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Seeking Your Valentine Online? Beware: More Than One-Fourth in New Survey Confirm First-Hand Accounts of Relationship Scams

AARP Campaign Warns: 'Protect your Heart and Your Money'

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As Valentine's Day approaches and millions of Americans meet others on matchmaking websites, dating apps and social media, 27 percent of those polled in a new AARP **survey** reported that they, a family member or a friend have encountered attempted financial scams while seeking friendship or love interest online.

To help empower people to take steps to protect themselves and their family members, the **AARP Fraud Watch Network** has launched an educational campaign to raise awareness of online-based relationship fraud schemes.

“ The AARP survey found that 11 percent of adults have either been victimized by an online relationship scam or know someone who was. ”

The idea of going online to broaden one's social networks continues to gain in popularity. More than half (54 percent) of U.S. adults have used the internet to find new friends, dates and/or romantic partners, according to the AARP **survey**. But scammers also use the dating sites, apps and social media. The AARP survey found that 11 percent of adults have either been victimized by an online relationship scam or know someone who was. More troubling, 53 percent of the victims reported suffering a negative effect on their physical and/or emotional health.

“Many of us, along with our family members, have successfully made new friends or even established deeper relationships online,” said Kathy Stokes, director, fraud prevention programs, AARP. “But as with every other aspect of life these days, you must be aware that the criminal element lurks there also. Our message is: protect your heart – *and* your money.”

The AARP educational campaign includes advertising, webinars, **podcasts**, a fun video and a **tip sheet**. Each of the campaign's **content elements** urge consumers to recognize the warning signs that their online suitor may actually be a fraudster:

- They profess love too quickly.
- The person immediately wants to leave the dating website and communicate with you through email or instant messaging.
- Your new romantic interest sends you a picture that looks more like a model from a fashion magazine than an ordinary snapshot.
- He or she repeatedly promises to meet you in person but always seems to come up with an excuse to cancel.
- They make a request for money, for any of a variety of reasons: travel, medical emergencies, visas or other official documents, or losses from a financial setback. Seventeen percent of respondents in the AARP survey said a friend or romantic partner whom they have only met online has asked them to help them financially in some way.

The **FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center** reports there were 15,000 victims of confidence fraud/romance fraud in 2017, with more than half over age 50. Financial losses in these scams totaled \$220 million in 2016, according to the **Federal Trade Commission**.

The **AARP Fraud Watch Network** launched in 2013 as a free resource for people of all ages. Consumers may sign up for “Watchdog Alert” emails that deliver information about scams, or call a free helpline at 877-908-3360 to speak with staff and volunteers trained in fraud counseling. The Fraud Watch Network website provides information about fraud and scams, prevention tips from experts, an interactive **scam-tracking map**, fun educational quizzes and access to AARP's hit podcast series, **The Perfect Scam**.

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Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago on behalf of AARP. Data were collected using the AmeriSpeak® Panel, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Interviews were conducted between Jan. 9 and 24, 2019, with adult Internet users ages 18 and older, representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. 1,721 adults completed the survey. The overall margin of sampling error is plus or

minus 3.43 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. For more on the survey methodology, please visit <https://www.aarp.org/OnlineRomanceScams>.

About AARP

AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence and nearly 38 million members, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to families: health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also produces the nation's largest circulation publications: AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit <http://www.aarp.org> or follow @AARP and @AARPadvocates on social media.

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