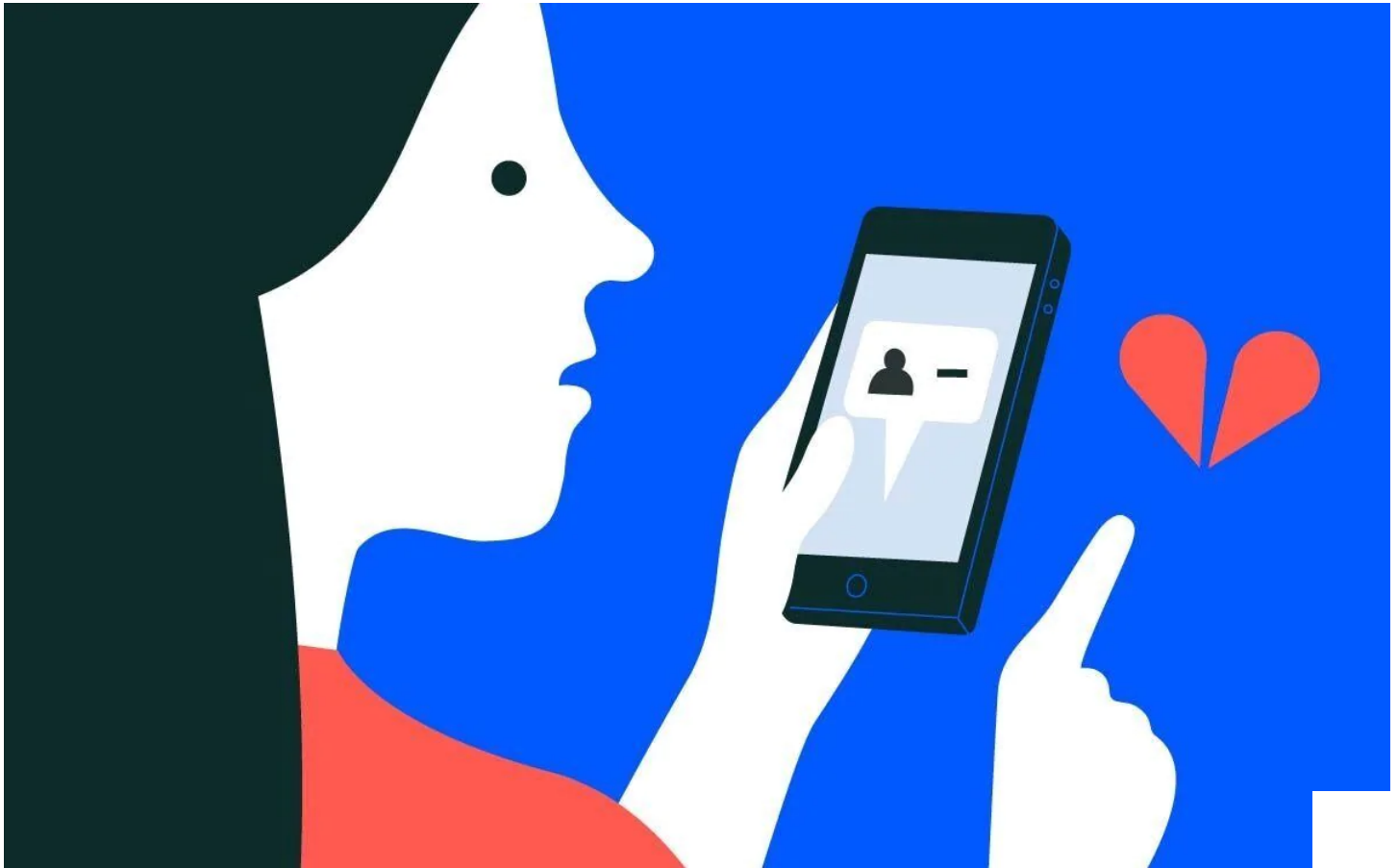


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Revealed: the favourite dating websites used by scammers

Victims lose £8,368 on average

By Marianna Hunt

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Every year thousands of people looking for love are preyed upon by scammers using dating websites. Now new data reveals for the first time the match-making sites victims are most frequently caught out while using.

The figures from Action Fraud, the national scam reporting centre, and seen exclusively by this newspaper, show that in one year alone almost 700 people were tricked into transferring money to someone they had met via Facebook, the social media site.

In total 2,753 people [fell victim to a romance scam](#) between July 2019 and July 2020 – one in four of whom met their fraudster via Facebook.

Separate figures from UK Finance, the banking trade body found victims of romance scams lost £8,368 on average.

Laura Lyons of Are They Safe, a private investigation firm, said: “Many dating and social media sites [are not safeguarding users](#) and it is completely unfair. They should be held accountable”

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Although some ask users to verify their identity, others [do not](#). “If you’re looking to open a bank account you would need to provide an ID. Why shouldn’t you do the same when looking for love?,” Miss Lyons said.

The site or app with the second highest number of reported romance scams was Instagram, which is also owned by Facebook. One fifth of victims over the period (556) had met their would-be lover via Instagram.

How many scams took place via different dating and social media sites last year?

Company	Number of scams reported to Action Fraud between July 2019 and July 2020
Facebook	692
Instagram	556
Plenty of Fish	546
Tinder	430
Match.com	258
Hinge	86
Twitter	68
Bumble	45
EliteSingles	30
eHarmony	24
Coffee Meets Bagel	11
Silver Singles	4

A similar number of people (546) reported being scammed after meeting someone via the dating website Plenty of Fish. The number of romance scams reported by users of Tinder and Match.com, two other dating platforms, was 430 and 258.

Other popular sites such as EliteSingles, eharmony, Coffee Meets Bagel and SilverSingles had far fewer scam cases (see table, above).

Facebook and Instagram have far more users in Britain than other websites (45 million and 27 million respectively), which may explain the higher number of scam reports. Most of the other sites or apps have five million users or fewer.

Miss Lyons said that even if users reported a profile as suspicious, scammers [were easily able to set up another](#) one using a different name and email address to continue targeting victims.

“It isn’t that difficult to check if people are legitimate but there will be a cost. Dating sites should also do far more to educate people about scams,” she said.

In one case she dealt with an older woman who had sent £230,000 to a man she believed she was in a relationship with. She was recently divorced and the money had come from selling her family home.

In another case a woman paid over £100,000 to a man she had met via a dating app. She then reported him to her bank but during the investigation the man forced her to drop her claim. It took intervention by her bank and the police to stop her transferring more money.

A spokesman for Action Fraud said: “Criminals won’t just target dating websites and apps. More frequently we are seeing people being [approached via social media](#) and on gaming platforms.

“Criminals will often dedicate months to winning over victims. No matter how long you’ve been speaking to someone and how much you trust them, don’t send them any money, transfer money on their behalf, or give out your financial details.”

A Facebook spokesman said: “We’re investing in people and technology to identify and remove fraudulent activity from our platforms which is not allowed.”

Facebook said it had donated £3m to Citizens Advice to help the charity fight scams and had a dedicated team reviewing scams reports.

A spokesman for Match Group, which owns Match.com, Tinder, Hinge and Plenty of Fish, said: “We take the issues of impersonation and scamming very seriously across all brands in the Match Group and have a zero-tolerance policy on predatory behavior of any kind.”

The firm said it had a dedicated fraud team and had been vocal in support of legislation to protect people from being targeted online.

Parship Elite Group, which owns eharmony, and Spark Networks, which runs EliteSingles and SilverSingles, said safeguarding users was a top priority.

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