

A Small Subgroup Attack for Recovering Ephemeral Keys in Chang and Chang Password Key Exchange Protocol

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Abstract— Three-party authenticated key exchange protocol is an important cryptographic technique in the secure communication areas. Recently Chang and Chang proposed a novel three party simple key exchange protocol and claimed the protocol is secure, efficient and practical. Unless their claim, a key recovery attack is proposed on the above protocol by recovering the ephemeral keys. One way of recovering the ephemeral key is to solve the mathematical hard Discrete Logarithm Problem (DLP). The DLP is solved by using a popular Pohlig-Hellman method in the above key recovery attack. In the present study, a new method based on the small subgroup attack to solve the DLP is discussed to recover the ephemeral keys. Computation of DLP is carried out by two stages, such as the prior-computation and DLP computation. The prior-computation is performed on off-line and the DLP computation is performed on on-line. The method is analyzed on a comprehensive set of experiments and the ephemeral keys are recovered in reduced time. Also, the key recovery attack on Chang and Chang password key exchange protocol is implemented by using the new method to recover the ephemeral key.

Index Terms— Ephemeral key, Key recovery attack, Chang and Chang password key exchange protocol.

I. INTRODUCTION

The key exchange protocol is one of the most elegant ways of establishing secure communication between pair of users by using a session key. The session key, which is exchanged between two users assures the secure communication for later sessions. The first practical key exchange protocol is proposed by Diffie-Hellman. Since the introduction of key exchange protocol by Diffie-Hellman, various versions and improvements in key exchange protocol have been developed. In the line of key exchange protocol development, password based key exchange mechanism achieved attention due to its simplicity and wide range of applicability, as it requires the users to remember the easily memorable password. Even though the protocol is simple and efficient, according to Ding and Horster [4], it should not be vulnerable to any type of off line, undetectable or detectable on line password guessing attacks, since the passwords are of low-entropy.

In general the password guessing attacks can be divided into three classes and they are listed below:

- Detectable on-line password guessing attacks : An attacker attempts to use a guessed password in an on-line transaction. He/She verifies the correctness of his/her guess using the response from server. A failed guess can be detected and logged by the server.
- Undetectable on-line password guessing attacks : Similar to an attacker tries to verify a password guess in an on-line transaction. However, a failed guess can not be detected and logged by server, as server is not able to distinguish an honest request from a malicious one.
- Off-line password guessing attacks : An attacker guesses a password and verifies his/her guess off-line. No participation of server is required, so the server does not notice the attack.

Since the first proposal of Bellovin and Merrit (PAKE) [2], many efficient key exchange protocols based on password have been developed. Recently these two party key exchange protocols are extended to three party, in which, the two parties initially communicates the passwords with the trusted server securely. Later the server authenticates the clients when they want to agree upon a session key. The 3-party protocol is introduced by Steiner et al [18]. Subsequently Ding and Hoster published on line and off line guessing attacks on Steiner's protocol [4]. Later Lin et al. proposed two versions of improved three party protocol [7], one with server's public key and another without. Recently Chang and Chang [3] proposed a novel three party encrypted key exchange protocol without server public key and claimed the protocol is secure, efficient and practical. Unlike their claims Yoon and Yoo [19] pointed out an Undetectable password guessing attack on their protocol, in which one party is able to know the other party's password and furthermore they presented an improved version of it to avoid the above attack. In the similar line Lu and Cao [8] extended the Adbella and Pointcheval protocol (SPAKE) [1] and proposed a simple

three party key exchange protocol (S-3PARTY). More recently Phan et al. [15] pointed out the Unknown key share attack and Undetectable password guessing attack on S-3PAKE and Guo et al. [5] proposed man in the middle attack and Undetectable on line dictionary attack. They also presented an improved version of S-3PAKE protocol to resist the above attack.

More recently R.Padmavathy and Chakravarthy [11] discussed a key recovery attack on Chang and Chang protocol by recovering the ephemeral keys. The ephemeral keys are recovered by solving a mathematical hard Discrete Logarithm Problem (DLP). The following paragraph discusses the DLP.

Let a group $(G, *)$ consist of a set G and a binary operation $*$. The order of an element, say a , of a finite group G is defined to be with the smallest value t such that $a^t = 1$. Some of the well known groups used in the cryptography are the set with multiplication mod p (p is a prime), the multiplication group of the field and the addition group formed by the collection of points defined by an elliptic curve over finite field. For a given prime p , a generator g and an element y , the problem of finding x , in the range of $0 \leq x \leq p - 2$, such that $g^x = y$, is known as the DLP.

Apart from the Exhaustive search to solve DLP a well known deterministic algorithm is Shanks baby step - giant step algorithm. It requires $O(\sqrt{n})$ group operations and space [6], where n is the order of the generator. Pollard Rho method, which is a probabilistic one, has similar square root running time but avoids large space requirements [16]. Pohlig -Hellman method [17] reduces the DLP in a field to small subgroups. For example if $p - 1$ is a product of small factors, namely q_i , which are relatively prime to each other. Then the method reduces the discrete logarithm $x \bmod p$ to $x_i \bmod q_i$, computes $x_i \bmod q_i$ in each q_i and finally combines the results using Chinese remainder theorem.

The DLP can be computed in the sub exponential time using Index calculus method, if there is more structure to the group beyond the set of elements and the group operation. Specifically, certain group elements can be labeled as smooth, when it can be factored into a product of group elements from some relatively small factor base. The index calculus method uses a fixed small set called the factor base B and tries to write elements as a product of members of the factor base B [9]. The base consists of objects which are small and irreducible.

The ephemeral keys are solved by using Pohlig-Hellman method in [11] and other efficient methods to recover ephemeral keys are discussed in [12], [13]. In the present study, the DLP is solved to recover ephemeral keys by using a new method based on small subgroup attack. Ephemeral keys are dynamic and change for every session [10]. Since the underlying group and the generator is common for all sessions and the ephemeral keys are computed for each session, the partial computation of solving the DLP for ephemeral key may be computed off-line and the remaining computation can be done on

on-line. This is the technique followed in the new method proposed in the present study. The method involves two phases, such as a prior computation step and DLP computation step. In the first step, the information regarding the DLP of y is gathered using the underlying group and the generator. The second step is the step for finding the DLP of y .

The following section describes the Chang and Chang password key exchange protocol and the key recovery attack. Section 3 discusses the new method to solve DLP for ephemeral key. Section 4 presents the experimental results and concluding remarks are given in Section 5.

II. A KEY RECOVERY ATTACK ON CHANG AND CHANG PASSWORD KEY EXCHANGE PROTOCOL

This section briefly explains the key recovery attack on Chang and Chang novel three party key exchange protocol proposed by R.Padmavathy and Chakravarthy Bhagvati [11]. The notations used in this protocol are listed below:

A, B : two communication parties.

S : the trusted server.

ID_A, ID_B, ID_S : the identities of A,B and S, respectively.

PW_A, PW_B : the passwords securely shared by A with S and B.

$E_{PW}(\cdot)$: a symmetric encryption scheme with a password PW .

r_A, r_B : the random numbers chosen by A and B, respectively.

p a large prime.

g a generator of order $p - 1$.

R_A, R_B, R_S : the random exponents chosen by A,B and S, respectively.

N_A, N_B : $N_A = g^{R_A} \bmod p$ and $N_B = g^{R_B} \bmod p$.

$F_S(\cdot)$: the one-way trapdoor hash function (TDF) where only S knows the trapdoor.

$f_K(\cdot)$: the pseudo-random hash function (PRF) indexed by a key K .

K_{AS}, K_{BS} : a one time strong keys shared by A with S and B with S, respectively.

A. The attack

A malicious party B guesses the password of A using Undetectable password guessing attack as proposed by Yoon and Yoo. B uses the password of A for obtaining the session key between A and C , when A and C wants to communicate. The following procedure presents the attack in detail.

Step 1:

$A \rightarrow C : \{ID_A, ID_B, ID_S, E_{PW_A}(N_A), F_S(r_A), f_{K_{AS}}(N_A)\}$

User A chooses a random integer number r_A and a random exponent $R_A \in_R Z_p^*$, and then computes $N_A = g^{R_A}$ and $K_{AS} = N_A^{R_A}$. Then, A encrypts N_A by using his/her password

PW_A like $E_{PW_A}(N_A)$ and computes two hash values $F_S(r_A)$ and $f_{K_{AS}}(N_A)$. Finally, A sends $\{ID_A, ID_B, ID_S, E_{PW_A}(N_A), F_S(r_A), f_{K_{AS}}(N_A)\}$ to C .

Step2:

B gets $\{ID_A, ID_B, ID_S, E_{PW_A}(N_A), F_S(r_A), f_{K_{AS}}(N_A)\}$ and from $E_{PW_A}(N_A)$ decrypts N_A , since password is known and solves the ephemeral key R_A from N_A using the popular Pohlig-Hellman method or index calculus method as discussed in the following section. This is achieved, since the order of the generator used in the protocol is $p-1$. When the factorization of $p-1$ is known and small, the exponent can be solved in reduced time, even in polynomial time when the factors of $p-1$ is in the form of $2^n p_1^m$, where p_1 is small and n, m are very large.

Step4:

$C \rightarrow S: \{ID_A, ID_C, ID_S, E_{PW_A}(N_A), F_S(r_A), f_{K_{AS}}(N_A), E_{PWC}(N_C), F_S(r_C), f_{K_{CS}}(N_C)\}$. User C chooses a random integer r_C and a random exponent $R_C \in_R Z_p^*$, and then computes $N_C = g^{r_C}$ and $K_{CS} = N_C^{R_C}$. Then, C encrypts N_C by using his/her password PWC like $E_{PWC}(N_C)$ and computes two hash values $F_S(r_C)$ and $f_{K_{CS}}(N_C)$. Finally, C sends $\{ID_A, ID_C, ID_S, E_{PW_A}(N_A), F_S(r_A), f_{K_{AS}}(N_A), E_{PWC}(N_C), F_S(r_C), f_{K_{CS}}(N_C)\}$ to S .

Step5:

$S \rightarrow C: \{N_C^{R_S}, f_{K_{AS}}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{AS}, N_C^{R_S}), N_A^{R_S}, f_{CS}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{CS}, N_A^{R_S})\}$ Server S decrypts $E_{PW_A}(N_A)$ and $E_{PWC}(N_C)$ by using PW_A and PW_C to get N_A and N_C , respectively. Then, S gets r_A and r_C from $F_S(r_A)$ and $F_S(r_C)$ by using a trap door, respectively. To authenticate A and B , S computes $K_{AS} = N_A^{r_A}$ and $K_{CS} = N_C^{r_C}$ and then verifies $f_{K_{AS}}(N_A)$ and $f_{K_{CS}}(N_C)$, respectively. If successful, S chooses a random exponent $R_S \in_R Z_p^*$ and then computes $N_A^{R_S}$ and $N_C^{R_S}$, respectively. Finally, S computes two hash values $f_{K_{AS}}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{AS}, N_C^{R_S})$, $f_{K_{CS}}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{CS}, N_A^{R_S})$, and sends $\{N_C^{R_S}, f_{K_{AS}}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{AS}, N_C^{R_S}), N_A^{R_S}, f_{CS}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{CS}, N_A^{R_S})\}$ to B .

Step 6:

B gets $\{N_C^{R_S}, f_{K_{AS}}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{AS}, N_C^{R_S}), N_A^{R_S}, f_{CS}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{CS}, N_A^{R_S})\}$ and from $N_C^{R_S}$ he computes the session key $(N_C^{R_S})^{R_A}$ is nothing but a session key between A and C $g^{R_A R_S R_C}$

Step 7:

$C \rightarrow A: \{N_C^{R_S}, f_{K_{AS}}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{AS}, N_C^{R_S}), f_K(ID_C, K)\}$ By using $K_{CS} = N_C^{r_C}$, C authenticates S

by checking $f_{CS}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{CS}, N_A^{R_S})$. If successful, C computes the session key $K = (N_A^{R_S})^{R_C} = g^{R_S R_A R_C}$ and hash value $f_K(ID_C, K)$, and then sends $\{N_C^{R_S}, f_{K_{AS}}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{AS}, N_C^{R_S}), f_K(ID_C, K)\}$ to A .

Step8:

$A \rightarrow C: \{f_K(ID_A, K)\}$ By using $K_{AS} = N_A^{r_A}$, A authenticates S by checking $f_{K_{AS}}(ID_A, ID_C, K_{AS}, N_C^{R_S})$. If successful A computes the session key $K = (N_C^{R_S})^{R_A} = g^{R_S R_A R_C}$, and authenticates C by checking $f_K(ID_C, K)$. If authenticates is passed, A computes and sends $f_K(ID_A, K)$

Step 9:

C authenticates A by checking $f_K(ID_A, K)$. If successful, C confirms A 's knowledge of the session key $K = g^{R_S R_A R_C}$.

III. SOLVING DISCRETE LOGARITHM PROBLEM (DLP) FOR EPHEMERAL KEYS

From the discussion of key recovery attack on Chang-Chang protocol, it is observed that the computation of R_A from N_A is the key issue. This leads to recover the session key by the malicious party B .

A. New method based on small subgroup attack

In this section, a new method based on small subgroup attack to solve the DLP for ephemeral keys (N_A and N_B) used in the key recovery attack is discussed. The DLP is solved by using the Pohlig-Hellman method in [11]. In the password key exchange protocol, such as Chang and Chang, the underlying group and the generator of order $p-1$ are common for all sessions and the ephemeral key, say y , is computed for every session. This motivated to propose a new technique for the computation of DLP of y . The proposed method comprises two phases. The first phase performs the partial computation of DLP of y on off-line and the second phase is for computing the remaining computation on on-line. The technique is based on the property of field elements of prime say p of the form $p-1 = 2X$, where X is a prime or product of primes

1) Property of field elements:

Theorem 1: Let p be a prime with $p-1 = 2X$, where X is a prime or product of primes and let an element $y \in Z_p^*$. In such a case, If the order of y is q then the order of $-y$ is $2q$, vice-versa, where q is a prime and the factor of X .

Proof:

1) Let $y \in Z_p^*$ be an element of $O(q)$ Then,

$$y^q \equiv 1; -y^{2q} \equiv -y^{q^2} \equiv 1$$

That is, $-y$ is a generator for $O(2q)$.

2) Let $y \in Z_p^*$ be an element of $O(2q)$. Then,

$$y^{\frac{2q}{2}} \equiv -1; -y^{\frac{2q}{2}} \equiv 1$$

It shows that $-y$ is an element of $O(q)$.

From (1) and (2), it may be seen that if y is of order q then $-y$ is of $2q$, vice-versa.

Also, the discrete logarithm of y and $-y$ are related as follows:-

$$x = q \pm 2i \text{ mod } p - 1; \text{ when } y \text{ is of order } 2q \quad (1)$$

$$i = (x \pm q)/2 \text{ mod } q; \text{ when } y \text{ is of order } q \quad (2)$$

[14] where x is the discrete logarithm of y or $-y$, i is the discrete logarithm of $-y$ or y with respect to q and q is the order of the subgroup. Based on the above theorem a new technique is developed and discussed below.

First Phase:-(off-line)

For a random prime Z_p^* , Compute the generators with order of factors of $p - 1$ and the logarithms of subgroup generators with respect to the generator of order $p-1$.

Second Phase:- (on-line)

If the order of y is small and q , then the DLP of y with respect to order q ($\log y_q$) is computed by using any exponential time algorithm such as Shanks baby step and giant step or Pollard Rho. The logarithm of y with respect to order $p - 1$ is calculated as $\log y = \log g_q \times \log y_q$.

Similarly, if the order of y is small and $2q$, then the logarithm of y with respect to order $p - 1$ is calculated as $\log y = \log g_{2q} \times \log y_{2q}$. To find the logarithm of y with respect to order $2q$ (y_{2q}), the generator of order $2q$ (g_{2q}) is needed. The generator of order $2q$ (g_{2q}) is obtained from the generator of order q (g_q) by computing $-g_q$ (g_{2q}), and the logarithm of g_{2q} is obtained from the logarithm of g_q by using the equation (1) with the assumption of i is \log_q and x is \log_{2q} . After obtaining the logarithm of g_{2q} , the logarithm of y with respect to order $2q$ is computed by using the pollard Rho algorithm by using the generator of order $2q$ (g_{2q}). Finally the logarithm of y is calculated.

Algorithm 1 Off-line Computation

INPUT : Problem of size p , factors of $p - 1$.

OUTPUT: logarithm of generators of each factor of $p - 1$.

-
- 1: **for** every q of $p - 1$ **do**
 - 2: Find the generator as follows:- $g_q \equiv g^{\frac{p-1}{q}}$
 - 3: Find the logarithm of generators as follows:- $\log g_q = \frac{p-1}{q}$
 - 4: **end for**
-

The **Algorithm-1** is for prior computation and **Algorithm-2** is for computation of DLP of y . The variable q represents one of the factor of $p - 1$ and

Algorithm 2 On-line Computation

INPUT: Problem of size p , factors of $p - 1$ and the logarithms of generators of each factor of $p - 1$.

OUTPUT: logarithm of y .

-
- 1: Find the order of y
 - 2: **if** y is of order q **then**
 - 3: Find the logarithm of y_q using Pollard Rho
 - 4: $\log y = \log g_q \times \log y_q$
 - 5: **else**
 - 6: **if** y is of order $2q$ **then**
 - 7: Compute $-g_q$
 - 8: Find the $\log y_{2q}$ using Pollard Rho with $-g_q$ as generator
 - 9: $\log y = \log y_{2q} \times (q + 2 \log g_q)$
 - 10: **end if**
 - 11: **end if**
-

$\log g_q, \log y_q, \log y_{2q}, \log -g_q$ represent logarithm of generator of order q , logarithm of y with respect to q , logarithm of y with respect to $2q$ respectively.

IV. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

We implemented the method discussed above for problems of different size and conducted experiments using an appropriate database. This is generated for the purpose of ensuring the performance of the method to solve the DLP, which is discussed in the previous section. In this section we describe these experiments and give a representative selection of our experimental results. The purpose of our experiments is to produce the data on which we can base reliable statements about the expected running time of the proposed method to solve the DLP. Let us describe clearly, First we generated a database of approximately 100 problems along with the necessary information to carry out the experiments.

- A data file is produced with 4-tuple (p, g, y, F) with the following properties:
- p is the prime to be tested of size between 100 to 1024 bits.
- g is the generator
- y is the ephemeral key for which the DLP to be solved .
- F is an array of factors of $p - 1$.

The following algorithm is used to produce the database.

Algorithm-3

- Select k between 100 to 1024bits.
- Select a set of primes.
- Compute the product of primes (X)
- Check $2X + 1$ is a prime using probabilistic primality test algorithm and the size of the prime is k bits.
- Find the generator g of order $p - 1$.
- Create a 4-tuple as (p, g, y, F) .

Having built up the database the method is tested. The table-1 represents average running time to solve the DLP of y , when the order of y is q or $2q$. The average running time is listed based on the order of q . Table-2 shows

TABLE I.
AVERAGE RUNNING TIME OF OFF-LINE AND ON-LINE COMPUTATIONS

Problem size in bits	Off-line Running time in μs	On-line Running time		
		$q \approx 2^{20}$	$q \approx 2^{30}$	$q \approx 2^{40}$
100	6897	100ms	1s	1s
256	52418	.75s	9m	4h
512	109932	1.25s	15m	6h
1024	819460	2.5s	40m	16h

TABLE II.
SELECTED LIST OF PROBLEMS SOLVED

Problem	Generator of subgroup q	Logarithm of generator of subgroup q	Generator of subgroup $2q$	Ephemeral key y	Logarithm (DLP) of y
19100099015936	42692746481915	11790184577738	14830824367744	1211016537175	1143647904040
50473786381403	05214682255939	58317152087286	99952318155809	9097783526253	6425676375246
54882802383987	21054541511202	14125186656782	62777348232866	6978350794809	6755701431057
02779486862596	64571907141726	11592275841109	76322296148424	5477010726884	0786524450756
73707683	9428709	0969610	04278974	525830293195	587582405217
34153293653803	31587995096258	89615056234469	25652985575452	1163730026953	1837108652806
39960388006815	17294434969352	56164283399806	26659530374621	5041669059925	6260136780969
17632109811572	99981172548703	58509909126574	76509372628683	4470121156541	6034994531370
28235674675229	97550725955774	501810705764	0684948719455	1001401151800	9477728711946
				2766	8162
87590417430723	60453296155989	81102238361781	27137121274734	5894300008847	4703929824983
51011323449493	09684323098160	02788262453234	41327000351333	7801691794326	2996171922228
7116028209	4484127257	9181507600	2631900952	893882218071	762525274408
35527136788005	26108246390031	28421709430404	94188903979734	2269138558123	1890043677121
00929355621337	54817614236277	00743484497070	61117413850604	2393128598320	8664944171905
89062501	46201616	3125000	2860885	2435037754	5175781250
20602102921755	23762623821497	16278204777683	18225840539605	1751600492338	2543469496512
07490794709453	14729187618463	02214948906234	36017875947607	7606476165568	9722108576659
5687	626	9184	2061	432268	92060
56843418860808	39317167198025	51386450650170	17526251662782	5067635044821	3115019353572
01486968994140	45843434887577	44544219970703	55643534106563	4788109827879	2792148590087
6251	4468	1250	1783	442170	890625
84782316550432	47665829597026	72221973357775	37116486953405	37116486953405	2983081508255
40702858886640	65498460979461	75413546458989	75204397907178	75204397907178	9550621170156
					697
31400857981641	22743099941158	13205436289289	86577580404829	27328216955331	1725108864423
63223281069127	66323984131388	9249391400638	6899296937739	93650109216281	5217708149083
11629947400608	20792696017529	10194151425224	95506777988550	57310051114185	6389292090457
0119380780339	179501213815	3067605375358	939879566524	187206051185	4880400552161
10000000000000	19201683683819	33333333333333	80798316316180	19201683683819	16666666666666
00000000000000	70000326718251	33333333333333	29999673281748	70000326718251	66666666666666
000000000327	71002465659	33333333442	28997534668	71002465660	6666666666721
10000000000000	49843318580590	14135694182737	84437207871939	50156681419409	5000014135694
00000000000000	22833786641626	77297792428639	97244553522994	77166213358373	182737729779
000000004219	83011830037	481842	35584981464	16988174182	2428639483951
10000000000000	2208360907695	13844854559802	77916390923045	52615691210493	5000415345636
00000000000000	4610490338659	84927106840742	38950966134091	71999435166308	7940854781320
00000103	086559838	638	3440265	1777183	522227965
10000000000000	3072102722306	20594789888864	69278972776931	24396954182402	5000035011142
00000000000000	8212214213860	33532272138729	78778578613993	98790528416272	8110693700486
00082549	065813499		4193408	8572710	263587519
10000000000000	7384419687517	27408892157247	26155803124826	15245806559296	5002738148326
00000000000000	3532229528238	00701749865902	46777047176152	38972550552515	5089760010481
0017803	47402210		615593	421826	16044999
10000000000000	7967748588439	53331342296554	20322514115609	31722507820841	5002613235772
00000000000000	0744258607918	26197421962913	25574139208137	33876937946337	5311588367367
0028939	62145582		883357	767461	61842035

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