

New report finds scammers are repeatedly targeting older people

November 14 2023



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Two out of three older people have been targeted by scammers in the last year, leaving them frightened, depressed and even suicidal, according to new research from leading charity Re-engage and the University of Portsmouth.

Around a fifth experienced weekly attempts to defraud them and 40% suffered illegal approaches on a monthly basis.

The vast majority of these scams are telephone related—landline, mobile or text—and have so concerned the [charity](#) that it is calling for immediate action.

The research, which involved 1,177 older people is one of the largest surveys of its kind. It revealed that half of those surveyed do not use the internet with 70% never banking online and the majority saying their greatest concern is having their computer or accounts hacked.

Around 80% of those who took part live alone and more than three-quarters were women.

Re-engage, which is the only charity dedicated to ending loneliness and isolation among those aged 75 and over, wants training for professionals—doctors, [social workers](#) and bank staff—to spot older people who may be vulnerable to scams.

It is also urging the government and other bodies to fund high quality call blockers for older people who want them.

Laura Joplin, Re-engage's head of impact, who commissioned the report from the University of Portsmouth—'The Unseen Price of a Scam'—said, "The scale of intimidation and fear unleashed on older people by these scams and frauds is really shocking. It is causing tremendous distress.

"Many of those we spoke to are simply too terrified to answer the phone because it might be someone trying to steal their money. This contributes to their feelings of isolation which in turn damages their quality of life.

"Urgent action is needed to give them the proper level of protection so they are no longer held hostage by a cascade of incessant scams and can feel safe and secure in their own homes."

Professor Mark Button, Co-Director of the Centre for Cybercrime and Economic Crime at the University of Portsmouth, who led the research, which was funded by the Aviva Foundation, said, "As worrying as the results are, this may be just a small part of the problem. Many people do not report scams because of the stigma attached to being a victim.

"It's also deeply concerning that around a quarter of those we spoke to had received no advice on how to avoid scams which highlights the urgent need to raise awareness of this issue."

Among those interviewed was an 80-year-old woman who said, "I often feel very insecure when I receive phone or mobile messages. I try to ignore them, but they make me feel unsafe in my own home."

Another said, "Some days I have so many [scam](#) calls I could scream. I am disabled and I find those calls distressing."

One man who was scammed out of £15,000 by a woman he met online after his wife died, told researchers: "I was grieving and vulnerable. I can ill afford to lose this money especially now the old age pension is a pittance to rely on."

As part of the research Re-engage worked with the National Trading Standards Scams Team to develop training for its 9,000 volunteers. They have helped raise awareness about scams among the [older people](#) who attend the charity's free monthly tea parties, social activity groups, and take part in their call befriending service.

Provided by University of Portsmouth

Citation: New report finds scammers are repeatedly targeting older people (2023, November 14)
retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2023-11-scammers-older-people.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.