worried it would get all over school, and then it would get all over Dearborn," she said last week as a tear trickled from the corner of her dark eye. "And then everybody would get mad at me and gang up on me."

So when the **boy** asked for **money** , she paid. Twenty dollars here, \$50 there. Police say they believe she even took part in oral and anal **sex** with the **boy** to keep him quiet.

All for the sake of being a good **girl** in a society that punishes those **who** aren't.

Fearful of blame and reprisal, the **girl** dared not go to an adult for help. But when her parents reported a burglary in March, a police investigation began that has since unraveled a disturbing tale of preteen **sex** and extortion involving a handful of Dearborn middle school students, including at least two female victims and two male suspects.

"The investigations aren't complete, but our goal is to come up with enough evidence to bring charges in both cases," Dearborn Police Chief Ronald Deziel said.

This discovery comes on the heels of news that Grosse Pointe North High School's senior class president and three of his friends have been charged with sexually assaulting three freshmen **girls** . In that case, too, the **girls** didn't come forward immediately. Instead, authorities got involved months after the alleged assaults occurred when an illicit yearbook photo got people talking.

Therapists say these incidents -- and the **girls** ' reluctance to report them -- are evidence that society's double standard stigmatizing women for sexual involvement still holds strong.

And in the **12** -year-old Dearborn **girl** 's close-knit conservative Arab-Muslim community -- where dating isn't allowed, female virginity is sacred and a father killed his daughter for having a boyfriend -- the stigma is especially harsh. It's not just a **girl** 's reputation at stake; it is her family's name and possibly her safety.

Although the religion of Islam says **sex** before marriage is wrong, in metro Detroit's Arab-Muslim community, **boys** date and have **sex** before marriage without repercussions.

But not **girls** .

"These **boys** knew exactly what they were doing, and they knew they could get away with it because of the added pressures on **girls** in that community," Deziel said. "They were taking advantage of a cultural situation."

Deziel said he expects to arrest two **boys** on suspicion of felony extortion. Sexual-assault charges, which would each carry a maximum life sentence because the **sex** involved victims under 13, are unlikely, he said, because they would be difficult to prove amid the twists and turns of the cases.

Details of the second case were unavailable.

The **12** -year-old **girl** 's saga began last fall when she and the 14-year-old **boy** engaged in sexual activity. It's unclear what that involved, but intercourse was not part of it.

Soon after, threats followed. He told her that if she didn't give him **money** , he would tell people what she had done and more. At first, she didn't pay him, and he started telling tales. To get him to stop -- and take back anything he had already said -- she began giving him **money** whenever he asked.

Lunch **money** . Allowance. Gifts. Cash she found around the house. Even **money** she took from her sister.

Sometimes he asked for **money** every day at school. Other times, he had say that if she gave him \$50 on a Monday, he wouldn't ask for any more until the next week.

At some point, anal **sex** and oral **sex** became part of the tradeoff. Police suspect it happened at her house in the afternoons before her parents came home from work or on weekends at his house, where she frequently went to play with his sister.

And it might have continued if not for the burglary.

Her mother came home from work one day in March, and the **12** -year-old said some **boys** had broken into the house. Four of the mother's gold rings and a necklace were missing.

Within days after her parents reported the burglary, talk around the neighborhood was that she knew the **boys who** had committed the crime. Curious, the parents queried their daughter and searched her room, finding a diary that detailed some of the payoffs and **sex** .

Police soon determined that there was no burglary. Instead, they say, the **girl** took the jewelry, had three **boys** trade it to get cash for her and then used the cash to pay off the 14-year-old **boy** .

The **girl** , **who** admits to paying the **boy** and taking part in some **sex** acts, said she had nothing to do with the burglary. And because she fears legal action against the **boy** will only make things worse for her, she has been reluctant to help investigators.

"I just wish this would all fade away," she said, fidgeting with her fingernails. "I wish it would've never happened. I'm really just trying to forget about it.

"I don't want to have to stand up and testify against him and have everybody get mad at me. And I don't want everybody to know about all this."

Until taking a police lie detector test in May, she had talked only to a few friends and confided in her diary. She said her parents were "the last people" she wanted to talk to and that she didn't feel comfortable talking to her male counselor at school.

She still refuses to open up to her parents, despite their attempts to talk.

"They think it's all my fault," she said, while her mother waited in another room.

In a separate interview, the mother said she doesn't completely blame her daughter, but she has lost trust in her. "I'm not mad at her per se," she said. "I'm mad that she -- that any woman -- would let a young man intimidate her so much that they would do these things. It makes me sick.

" **Sex** and **money** ," she said shaking her head. "This is what 20-year-old people do, not **12** -year-old kids.

"I've never even had a **sex** conversation with her. I didn't think it was necessary."

The **girl** 's parents say they understand why their daughter was scared. Her mother pointed to the stories of Arab-Muslim fathers stoning unwed daughters **who** 've lost their virginity. And there was the Dearborn case in the late 1980s in which a father shot his teenage daughter to death because she defied him **by** having a boyfriend.

"There is a real double standard," she said. "Islamically, you're not supposed to have **sex** before marriage. But culturally, if the **boys** do it, it's OK. If the **girls** do it, it's not. My daughter knows this."

Even her parents' reaction reinforced her fears. At the first mention of sexual activity, they took her to a doctor. "My biggest concern was that she wasn't a virgin any more," her father said. "For a Muslim **girl** , that is everything. And thank God, she still is. Everything else, I can deal with."

Still, his daughter has received no counseling.

"It's a cultural thing," her mother explained. "My husband thinks if she goes to counseling, people would find out and think she's in trouble.

"But I think I'm going to call to set up an appointment anyway."

Meanwhile, Deziel said his department will do its part to protect other **girls** from similar trouble. When students return to school this fall, police officers will work with faculty to spread the word that extortion and sexual activity involving minors is illegal, violators will be prosecuted and victims should always notify police.

"We need to make sure these kids understand that this is not permissible, that it's criminal and that it won't be tolerated," he said.

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