

# Prevention Connected with Romantic Relationships in the Internet

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Virtual reality is the space where people fulfill their needs, even the basic ones, more and more often. It is true for elder people too. More and more often, seniors recognise the benefits of using modern communication technologies and resort to them in different spheres of their life, including the emotional life. While the society becomes more and more atomized, family relationships are weakening and trust between individuals is declining, interpersonal relationships are increasingly harder to build. In case of seniors, there is an additional factor of social permission for having romantic and erotic relationships in their age. Thus, it should not come as a surprise, that a growing percentage of individuals search for love on different dating portals and marriage websites. It is not always responsible and safe. The paper describes the mechanisms of marriage frauds committed via online marriage portals and available Internet ways to verify the reliability of potential partners. The main emphasis is on the prevention context. The goal of the paper is to show, on the example of individual experiences of female seniors, how do marriage frauds operate and to present protection means against such frauds. The research question posed was: What are the means used by frauds targeting seniors who are looking for love in the Internet? The qualitative and interpretation paradigm was adopted. The research material was collected as case studies. The data collected were complemented with the literature analysis. The research results show the mechanisms in the behaviours of frauds and victims as they enter into new relationships in the Internet. Fraud profile is also presented and some technology-based solutions to limit the probability of senior abuse.

**Key words:** *Internet dating fraud, online deception, digital technologies, elder people.*

## Introduction

Modern times are being called the age of the greatest opportunities but also the greatest loneliness of humans. The statistics regarding depression are alarming and psychotherapist offices are full of people who need someone to just listen to them. One of the major social issues is the hunger of being significant and loved. This is true for people in every age, however for elder people, this need is particularly strong. Loneliness of seniors results from the changes which take place in the society as well in individual biographies. When a person retires, their previous social and interpersonal relations become limited. Often, this is the time when life partners pass away while children and grandchildren are heavily engaged in following their own life goals. Limitations resulting from the current pandemic have only increased the sense of loneliness in the oldest generation.

Close relationships are the natural human need, thus it should not be surprising that people will look for different ways to enter into and develop romantic relationships. The easiest and the most cost-effective means is the Internet. This virtual space is immersive (it absorbs), interactive, imaginative, easily accessible and anonymous (Ben-Ze'ev 2005, p. 35, 114). These features make cyberspace the ideal place to make the deepest dreams and desires come true, including those regarding the emotional sphere of life (Krone, Johnson 2007; Kaplan 2010; Coluccia et al. 2020). Researchers who study the phenomenon of technological expansion point to many positive aspects of this multimedia communication. First, it is an easy, cheap and fast way to access various offers and start new relationships. It is also a safe alternative for those for who, for different reasons, find it hard to initiate relations in the real world. For example, there are dedicated dating websites for introverts. Most services provide automatic, "perfect match" for their users, using algorithms which find matching profiles, based on their common characteristics (Wang, Lu 2007; Coluccia et al. 2020). This type of communication facilitates greater openness and comfort during conversations. Internet is also the means that provides the sense of social support (Krejtz, Krejtz 2006) or allows to expand the circle of friends. Imagination compensates the lack of image, touch or comprehensive information about the people met online. It also allows to create one's own image (Vandeweerd et al. 2016). Anonymity, in turn, mitigates the risk of the actions taken and reduces the vulnerability to being hurt (Ben-Ze'ev 2005, p. 35, 114). Thanks to the above mentioned factors people feel safe, are more willing to share intimate details of their life and easily get fascinated by persons they meet in the virtual world. Unfortunately, these features may determine users' susceptibility to various abuses and frauds.

The Internet offers singles numerous dating sites dedicated to certain age groups, addressing certain needs or preferences. The first dating services were launched in 1994, and since 1998 they have become part of popular culture (Oronowicz-Jaskowiak, Oronowicz-Jaskowiak 2015). With time, the offer has been extended and enriched. Portals and applications

dedicated to certain types of clients were launched. Some of them assumed the relationships will be only short-term and with no obligations whatsoever for both parties. At present, they use special algorithms that match partners for obligation-free speed dating (Dziennik Wschodni 2019). According to Howard Rheingold, friendships initiated online often become deeper relationships in the real world (2001).

Emotional life in the old age is the phenomenon which evokes different emotions, both in case of celebrities from the front covers and ordinary people. The younger generations often treat new relationships of their parents or grandparents with skepticism. These attitudes are coherent with some social expectations towards elderly people, which include being staid, reserved and wise, also in this sphere. They forget that older people have similar emotional needs and are as prone to follow the impulses of their hearts as other age groups (Łaszyn, Wnęk-Gozdek 2012). This is confirmed by research, for example by Wang and Nguyen (1995). They say there are no differences in experiencing love nor regarding the objects of love. The only discrepancies are in the way these experiences are described. The older the respondents, the more mature and reflexive they were (Kaleta, Jaskiewicz 2007).

The study conducted by A. Falconi and E. Mullet indicates that the differences between generations in experiencing love are limited to percentage distributions between the three components: passion, intimacy and engagement. Depending on the strength of these three components, there are different forms of love: liking (only intimacy), crush (only passion), empty love (only engagement), romantic love (intimacy and passion), ridiculous love (engagement and passion), partnership love (engagement and intimacy) and perfect love where all the three components: engagement, intimacy and passion are present (2003). With age, the first of those three elements becomes the most important. And most often, this is what predestines seniors to become victims of marriage frauds.

### **Romantic Relationships Online**

Retirement and entering the late adulthood motivates to look back at own life. As for emotional balance, the following variables are considered: the number of previous relationships, the way they are evaluated, how did the partner left or the subjective evaluation of the degree of loneliness. Such evaluation may result in a crisis which, in turn, leads to depression and social isolation. Overcoming this condition depends on individual character and the strength of the desire to fulfill one's dreams and experience something new and beautiful. Entering into relationships in mature age has many advantages. First of all, people have less obligations than when they were younger. They enjoy some financial stability. They know what is the most important in life and can nurture it. They are not time-pressed and can take time to get to know each other.

With the expansion of modern technologies and the Internet, new possibilities appeared. Various social networking and dating websites have become an attractive place to build relationships, also the intimate ones. According to the research conducted by Cafeseniore website, as much as 60% of the respondents find Internet to be the perfect place to initiate new relationships. Almost 1/3 of the respondents admitted that during the last ten years they had found a partner through a dating website. A study by CBOS showed that 7% of the respondents aged 55 and more had met someone via the Internet and 5% actually met with that person (CBOS 2018). There are three types of online intimate relationships identified: profound online-only relationships, superficial cyberflirting and cybersex, and online relationships pursued to find a partner offline (Ben-Ze'ev 2005, p. 153). Sometimes, a relationship goes through all these stages. Turning an online relationship into offline one is connected with various difficulties. Aaron Bez-Ze'ev points out to the incomplete nature of online relationships, the discrepancy between the imagined partner and the actual one, adding physical dimension, giving up on the proved communication medium and practical issues (2005, p. 168). Also, it must be remembered that when it comes to love between mature persons, there is often a double ageing standard and asymmetry in social perception. Women look for partners of similar age. Men prefer much younger partners, often in the age of their children.

The most popular Polish dating websites for seniors are: Sympatia (<http://sympatia.onet.pl>), Razem 50 plus ([www.razem50plus.pl](http://www.razem50plus.pl)), Samotne serca ([www.samotneserca.pl/senior/randki](http://www.samotneserca.pl/senior/randki)), Randkidojrzałych.pl (<https://randkidojrzałych.pl/>), Swatka, (<http://www.swatka.pl/senior>). The potential clients are attracted by advertising slogans and user-friendly interfaces. Most of the advertisements are the stories of couples who have met using the service.

The above mentioned websites were analysed regarding security and prevention measures. Sympatia.pl has Safety tab where users can read about the range of security measures applied. In addition to the secure login standards, it offers professional assistance of the Customer Service Office responsible for verifying every profile and photograph. Users are also referred to Advises tab but unfortunately, there are no warnings regarding the activity of marriage frauds.

Razem 50 plus portal declares that they have the SSL certificate. In this case, the safety content is more comprehensive. It includes seven rules of safe dating: *Give yourself time to know the other person; Use the dating website internal mail; Do not share your contact details too quickly, Keep limited trust, If you go on a date, tell your family about it, Choose a public place for an offline date, Never get in the car with a stranger* (Razem50plus 2020). Users can also read about 7 signals they might have met a marriage fraud. The signals are

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<sup>1</sup> 2 thousand seniors were interviewed <https://interaktywnie.com/biznes/artykuly/biznes/aktywnosc-seniorow-w-internecie-oto-wyniki-badan-259086>.

presented as graphics and include: *unrealistic photo or lack of photograph, suspicious profile description (not grammatical or in a foreign language), appeal for financial help, asking for sharing private data, inconsistency in what they say, a person does not want to meet offline and is not interested in you but focuses only on self* (Razem50plus 2020). The last element can be disputable. As revealed in numerous analyses, frauds show much interest in their victims for the first two weeks. This website puts definitely more emphasis on safety issues and this might be due to the fact that it is dedicated to mature people who are potential digital immigrants (Prensky 2001).

Another website, Samotne Serca, has many marketing information in their main page. The creators of the portal encourage to visit their blog where different issues are addressed. Unfortunately, safety issues are not exposed in the blog.

Randkidojrzałych.pl also lacks information about safe emotional relationships in the Internet. In general, it does not present much content. It only has a forum. It is dedicated to mature adults and seniors.

Swatka, the last website mentioned declares on their home page that: *All profiles are verified by carefully moderated by our staff. This is why you can find only real profiles in our service* (Swatka 2020). However, users will not find information about safe dating.

Only one out of the five websites publishes content regarding the threat posed by dating frauds. Perhaps, administrators of other portals decided that there are lots of information in the Internet and there is no need to copy them. With such approach, it would be worth to publish links to the selected websites.

### **Threats Connected with Virtual Dating**

Due to the fact that media have appeared quite late in their life, elder people are more vulnerable to different virtual manipulations and frauds. Online dating industry is facing new forms of offence and pathologies (Swatka 2020). One of the most common is the so called *love scamming, Online Romance Scams, sweethearts scam*. It involves creating a false identity and building a romantic relationship using online dating websites in order to obtain money from the potential victim (Whitty, Buchanan 2012; 2016).

According to police statistics, frauds operate in similar way. Most often it is “American soldier” or “humanitarian mission” scam. Frauds create their false profiles using publicly trusted professions like a doctor, a pilot, a soldier, a war correspondent or a lawyer. Sometimes it is a sportsman, a model or a businessman (Coluccia et al. 2020). The victims are single seniors - divorced or widows, however it does not mean men are not in this group.

In case of men, the most popular motive is a woman living behind the Eastern border who wants to start a new life in Poland. The scenario is always the same. It will be thoroughly analysed in the empirical section. The romantic relationship with a victim lasts for 6-8 months and love is declared already two weeks after first interaction (Coluccia et al. 2020). After declaring love, the fraud begins “grooming” the victim - developing a hyperpersonal relationship with the victim (Whitty 2013; 2015; 2018) and slowly plans an offline meeting which gets postponed for different reasons. Usually, it is a series of dramatic events. Ultimately, for the meeting to happen or the relationship to last, a financial support from the victim is necessary. There is a whole list of needs: passport fee, flight tickets for the fraud or their relative, customs tax, hospital fee, costs of some treatment or education (of the fraud or their family member), phone bills (in order to continue communication with the victim). Sometimes the fraud offers the victim a job and takes a registration fee (African dating websites) or works for a website (Wiki, 2020). It happens that the victim is asked to send intimate photos or do something and later becomes blackmailed.

**Table 1:** Fraud and victim characteristics

Fraud	Victim
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Often a member of an international crime group.</li> <li>- Acts very quickly. Asks a lot of questions, shortens the distance. Prefers to communicate through online chats or e-mails. His/her statements are often inconsistent and do not match the information on their profile. Uses English translated in a translator.</li> <li>- At some point begins to ask for financial support or promises to send a surprise gift.</li> <li>- Increases the frequency of contacts, begins to sound desperate. Exerts more or less open pressure.</li> <li>- Situation complicates, they have various excuses or reasons.</li> <li>- Residents of African countries, individuals living a “double life”.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lonely person, often after or during a crisis.</li> <li>- Someone who looks for new experiences, impulsive, with a higher level of neuroticism, amicable, with low self-esteem, idealist, prone to addiction, also emotional (Whitty 2018).</li> <li>- Is not careful, gullible, shares personal information.</li> <li>- Shares their personal data or account number without thinking. Sometimes decides to enter into some agreement.</li> <li>- Does not check or verify their online friends, lacks sound skepticism.</li> <li>- Keeps the relationship secret from their friends and family.</li> </ul>

**Source:** Author’s own compilation

In 2018, there were 4555 love scams reported to Action Fraud organisation, and the victims lost the total of over 50 million pounds (Action Fraud 2019). According to the report of the Federal Trade Committee (FTC), in 2018 there were 21 thousand of love scams reported,

which costed the victims 143 million dollars. It is the average of 2,6 thousand USD per person (Lesman 2019). It is hard to determine which age group is most vulnerable to love scamming: people in their middle age (Whitty 2018), older adults (Oliver S, Burls T, Fenge L-A, et al. 2015) or seniors (Lee, Soberon-Ferrer 2005). The FTC statistics indicate individuals aged 40-69 are susceptible to this type of frauds. Usually, they are well educated women (Whitty 2018). Older people give higher amounts than 20 or 30 year-olds. 60% of false users are men in average age of 50 (Sorell, Whitty 2019). Geographically, half of the frauds come from African countries and 16% from Asian and English speaking countries (Coluccia et al. 2020). They use very emotional language in their profile descriptions and messages to potential victims. In 2018 Facebook introduced a system to detect false accounts and blocked as much as 500 000 of them (New York Times 2019). 63% of its users fell victim of a fraud at least once, whereas 29% suspected they had been in such situation (Jimoh, Stephen 2018).

Other threats are cyberbullying, cybermolesting and Cyber-Obsessive Relational Intrusion (ORI). Intrusion aims at creating a bond with the victim. The literature mentions three types (after Whitty, Carr 2009, p. 185):

- Hyperintimacy - sending content which is too private, proofs of love and obscene photos and content;
- RL-transference, Real-Life-transference - threatening, following the person met online;
- Threats - sending verbal threats, damaging someone's reputation.

### **Methodological Assumptions**

Prevention of threats connected with using the Internet by elderly people is the important social issue. The descriptive research aimed at answering the following question: How do marriage frauds operate in the Internet? Then, some more detailed problems were identified.

- What the reactions of marriage fraud victims?
- What prevention means are being introduced in the Internet?

The research was qualitative. The method used was case study, document analysis and interview. Sampling was purposeful and the sample consisted of four seniors who have fallen victims of love scams.

- K1, 67 years - divorced, secondary education, 2 adult children
- K2, 68 years - widow, university degree, 1 daughter
- K3, 71 years - never married, lives alone, no children
- K4, 69 - divorced, university degree, 6 children

### **Analysis of Operation Mechanisms of Victims and Frauds**

The examples of women illustrate best how do marriage frauds operate. The beginning is always the same. Using a dating website or Facebook, a woman meets a man who works abroad (businessman), stays abroad on a mission (doctor) or is a soldier about to end their military service. She enters into the relationship driven by curiosity or compassion.

*At the beginning of the year I joined a dating service. I began to talk to a man who said his name was John. He said he was in Syria with the British army [K1].*

*Shortly after my 68<sup>th</sup> birthday I began to get interested in dating websites - encouraged by my grandchildren who suggested I could try this type of activity in the Internet. Soon, I noticed it is a good place to renew contacts with my old friends. One day, I saw a photograph in Facebook feed, of a man who was helping a wounded child and I decided to write to him. It turned out he was a voluntary [K2].*

*One day I answered a message sent to my profile on Facebook. This gentleman introduced himself as U.S. Army general, a widower, who was about to end his mission in the Middle East and get retired [K3].*

*I checked a dating website out of curiosity, encouraged by a friend. This man wrote to me first and he said he was a medicine doctor in a bombed hospital in Syria [K4].*

Newly met men often declare they have some Polish roots, which is to suggest they and the victims have something in common. They begin to exchange messages or e-mails. In case of social networking services, new friends want to move to e-mail communication as soon as possible but they will avoid forms of contact that are easy to track by law enforcement authorities.

*He asked for my phone number. He said he wanted to stay in touch with me but he did not trust FB [K2].*

*He contacted me only through online communicator, when I asked for a phone call, he always said that the army forbids them to make such calls [K3].*

*Soon, he suggested e-mail communication because he was afraid his colleagues will comment on the fact that he was looking for love on dating portals [K4].*

The alarming elements should include: attempts to shorten the distance quickly, excessive care and interest shown by the partner and declared desire to come quickly and legalize the new relationship.

*He said I am his angel, a gift from heaven and that with my support he will be able to organize aid for children - victims of wars in the Middle East [K2].*

*Few weeks later he confessed his love. After 2 months he said he was ready to move to Poland when he retires. He asked me to look for a proper house for him [K3].*

*Once in a while he mentioned he wanted to settle. Several times, he sent me small gifts - souvenirs from his missions. I told my daughter about this relationship. She asked me to be careful and never mentioned it again [K4].*

Coming to the victim's home country usually meets with different difficulties, mainly financial.

*He offered he can come to Poland and organize a fundraising campaign to help children. But he had some difficulties to get out of Syria so he suggested I raised the funds myself [K2].*

*A month later he asked me for money for his flight ticket to Poland. He explained that he has no access to his account while on mission [K3].*

*His departure from the mission was being postponed due to bombings. He sent me photos of bombed hospital buildings and asked for financial support because the situation there was tragic [K4].*

The partner often has to secure or deposit some important or valuable personal items or falls victim to frauds at the airport, as he travels.

*He said he had to secure some personal stuff and asked me to help him bring it to Poland. He was supposed to forward it through a trusted friend [K1].*

*He wrote that he has managed to get all the documents and that he was coming to Poland, I went to the capital to pick him up from the airport. At the airport I found out he was arrested for attempting to bring large amount of cash. He wanted to secure it [K3].*

*When everything was planned, his holiday in Poland, he sent me an e-mail that due to war activities he will not make it to the scheduled flight. He asked me to book another flight for*

*him and send him some money which he would give me back when he would get to Poland [K4].*

The emergency situations required immediate support from women and sending financial means necessary to continue the journey or pay the “ransom”.

*He asked me for money to pay for his tickets and customs for a friend who had been robbed at the airport. I believed because things like that happen. I sent him my savings [K1].*

*I was not able to raise these funds among my friends in such a short time. I decided that for now, I will pay with my money and I transferred the funds on the PayPal address I was given [K2].*

*I booked the flights for him and sent him the money on the account he gave me [K4].*

The alleged soldiers or doctors use different psychological mechanisms to convince women to transfer very high amounts, often taken on credit.

*I did not want to send several thousand. As I didn't have that much cash, I took a parbank loan. There were few of such requests for money. He always informed me what the money was for and documented it with photos [K2].*

*Few days later, I received information I can bail him out of the prison but I had to pay quite a lot. He promised to pay everything back as soon as he was released. I took a loan and transferred the required amount. He contacted me after his release and ensured that he would come to Poland within days, as soon as he deals with some issues [K3].*

As soon as he gets the money, the “lover” disappears without a trace.

*Three months later I got a message from his friend that he died during a bombing. After that the phone did not answer [K2].*

*I waited few days but I didn't hear from him. Finally I reported his missing on the police. I was afraid they hurt him [K3].*

*Suddenly, my doctor stopped writing and after a while I read that things like that had happened to other women, that they, too, booked hotels for him and sent him money. Slowly, I began to realise I had been scammed [K4].*

The scammed women experience a whole range of emotions, often very contradictory. Very often, they keep false hope till the end. They protect their partners and once they realise what has happened, they blame themselves.

*(...) I admit I was depressed, I could not forgive myself for a long time that I let myself get abused, that I got engaged that much. I was left with a huge credit to pay and I was ashamed to ask for help [K3].*

*(...) for long, I wondered what did I do wrong that the relationship was broken. I analysed the whole situation and went through various emotions [K4].*

Sometimes, despite hard evidence and rational arguments, women are still emotionally involved and it is hard for them to believe they have been scammed.

*(...) I can't stop loving him and I think I could forgive him. I believe he was manipulated by some criminal group... Maybe it's strange but I miss him [K2].*

*(...) sometimes, I think it was a dream. I will wake up and it will be like it used to be... we will write again... My daughter said, I didn't learn anything from this situation [K4].*

Recovering the money lost is difficult because seniors are reluctant to report the fraud to the police. They are blocked by shame (Coluccia at al. 2020), they feel embarrassed that they were so uncritical and careless, they feel humiliated and are afraid that their friends and family will know about the whole situation will and turn away from them. The more, that the amounts at stake are often very high. Psychotherapists who work with the victims have observed that they have problems with identifying their personal boundaries and recognising the difference between fiction and reality, dreams and real life, their own needs and the needs of others. The fact that they have entered in such relationships often results from their low self-esteem (the sense of being useless, worthless) or difficult existential situation (crisis). Sometimes, they are mourning for years (“double whammy”) over the loss of money and the partner or they struggle with lack of trust to people (Buchanan&Whitty 2013; Whitty 2019; Bozek 2019; Coluccia at al. 2020).

In all the above mentioned cases, the victims lacked support and interest from their loved ones and were not careful when entering into new friendships. There are much information in the Internet about marriage scams, dating websites post warnings and IT specialists offer different tools to verify data published online.

### **Technical Assistance to Fight Marriage Frauds**

There are many organizations which support victims of abuse. One of them is *ActionFraud*. Their website enables reporting cases of abuse. It also provides guidance for people who enter into online relationships, coded as *DATES*: get to know the person, not just their profile and ask lots of questions; copy parts of their profile description in Google search and check if the person is mentioned somewhere else; stay alert if they tell you to be loyal; do not send money or bank account numbers; until you are sure it is not a fraud, pick a public place for a meeting and have some observers. It would be beneficial to have such observers at every stage of building the relationship. It is known that perception of a person who begins new relationship may be disturbed due to emotions they experience. An observer keeps the distance and can apply a common sense.

Internet offers also many tools to verify website accounts. One of them is *BeenVerified.com* search engine. After typing the name, users need to determine what kind of information they are looking for. The search engine scans the selected social media. Unfortunately, users have to pay to get access to the data. Researcher from University of Warwick have developed an algorithm which, based on the analysis of all profile data, can detect frauds. This early verification can be used to prevent abuses (Lesman 2019).

Marriage frauds often use retouched photographs of actual soldiers who are on humanitarian missions. Another tool, *TinEye* enables reverse photo identification. It shows where given photographs have been published before. With this option one can verify photos uploaded by dating website users.

There are different computer (e-mail) and mobile spying software available on the Polish market. For example, *Spylogger Alfalog PRO* monitors and saves messages sent via e-mail, Skype and Facebook, and phone conversations. The software e-mails the report and can uninstall by itself, leaving no trace.

### **Discussion and Summary**

The problems addressed in the paper are to: draw attention to the threats related to online dating, present the selected means of protection against these threats, especially among elder/lonely people and raise awareness of the potential victims.

The course of the romantic relationships with men met through dating websites, presented by the respondents is coherent with the model scenario of love scams. The frauds took advantage of current political situation in Syria and of the victims. The image of the victims formed during the analysis, corresponds with the data obtained in other studies (Whitty 2018;

Coluccia at al. 2020). The women had secondary or higher education which, theoretically, should be the protective factor. In all cases, what was missing was the basic knowledge about safe use of the Internet. Similar to other research mentioned herein (Whitty 2019; Coluccia at al. 2020), in addition to the trauma connected with loosing money, the women experienced the trauma of loosing the potential partner. They did not decide to report the fact of being abused. On the one hand, it was caused by shame but on the other hand, by hidden, often unspoken hope that maybe, their “beloved” will contact again and explain the whole situation. Their emotional suffering is even bigger due to the fact that they did not have proper support from their loved ones, both during the onset of the relationship, its development and dramatic end. In the next research, it would be worth to add the motive of attitudes shown in the closest environment of the victims. What is their role in the process of overcoming the crisis caused by dating fraud?

The analysis of the dating website content showed that their administrators pay little attention to the issues of safety of their potential users. Data safety in the context of GDPR is emphasized, but there are no prevention measures in terms of the so called soft competencies and the process of luring the victims. The websites publish the stories of couples who have met through this communication channel but they could also publish the stories of people who have fallen victims to frauds as a warning. The safety tab could simply provide several external links to YouTube videos. Despite many online materials addressing these issues, the number of marriage scams does not decrease. It looks that this type of (primary) prevention is not very effective. It should be targeted at individuals who are directly in the risk group. It is important that the materials emphasize the “methods used by online frauds”. Some prevention activities (like information campaigns) addressed to the families of seniors would be also useful. Friendly, empathetic and watchful attitude of children, grandchildren or relatives is one of the key protective factors (unfortunately, it is not emphasized enough).

The (selected) technology solutions presented herein to safeguard the users of social media should be recommended by dating websites and discussed during digital education courses (organized by U3As or other institutions).

The problem discussed in the paper is global and can be reduced through cooperation of different environments and information exchange. Reflections presented herein can contribute to the discourse over the shape and content of prevention programmes or information-educational campaigns addressed to the oldest citizens of our global community.

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