

# GnuPG/GPG- An Implementation of the OpenPGP standard

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**Abstract**—The acceleration in the advance of web communication has leads to extension growth of the data privacy risks and increase in the vulnerability of the data. Cryptography is an indispensable in computer communication, due to the online privacy concerns our data is not safe without encryption. Zimmerman invented the PGP encryption standard, where it is then implemented as GPG - an Opensource. It gives the effective solution for the secure email communication Here, I have discussed about its function, its RSA computation by taking Libgcrypt's, and its Historical changes by fixing the vulnerabilities.

**Keywords**— public key, random number generation, cryptography, Symmetricity, signature, Error Function, Hash Functions, RSA algorithm

## I. PGP AND OPENPGP OVERVIEW

In 1991, Phil Zimmerman- the man behind the PGP Program, in order to provide privacy, security, and authentication for the online communication systems. In 1997, Phil proposed to the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) to create an open source PGP. It was accepted and created as an OpenPGP, defines the standard format to encrypt and decrypt over the internet, authenticate messages with digital signatures and encrypt stored files-Full-disk Encryption and network protection.

Chronological Releases:

PGP (1991) → OpenPGP (1997) → GnuPG (1999)

\*PGP is currently owned by Symantec Corporation, it is a proprietary version

## II. PGP FUNCTION:

It uses public and private key pairs-but it performs encryption and decryption in more difficult forms as it combines both the symmetric and asymmetric cryptography. Let's look on the

### A. PGP Encryption:

The sender of the message has the original plain messages, then generates a random symmetric encryption key, sender encrypts the message using the random key and encrypts the random key with the recipient's public key. Sender then transfers the encrypted message which is the combination of the encrypted data and the encrypted random key.

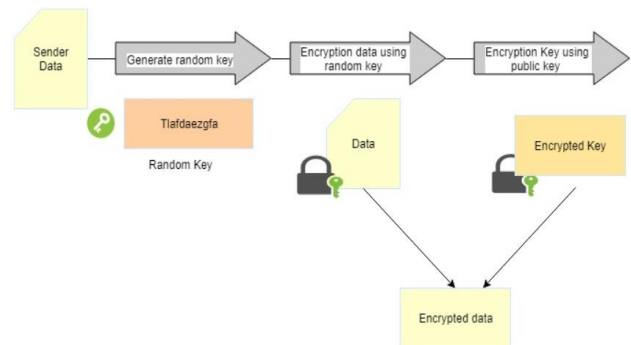


Fig. 1. Example of a figure caption. (PGPEncryption) drawn in draw.io

### B. PGP Decryption:

When the recipient receives the encryption messages, the user performs the following decryption process

- Firstly, the recipient decrypts the encrypted random key using the recipient's private key.
- It produces the random key created by the sender.
- Next, the recipient uses that random key to decrypt the encrypted message and retrieve the original message.

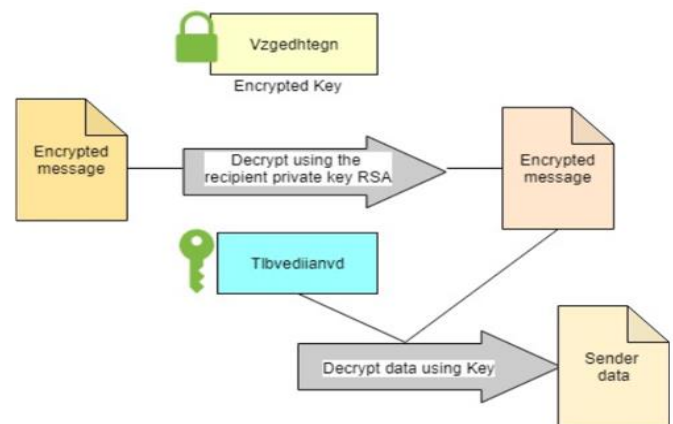


Fig. 2. Example of a figure caption. (PGP Decryption) drawn in draw.io

### C. Into GnuPG (GPG):

GnuPG is the implementation of the OpenPGP and its free. As it has been derived from the OpenPGP standard, it uses the Hybrid-encryption- where *Symmetric-key cryptography for speed* + public-key cryptography for flexibility in secure key *exchange* and it uses access modules for all kinds of public key directories. This protocol is widely used for email communication encryption.

Moreover, GPG is the command line tool also called as universal crypto engine does not have any graphic tools.

GnuPG has 2 prominent versions: GnuPG 1.x and GnuPG 2.x. GnuPG 2.x this supports the modern encryption algorithms that should be preferred over GnuPG 1.x[1].

#### D. GPG Trust model using the Web of trust:

Trust and authenticity networks are possible solutions for the key authenticity problem in this decentralized public-key infrastructure. A trust model, the so-called Web of Trust, has been proposed for and is implemented in this popular e-mail GnuPG. Yes, instead of the digital certificate in traditional key exchange, here we are using the Web of trust (WoT) [2].

1. Firstly, there are three levels of trust supported: complete trust, marginal trust, and no trust.
2. The owner of the key ring, who needs to manually assign these trust values for all other users, automatically receives full trust (also called implicit or ultimate trust).
3. When a user places trust in an introducer, implicitly it means that the user possesses a certain amount of confidence in the introducer's capability to issue valid certificates, i.e. correct bindings between users and public keys.

#### E. Key Validation in GPG

Based on such trust values, the GPG trust model suggests accepting a given public key in the key ring as completely valid, if anyone of the following

- (a) the public key belongs to the owner of the key ring,
- (b) the key ring contains at least C certificates from completely trusted introducers with valid which public keys,
- (c) the key ring should contain at least M certificates from marginally trusted introducers with the proper valid public keys.

In order to compensate for the above-mentioned mess-up of the trust levels, the PGP trust model allows the users to individually adjust the two scepticism parameters C (also called COMPLETES NEEDED) and M (also called MARGINALS NEEDED).

In general, higher numbers for these parameters imply that more people would be needed to conspire against you. The default values in GPG are C = 1 and M = 2, and C = 1 and M = 3 in GnuPG. If a given key is not completely valid according to the above rules, but if at least one certificate of a marginally or completely trusted introducer with a valid public key is present, then the key attains the status marginally valid.[6]

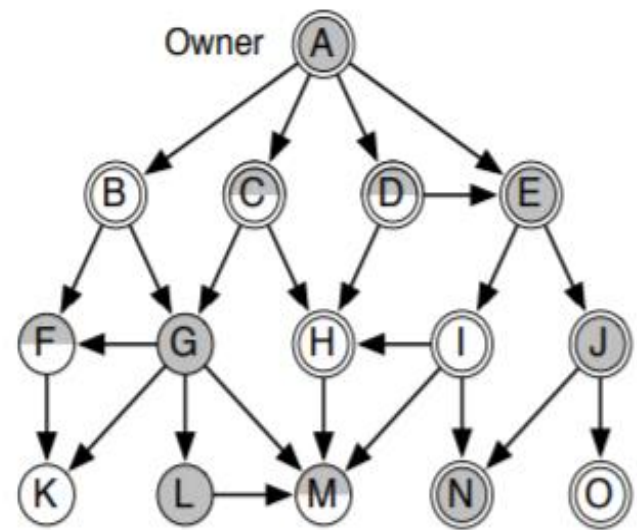


Fig. 3. Example of a figure caption. (web of trust tree) adapted from[2]

**Example:** Considering the certificate graph which shown in above figure which illustrates the PGP trust model. An arrow from X to Y representing a certificate issued by X for Y. Grey circles indicating the **complete trust** (A, E, G, J, L, N), grey semicircles indicate **marginal trust** (C, D, F, M), and white circles indicate **no trust** (B, H, I, K, O). The results of the key validation are shown for C = 1 and M = 2. Completely valid public keys are represented by nested circles (A, B, C, D, E, H, I, J, N, O). It is good to noting that all public keys with a certificate issued by A, the owner of the key ring, which are completely valid.

We are here to discuss about one of the GPG cryptographic libraries – Libgcrypt which is written in C program.

#### Libgcrypt Library (Gcrypt):

Libgcrypt is a general-purpose cryptographic library and it is most widely used Library on GPG. It is C language-based code and it facilitates functions for all cryptographic building blocks such as symmetric ciphers, hash algorithms, MACs, large integer functions, public key algorithms, random numbers and a lot of supporting functions. It has two advantages such as

- it is Opensource-free to use
- It encapsulates the low-level cryptography-using extendable and flexible API compared to others

Importantly, Library is fully dependable on the library ‘libpgp-error’, it contains the common error handling for GPG.

All the interfaces of the Libcrypt libraries are defined in this header file – `#include <gcrypt.h>` thus the function and the type name are `gcry_*` and `GCRY*` for the other symbol and as same applies for the libpgp-error where it uses `gpg_err_*` and `GPG_ERR_*`.

Additionally, gcrypt.h file is attached along with this following zip file

Many functions in Libgcrypt could be return an error if they fail. It handles **gcry\_error\_t** datatype and the multiple function which extracts the error code and handle it.

**Multi-Threading**, this library called as thread-safe that supports the multithreading when it call-back its command GCRYCTL\_SET\_THREAD\_CBS.

#### F. Architecture of the Libgcrypt:

The two most paramount things about any encryption technique are the algorithm and the key. Conventional protection of sensitive data where it requires a strong algorithm, which means that it's harder to break mathematically. Additionally, It requires that the key which is used to encrypt and decrypt the data is protected properly. Where the Libgcrypt's cryptographic blocks description has been explained in below

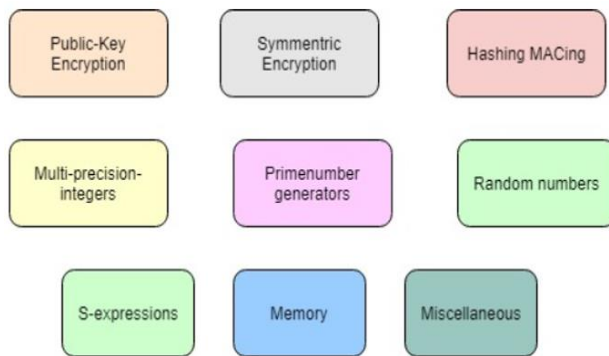


Fig. 4. Example of a figure caption. (Libgcrypt architecture) draw.io

#### G. Symmetric cryptography:

As seen in the introduction, the user initially generates the random symmetric encryption, to generate those it uses the cipher functions-where it utilizes the shared key. GPG has numerous available cipher function, each function starts with GCRY\_CIPHER\_\*, in order to use the cipher algorithm ,user allocates an according handle using following function

```
gcry_error_t gcry_cipher_open (gcry_cipher_hd_t *hd, int
algo, int mode, unsigned int flags) [Function]
```

where the ID of algorithm to use must be specified via algo it follows chosen algorithm AES, AES128, RIJNDAEL, BLOWFISH, 3DES, GOST28147 etc

#### H. Public Key cryptography:

This is also known as the asymmetric cryptography used for key management and to provide digital signatures, Libgcrypt allows two completely versatile interface to public key cryptography- RSA (Rivest-Shamir-Adleman) algorithms as well as DSA (Digital Signature Algorithm) and Elgamal.

1. This feature allows to add more algorithms in future
2. It uses s expression libraries API in C thus the S-expressions are a data structure for representing complex

data. It is used to read the complex integer codes by parsing where the following information is stored

- keys
- plain text data
- encrypted data
- Signatures

3. To create S-expressions is by using **gcry\_sexp\_build** where it allows rp pass a string to insert MPI (multi-precision-integers)

#### I. How the RSA algorithm is really computed in Libgcrypt library:

An RSA private key and public key syntax is described by this S-expression:

```
(private key /* Private key*/
(rsa
(n n-mpi)
(e-e-mpi)
(d d-mpi)
(p p-mpi)
(q q-mpi)
(u u-mpi)))
(public key /* Public key*/
(rsa
(n n-mpi)
(e e-mpi)))
n-mpi RSA public modulus n.
e-mpi RSA public exponent e.
d-mpi RSA secret exponent d = e-1 mod (p - 1) (q - 1). /* rsa-use-e value*/
p-mpi RSA secret prime p.
q-mpi RSA secret prime q with p < q.
u-mpi Multiplicative inverse u = p-1 mod q. /*
```

\* Where rsa-use-e value can be only used with RSA to give a hint for the public exponent. The value will be used as a base to test for a usable exponent. Some values are special:

‘0’ - Use a secure and fast value. This is currently the number 41.

‘1’ - Use a value as required by some crypto policies. This is

currently the number 65537.

‘2’ - Reserved

‘> 2’ - Use the given value.

For signing and decryption the parameters (p, q, u) are optional but using that it greatly improves the performance[4].

#### J. Cryptographic Functions-About #PKCS:

Based on the RSA, Libgcrypt uses PKCS#1 block type 2 padding for encryption, block type 1 padding for signing, It is described as

(data  
(flags pkcs1)  
(value block))

The above function checks that this data can be used with the given key, does the padding and encrypts it. If function is successful, it will return value will be 0 and the format will be as

(enc-val  
(rsa  
(a a-mpi))

Here it defines the mathematical properties and definitions that above said RSA public key and private keys must have the traditional key pair is as calculated as the following functions:

*gcry\_error\_t gcry\_pk\_sign (gcry\_sexp t \*r\_sig, gcry\_sexp t data, gcry\_sexp t skey)*

This function creates a digital signature for data using the private key skey and place

it into the variable at the address of r sig data may either be the simple. Mostly, this will be "sha256" or "sha1"

(data  
(flags pkcs1)  
(hash hash-algo block)) [5]

Where **Modulus n**, product of two distinct large prime numbers **p and q**, such that

When it is multi-prime key  $n = r_1 * r_2 * \dots * r_i$ , for  $i \geq 2$ , thus normally  $p = r_1$  and  $q = r_2$ ,

- whereas RSA public key is represented as the tuple (n,e), thus e is the public exponent
- RSA private key is representes as (n,d) thus d is the private exponent

Basically, Gcrpty uses-x931 Force the use of the ANSI X9.31 key generation algorithm instead of the default algorithm. This flag is only meaningful for RSA key generation and usually not required. Note that this algorithm is implicitly used if other than derive-parameters is given.

Where S/MIME integration used PKCS#7 secure message format.

*Example of generation of the RSA parameters P and Q:*

(genkey  
(rsa  
(nbits 4:1024)  
(rsa-use-e 1:3)  
(derive-parms  
(Xp1 #1A1916DDB29B4EB7EB6732E128#)  
(Xp2 #192E8AAC41C576C822D93EA433#)

(Xp #D8CD81F035EC57EFE822955149D3BFF70C53520D  
769D6D76646C7A792E16EBD89FE6FC5B605A6493  
39DFC925A86A4C6D150B71B9EEA02D68885F5009  
B98BD984#)  
(Xq1 #1A5CF72EE770DE50CB09ACCEA9#)  
(Xq2 #134E4CAA16D2350A21D775C404#)  
(Xq #CC1092495D867E64065DEE3E7955F2EBC7D47A2D  
7C9953388F97DDDC3E1CA19C35CA659EDC2FC325  
6D29C2627479C086A699A49C4C9CEE7EF7BD1B34  
321DE34A#))))) referred from[4]

These intended definitions of the cryptography also include the X.509 thus the string is processed by the RSA algorithm is formatted by the concatenation of a header, padding, the hash and a trailer, it operates only on the bit steams as the following parameters

- Where the data is converted between byte and bit string formats by taking the most-significant bit of the foremost byte of the byte string as the leftmost bit of the bit string.
- A signature is transformed from a bit string to a byte string by padding the bit string on the left with 0 to 7 zero bits so that the resultant length in bits is a multiple of 8,

It uses 2 functions to verify and Signing process as follows

Function	Key Type	Input Length	Output Length
C_Sign	RSA private key	$\leq k - 2$	k
C_verify	RSA public key	$\leq k - 2, k^2$	N/A

Additionally, I have a look on the RSA in Libgcrypt algorithm which taught by professor Erra as below it follows the ANS X9.31.

RSA in libgcrypt 1.4.4:  $e \geq 65537$

Algorithm: RSA key generation (it follows ANS X9.31)

Input: — an integer  $k = 1024 + 256s > 0$ ;

Output: — (N, e, d) with N a k bit number

Begin:

$e = 65537$ ;

Compute randomly a prime p of  $k/2$  bits;

Compute randomly a prime q of  $k/2$  bits;

Compute  $N = p q$  and  $\phi(N) = (p - 1)(q - 1)$ ;

Compute  $(N) = \text{lcm}(p - 1; q - 1) = \phi(N) / \text{gcd}(p - 1; q - 1)$

While  $\text{GCD}(e, \lambda(N)) \neq 1$   $e = e + 2$ ;

/\* So Again: if  $e > 65537$ , we gain information about (N) \*/



Compute  $d = e^{-1} \bmod f$ ;

End.

referred [7]

### K. Hashing Functions and MACing:

Libgcrypt provides the Hashing individually as well as Hashing with MAC (HMAC) using the below mentioned routines. Creating a message digest object for algorithm algo. flags may be given as a bitwise OR of constants described below

```
gcry_error_t gcry_md_open (gcry_md_hd_t *hd, int algo,
unsigned int flags) [ Hash Function]
```

```
gcry_error_t gcry_mac_open (gcry_mac_hd_t *hd, int algo,
unsigned int flags, gcry_ctx_t ctx) [ MAC Function]
```

of the hash functions from the GCRY\_MD\_\*, \* - SHA1, SHA512, MD5 etc. where for the message authentication code would be like the GCRY\_MAC\_HMAC\_\*, \* may be SHA256, SHA224, SHA3\_256 etc.

### III. GENERATING THE KEYS USING THE GPG TOOL

Here, I am generating the keys using the GPG 2.2 version as seen below



Fig. 5. Example of a figure caption. (GPG 2.2 version)

Secondly, generating the own key which prompts to asking information about the mail ID, key length whether 2048 or 4096 bits and the passphrase.

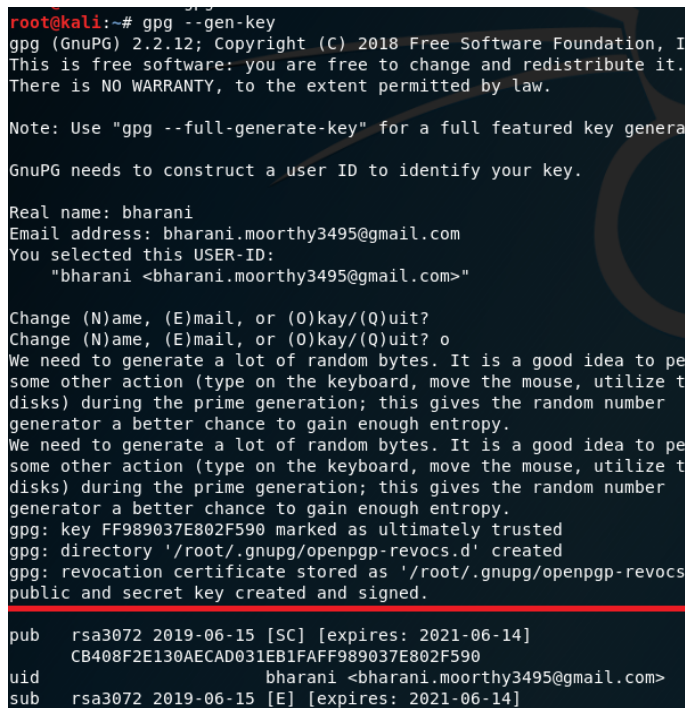


Fig. 6. Example of a figure caption. (generating the GPG Keys)

I am exporting the GPG key -Base 64 format as it begins and ends the RSA key as shown

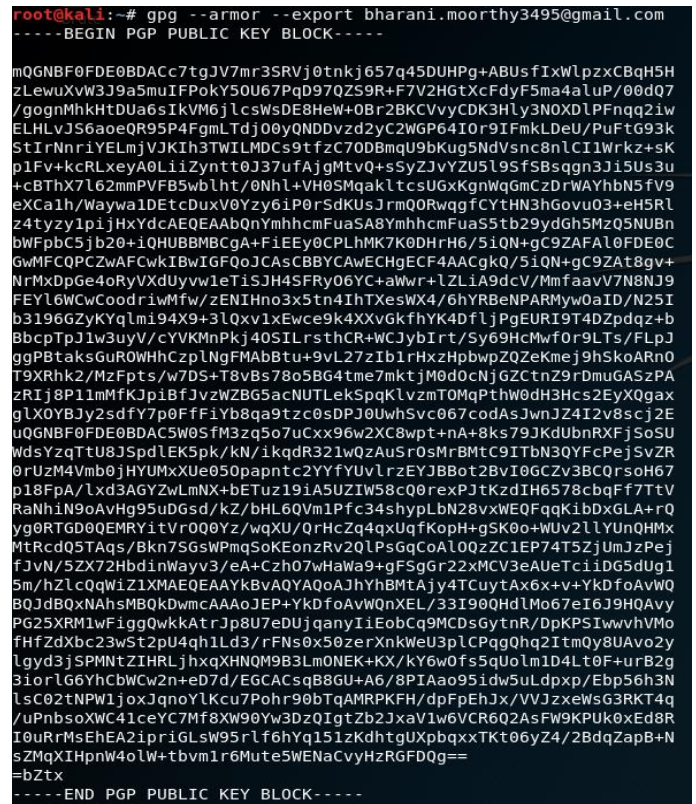


Fig. 7. Example of a figure caption. (exporting the PGP key Base64 format)

Additionally, I have used thunderbird email communication to get the concrete real time example, as I created, and I have added my friend and sent the mail using the signing and the encryption of the mail. Below screen shot is the keyring of my account, each key we can set the expiration date.[8]

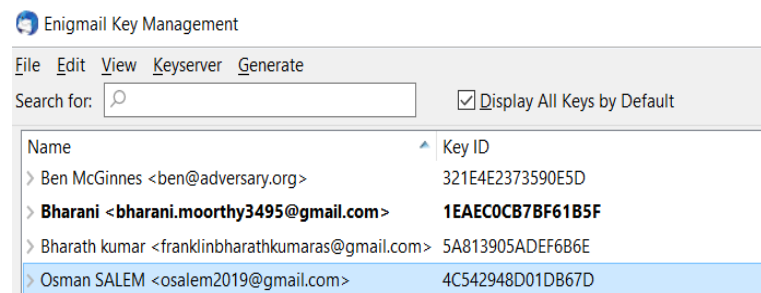


Fig. 8. Fig. 8. Example of a figure caption. (keyring of Enigmail)

#### IV. HISTORICAL CHANGES IN GPG BY FIXING THE VULNERABILITIES

As we have seen that GPG has predominantly two version as 1.X and 2.X, but the initial version starts from the 0.X. The first release version of the GPG 0.0.0 was 1997. This 0.X and 1.X version will be called as the “classic version” and 2.X version series is called as “Modern”.

- “Classic” GPG 0.X to 1.X changes overview

GnuPG 0.2.3 (1998)-Initially the set of the crew found that a bug in the calculation of ELG fingerprints. This is now fixed, but all existing fingerprints and keys for ELG keys are not any more valid. They have implemented the logic to handle the web of trust. It also has some bugs. As the string "(INSECURE!)" which appended to a new user-id if there is need to generate on a system even without a good random number generator.

GnuPG 0.3.3(1998): where it uses the Iterated+Salted passphrases worked. Making sure that the PGP is able to handle them you may want to use the options `k-mode 3 -s2k-cipher-algo cast5 -s2k-digest-algo sha1` when changing a passphrase.

GnuPG 0.4.3(1998): The experimental support for keyrings stored in a GDBM database. This is much faster than a standard keyring. It will notice that the import gets slower with time, so the reason is that all new keys are used to verify signatures of previous inserted keys. It used `"-keyring gnupg-gdbm:<name-of-gdbm-file>"`. This was not (yet) supported for secret keys.

GnuPG 1.0.5 (2001) The large File Support (LFS) has been working from this version. Secret keys were not allowed to be imported unless user use the new option `-allow-secret-key-import`.

- “Modern” -2.x

GnuPG 2.0.0 (2006) – First stable version which integrates openPGP and the S/MIME, where it uses PKCS#7 secure message format.

GnuPG 2.2.8 (2018)-The Vulnerabilities exploits the original filename all over decryption and verification actions, which permits remote attackers to spoof the output that GnuPG where it sends on file descriptor to other programs uses `"--status-fd 2"` option.[9]

About the Libcrypt Vulnerabilities:

Thus the Libcrypt 1.7.10 and 1.8.x - It permits a memory-cache side-channel attack on ECDSA signatures that can be lessened over the use of blinding during the signing process in the `_gcry_ecc_ecdsa_sign` function in `cipher/ecc-ecdsa.c`, it is called as the Return Of the Hidden Number Problem. To determine an ECDSA key, the attacker needs access to either the local machine or a different virtual machine on the same physical host.

#### V. APPLICATIONS:

Using the GPG correctly, we can secure our communications. This is extremely helpful, especially when dealing with sensitive information, but also when dealing with regular, everyday messaging as email services as enigmail, Protonmail, mailfence etc. I have studied about whistle blowing application named as “SecureDrop”, here they are using the GPG protocol to securely encrypting the file where the user needs to drop to the magazine.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pretty\\_Good\\_Privacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pretty_Good_Privacy)
- [2] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web\\_of\\_trust](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_of_trust)
- [3] <https://gnupg.org/>
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