

Police warn of 'overseas soldier' dating scam

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West Mercia Police have warned women to be careful of an online dating scam which tricks them into thinking they are giving money to struggling British soldiers overseas.

In a statement released on Friday, the police force said that it had been contacted by a number of women in the region who had been targeted by scammers posing as soldiers on online dating sites.

After carefully building an online relationship with the women, the "soldiers" ask for money to help them, for example, pay medical bills or fund setting up a telephone link near their military base.

The most recent report of such a scam was on January 4, when a woman from Kidderminster told West Mercia Police that she had been contacted by a man claiming to be a soldier.

She ([news](#)) became suspicious when she worked out some of the details he had given her about himself were false and decided to close the acquaintance.

According to the National Fraud Authority, such "dating scams" have become increasingly common in the past few years as more and more people use online dating websites.

Last year, the BBC reported that a rising number of scammers, often based in West Africa, were pretending to be US soldiers in order to solicit money from women they met on dating sites. Some of these men used the names of real American soldiers, and would take photos from military websites to use as their profile pictures on the dating sites. Others even sent the women fake military documents to make themselves seem more authentic.

PC Lee Halford of West Mercia Police said: "We are keen to make women who use internet dating websites aware of these scams, so that they will exercise caution.

"So-called 'romance scammers' will set out to form an online relationship over a period of weeks or months and then make a request for money when they feel they have established enough trust.

"In this latest reported case, the victim was lucky and we hope that by highlighting what can happen, other women will avoid falling victim to online fraudsters."

Most of the women targeted in the West Mercia area so far have been from the town of Kidderminster in north Worcestershire.

According to Action Fraud, victims of romance fraud reported losing over £3 million between June and November (Berlin: [NBXB.BE - news](#)) 2010.

Dr Bernard Herdan, CEO of the National Fraud Authority said that the fraudsters were "skilled in finding your emotional vulnerabilities, making you act in a way you wouldn't normally like sending money to someone you've never met. They will use a number of different stories, including being a soldier abroad, to cover up why they cannot meet you and what the money is for."

Action Fraud advises all people using dating sites to refrain from trusting people too quickly, avoid giving personal email addresses, and to never send money to people not met in person.