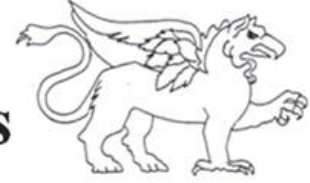




*Specialised*  
Security Services



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**PROJECT:**  
**SWEETHEART OR**  
**ROMANCE SCAMS**

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*Sweetheart or Romance scams have increased exponentially and are a significant concern in South Africa, as in many other parts of the world. Sweetheart scams typically involve criminals creating fake online profiles on dating sites and social media platforms to form fake romantic relationships with unsuspecting individuals. These scammers often gain the trust of their victims and then exploit that trust to request money, gifts, or personal information.*

*Please view our previous project on the dangers of dating apps:*

<https://mikebh.link/GoVZEy>

*Like other countries, South Africa has seen an increase in online dating and social media*

*use, making it a fertile ground for romance scammers to target potential victims. The scams can have devastating financial and emotional consequences for those who fall victim to them.*

*SSS and other law enforcement agencies and cybersecurity experts in South Africa have been working to raise awareness about such scams and provide tips on identifying and avoiding them.*

*We encourage people to be cautious when interacting with individuals online, especially those they have not met in person, and to be wary of any requests for money or financial assistance from strangers.*

*It is essential to note that the situations and the manner in which these scams function are continuously evolving.*

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## **THE VICTIMS:**

- The victims of Sweetheart scams can come from various backgrounds and demographics.
- These scammers are opportunistic and do not discriminate based on age, gender, nationality, or socioeconomic status.
- Anyone who engages in online dating or forms relationships through social media platforms can potentially become a victim of these scams.

However, there are certain factors that scammers might exploit to target victims more effectively:

- Loneliness and vulnerability:
  - Scammers often prey on individuals who may be feeling lonely or emotionally vulnerable.
  - They use emotional manipulation to establish a deep connection quickly.
- Elderly individuals:
  - Senior citizens can be at higher risk because they may be less familiar with online platforms and more trusting of others.
  - Scammers may take advantage of their limited online experience.
- Financial stability:
  - Scammers may target individuals they perceive to be financially stable or well-off, hoping to exploit their willingness to help or share their wealth.
- Recent life changes:
  - Individuals who have recently experienced significant life changes, such as the death of a spouse or a divorce, might be more susceptible to romantic advances.
- Long-distance relationships:
  - Scammers often claim to be from a different country or have reasons that prevent them from meeting in person.
  - People open to long-distance relationships may be targeted more frequently.
- Naivety and trust:
  - Some victims may be overly trusting or naive, making it easier for scammers to deceive them.
- Female victims:
  - Unfortunately, many of the victims are female, as women are usually more emotional, subjective and trusting.
  - Their nurturing character tends to sway them to take care of those in need.
  - Many ladies are also specifically looking for a romantic relationship rather than a physical relationship.
  - The female perception of "true love" is quite different from that of a male, making them more vulnerable to manipulation.

*It is important to remember that anyone can fall victim to a Sweetheart scam, and victims should not feel ashamed or embarrassed if they do.*

# *Scammers are highly skilled at manipulating emotions, and their actions are not the victim's fault.*

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## **THE PERPETRATORS:**

- Sweetheart scams are typically orchestrated by individuals or groups of criminals who create fake online personas to deceive and exploit their victims.
- These perpetrators are commonly known as "romance scammers" or "catfishers."
- They often operate from different parts of the world and use various techniques to manipulate and trick their targets into forming a false sense of trust and emotional connection.

The perpetrators of Sweetheart or Romance scams can be anyone with access to the internet, but they tend to share some common traits and behaviours:

- Professional scammers:
  - Some scammers are part of organised crime networks specialising in online fraud.
  - These individuals are skilled at creating convincing fake profiles and using psychological tactics to groom their victims.
- Impersonators:
  - Some scammers pretend to be someone they are not, such as military personnel, doctors, engineers, or wealthy individuals.
  - They often use stolen photos and information to create a persona that seems legitimate.
- Global presence:
  - These scammers can be based in various countries, making it difficult for law enforcement to track and apprehend them.
- Repeat offenders:
  - Scammers may operate multiple fake profiles simultaneously and target multiple victims simultaneously.
  - They may also return to the same targets or share victim information with other scammers.
- Manipulative tactics:
  - The scammers use emotional manipulation, flattery, and affection to gain their victims' trust and sympathy.
  - They may also create fake emergency situations to request money from their victims.
- Language barriers:

- Some scammers operate from countries where English is not the primary language, leading to grammar and spelling mistakes in their communications.

*It is crucial to remain cautious and sceptical when forming relationships online, especially with individuals you have not met in person.*

*Awareness of common scammer tactics and following online safety guidelines can help protect yourself from falling victim to these scams.*

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## **IMPORTANT MEASURES TO AVOID SWEETHEART OR ROMANCE SCAMS:**

Avoiding Sweetheart scams in South Africa, or anywhere else, requires vigilance and awareness.

Here are some safety measures to help you protect yourself from falling victim to a sweetheart or romance scam:

- Be sceptical:
  - Approach online relationships with caution, especially if the other person seems too perfect or quickly declares their love for you.
  - Scammers often use flattery and affection to build trust rapidly. For example, as soon as they realise that you are a Christian or a member of a specific religion, they will use specific theological ideals of that religion to win your trust.
- Protect your personal information at all costs:
  - Avoid sharing sensitive personal information with someone you've only met online, such as your home address, financial details, or identity number.
- Research the new suitor's profile:
  - Use search engines to verify the person's identity and check if their pictures or information appear elsewhere online.
  - Scammers often use stolen photos and fake names.

- Be wary if the Facebook profile is brand new or recent with no distinct timeline.
- Never send money:
  - Never send money or gifts to someone you've only met online, no matter how convincing their story may be.
  - This is one of the most common tactics used by these scammers.
- Meet in person:
  - If you're considering taking the relationship offline, insist on meeting in person.
  - Be cautious if the other person consistently avoids meeting face-to-face or makes excuses.
- Beware of sad stories or tales of life-threatening emergencies:
  - Scammers often create elaborate stories to evoke sympathy, such as having a sick family member or facing a financial crisis.
  - Avoid falling for these emotional ploys.
- Use trusted dating sites:
  - Stick to reputable and well-known dating websites or apps with safety measures and user verification processes.
- Look out for poor grammar and spelling:
  - Many romance scammers are based in countries where English is not the first language, leading to grammar and spelling mistakes in their messages.
- Stay cautious with long-distance relationships:
  - Be especially cautious if the person claims to be from a different country and is unable to meet you in person due to travel restrictions or other reasons.
- Report suspicious activity:
  - If you suspect that someone may be trying to scam you, report their profile to the dating site or app administrators.
- Educate yourself:
  - Stay informed about common scam tactics and read about the experiences of others who have encountered such scams.
  - Knowledge is an essential tool in protecting yourself.
- Never be persuaded to leave the site you met and to move your conversation to a private chat room.
- Tell a trusted but objective outsider or colleague:
  - Confide in someone you can trust and who will be truthful in their intention to help you vet the new suitor.
- If you are still unsure in any way, feel free to contact Mr Mike Bolhuis personally.

*Remember, romance scammers are skilled at manipulating emotions and gaining trust, so always prioritise your safety and be cautious when interacting with people you meet online.*

*If something feels off or too good to be true, it's essential to investigate further and take steps to protect yourself from potential scams.*

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## **HOW TO DO A REVERSE IMAGE SEARCH:**

Performing a reverse image search is a simple process, and there are multiple methods you can use depending on your device and preferred search engine.

Here's how to do a reverse image search using popular search engines:

- Google Reverse Image Search (Desktop):
  - Go to <https://images.google.com/> on your web browser.
  - Click the camera icon in the search bar (this opens the reverse image search).
  - You have two options:
    - Paste the image URL: If you have the image's URL, paste it in the search bar.
    - Upload an image: Click "Upload an image" and select the image file from your computer.
  - Google will process the image, and the search results will show you similar images and web pages that include that image.
- Google Reverse Image Search (Mobile):
  - If you are using the Chrome browser on your mobile device, go to the image you want to search.
  - Press and hold the image until a pop-up menu appears.
  - Tap "Search Google for this image."
  - Google will process the image, and the search results will be displayed.
- Reverse Image Search using other search engines:
  - Other search engines like Bing and Yandex also offer reverse image search functionality.
- For Bing:

- Go to <https://www.bing.com/images> and click the camera icon in the search bar to upload an image or paste the image URL.
- For Yandex:
- Go to <https://yandex.com/images/> and click the camera icon to upload an image or provide the image URL.

*These methods will help you perform a reverse image search to find out where else an image appears on the web or to find related photos. It's a valuable tool to check the authenticity of photographs, find the original source, or see if an image has been used in multiple contexts.*

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## **WEBSITES TO HELP YOU VET YOUR POTENTIAL NEW SUITOR:**

- There are websites and resources dedicated to exposing photos of people that scammers use in sweetheart scams.
  - One of the most well-known websites for this purpose is "RomanceScam.com."
    - On this website, you can find a section called "Gallery of Scammers" or "Scammer Photo Gallery," where users submit photos used by scammers in various types of fraud, including romance scams.
  - Please note that while these resources can help identify potential scammer profiles, they may not cover every instance, as scammers frequently change their tactics, names, and images to avoid detection.
  - Therefore, it's essential to remain vigilant and follow the tips mentioned earlier to protect yourself from falling victim to romance scams.
  - If you suspect you are interacting with a scammer, it's crucial to cease communication and report the profile to the platform administrators.
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## THE IMPACT ON THE VICTIMS:

Sweetheart or Romance scammers can have significant and devastating effects on their victims, both emotionally and financially. The impact of falling victim to a romance scam can be long-lasting and traumatic.

Here are some common effects a romance scammer may have on their victim:

- Emotional distress:
  - Victims often experience intense emotional distress, including feelings of betrayal, humiliation, and heartbreak.
  - They may struggle to come to terms with the fact that the person they believed to be their romantic partner was a complete fabrication.
- Loss of trust:
  - Victims may become more cynical and lose trust in others, especially in online relationships.
  - This loss of trust can affect their willingness to form new connections and relationships in the future.
- Financial loss:
  - These scammers commonly request money from their victims under various pretexts, such as medical emergencies, travel expenses, or financial hardships.
  - Victims may end up sending large sums of money, depleting their savings, and facing financial ruin.
- Isolation and shame:
  - Many victims feel ashamed and embarrassed about falling for a romance scam.
  - As a result, they may withdraw from friends and family, leading to social isolation and a reluctance to seek help or support.
- Identity theft and fraud:
  - In some cases, scammers may also collect personal information from their victims during the scam, which can be used for identity theft and other fraudulent activities.
- Impact on physical health:
  - The stress and emotional turmoil caused by the scam can have physical effects on the victim, such as insomnia, headaches, and digestive issues.
- Legal issues:
  - Some victims may find themselves in legal trouble if the scammers use their identity to commit illegal activities.
- Recovery and healing:
  - Recovering from a Sweetheart scam can be a challenging and lengthy process.

- Victims may need counselling or therapy to address the emotional trauma and rebuild their lives.
  - Unsettling psychological impact:
    - Many of our clients continue with these relationships even though they have been warned against it by family and friends.
    - They might continue despite taking our and other authorities' advice and proof of the scam into consideration.
    - Their absolute emotional or financial desperation seems to have a hold on them.
    - If anyone you know has been through such an ordeal, be vigilant to ensure they do not continue.
    - The victims often lie about continuing contact with the scammers.
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*It is crucial for victims of romance scams to understand that they are not to blame for what happened. Scammers are skilled at manipulation and deception, and anyone can fall victim to their tactics.*

*If you or someone you know has been targeted by a romance scammer, seeking support from friends, family, or professional counsellors is essential. Additionally, reporting the scam to the relevant authorities can help prevent further victimisation and potentially assist in catching the perpetrators.*

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**VIEW OUR OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE OR WEBSITE FOR MANY SIMILAR WARNINGS REGARDING THESE ATROCIOUS SCAMS AND THE TRAUMATIC EFFECTS IT HAS ON THE VICTIMS.**

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**CONTACT MR MIKE BOLHUIS FOR ADVICE,  
RECOMMENDATIONS, SECURITY, PROTECTION,  
OR AN INVESTIGATION IF NEEDED.**

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**ALL INFORMATION WILL BE TREATED WITH THE  
UTMOST PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY.**

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***You may forward this document and  
share it with as many people as possible.***

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Regards,

Mike Bolhuis.  
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<https://www.facebook.com/MikeBolhuisOfficial>

**EXTREMELY IMPORTANT:** All potential clients need to be aware that owing to the nature of our work as specialist investigators there are people who have been caught on the wrong side of the law - who are trying to discredit me - Mike Bolhuis and my organisation Specialised Security Services - to get themselves off the hook.

This retaliation happens on social media and creates doubt about our integrity and ability. Doubt created on social media platforms is both unwarranted and untrue.

We strongly recommend that you make up your minds concerning me and our organisation only after considering all the factual information - to the exclusion of hearsay and assumptions.

Furthermore, you are welcome to address your concerns directly with me should you still be unsatisfied with your conclusions. While the internet provides a lot of valuable information, it is also a platform that distributes a lot of false information. The distribution of false information, fake news, slander and hate speech constitutes a crime that can be prosecuted by law. Your own research discretion and discernment are imperative when choosing what and what not to believe.

**STANDARD RULES APPLY:** Upon appointment, we require a formal mandate with detailed instructions. Please take note that should you not make use of

our services – you may not under any circumstance use my name or the name of my organisation as a means to achieve whatever end.

**POPI ACT 4 of 2013 South Africa:** Mike Bolhuis' "Specialised Security Services" falls under Section 6 of the act. Read more here: <https://mikebolhuis.co.za/popi-act-4-of-2013-section-6-mike-bolhuis/>

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**SSS TASK TEAM:**  
<https://mikebh.link/Task-Team-2023>

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You are receiving this email to inform and keep you updated with violent and/or economic crimes. So that you can inform and protect your loved ones and everyone you know.

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