

Romance scam is the most emotionally devastating fraud

Many hearts are broken in the quest for love, leaving some people financially wounded.

Romance scams cause victims severe financial loss and, due to the emotional impact and personal embarrassment, these crimes are not reported to police.

Members of the OPP Anti-Rackets Branch say criminals use the romance scam to find potential victims online, generally single or recently unattached people of all ages. Usually this form of mass marketing fraud occurs through singles and dating-related 'meet' websites, social media platforms, or email blasts. In some cases, prolonged interaction with individuals has cost some victims tens of thousands of dollars before the 'relationship' suddenly ends, usually without ever meeting in person. Among the most vulnerable are seniors.

In 2017, the romance scam generated 352 complaints and caused 250 victims to lose \$6.2 million in Ontario alone. The dollar value is the second highest fraud in the province and police admit that this may represent just five per cent of the total number of victims. As part of the annual Fraud Prevention Month campaign, OPP and its partners at the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre have some tips to help people avoid becoming a victim of the romance scam.

First, ask 'Would someone I have never met, really declare their love for me after only a few letters or emails?' If the answer is no, report it to police.

Don't give out any personal information in an email or when chatting online. Educate yourself. Check the person's name, the company name, and the addresses used.

Never send money, or give personal credit card or online account details to anyone you do not know and trust. A request to send money to a foreign country or to someone you have never personally met should be a red flag.

Check website addresses carefully. Scammers often set up fake websites with addresses that are very similar to legitimate dating websites.

If you or someone you know suspect they've been a victim of the romance scam, contact police. You can also file a complaint through the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS), or online at <https://www.tipsubmit.com/start.htm>