The Impact Report should be completed and submitted using the grant reference as the email subject to reports officer@esrc.ac.uk on or before the due date.

Please complete each box as fully as possible, adhering to the word counts, please do not include images within the text. Appendices are not accepted.

Principal Investigators are expected to consult with co-investigators on the content of this report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grant Reference:</th>
<th>ES/J010863/1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Investigator/s:</td>
<td>Prof Monica Whitty &amp; Professor Tom Buchanan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>Development of the online romance toolkits for the public sector</td>
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Description

Please include a short overview of the projects impacts (max 2000 characters with spaces).

Online mass-marketing fraud can have a devastating impact on its victims – both psychological and financial harm. The ‘follow on’ study focused on the online dating romance scam, which is an international problem and has been around since about 2007 (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012). In romance scams, criminals target users of dating and social networking sites, creating fake profiles and establishing trust in order to defraud them. Victims believe they are involved in real relationships. Often resistant to the idea that they have been defrauded, they are prone to re-victimisation and experience significant emotional distress.

The project was a ‘follow on project’, which is funding focused purely on impact activity carried out based on previous research. The objectives were to: improve the quality of care for victims of the online romance scam; decrease the likelihood of re-victimisations; and to improve current policing practice with regards to dealing with victims of the online romance scam.

The work done in partnership with the Serious Organised Crime Agency (now known as NCA) and National Policing Improvement Agency. We achieved our impact by:
a. Contributing to the development of police training packages on how to deal with fraud. These will be used across the UK at three levels of policing (First Responders, CID and Fraud Academy).

b. Evaluating these packages by interviewing victims who had been in contact with police who had received this training. Some victims were involved in a court case and so we were able to ascertain their treatment from initial crime report to conviction of the criminal. Others were followed up to evaluate their experience with police and to determine whether they were re-victimised.

In addition:

- A judge used our work to help make a decision on sentencing a romance scammer in the UK;
- We developed new methods to help prevent re-victimisation;
- Based on our advice, victims in a court case in the UK were treated as ‘intimidated witnesses’.
1. **Scientific impact**

A  Please summarise below the scientific impact(s) your project has had. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

Given this was a ‘follow on’ project we were not funded to undergo empirical research. These grants are awarded to maximise impact from previous research. Moreover, given that the police training materials that were created drew from confidential material we are unable to convey their entire contents. Nonetheless, we have some scientific impact via our evaluations of our toolkits, listed below:

a) We examined whether victims felt the officers dealing with them had a good understanding of the crime and whether they understood the psychological impact it had on them. We interviewed both victims who had been dealt with by trained as well as untrained officers. We found that trained officers were extremely empathetic and understanding and victims reported feeling cared for by these officers. Some of these victims had originally dealt with an untrained officer and then were passed onto the trained officer. They reported a much more positive experience with the trained officer.

b) We examined whether it was of benefit to have a ‘Family Liaison Officer’ (FLO) deal with the victim. These officers are trained to understand psychological abuse (which these victims endured). Moreover, given that they often deal with sexual abuse they are mindful of the ‘transference effect’ (transference of love for the criminal to the officer) that might occur between the victim and the police officer. We interviewed both police and victims about using FLO and found this to be highly successful.

c) With regards to our ‘letter writing’ strategy to prevent re-victimisation we found that these letters successful for those who were giving small amounts of money but not for those who were sending large amounts of money. This was statistically analysed with a sample of 50 victims.

d) We interviewed victims who had been treated as ‘intimated witnesses’ in a court case in the UK. This involved having a video link rather than having to physically go to court. We found this to be a successful strategy.

B  Please outline the findings and outputs from your project which have had the scientific impact(s) outlined in 1A. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

Although ‘follow on’ grants do not fund scientific research, we nonetheless were able to produce some scientific outputs from the project. All of the above findings have or will be disseminated at the following academic conferences as well as non-academic conferences. The outputs are as follows:

**Academic conferences:**
Stockholm, Sweden, 9-12 July, 2013. (invited paper)

Non-academic conferences:

They have also been disseminated in professional and lay audience publications.

[Please note the gap in dissemination has been due to the PI being on maternity leave from November 2013 – June 2014].

C Please outline how these impacts were achieved. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

These included both academic and non-academic conferences.
The academic conferences (both national and international) are all well regarded conferences. Moreover, the PI was invited to give the talk at the international conference in Sweden. The type of conferences chosen reflects the true interdisciplinary nature of the project. Two of the academic conferences focus was on psychology and the other is criminology.

Given this project was an ‘impact’ grant, it was important to disseminate the work to lay audiences (especially law enforcement). This was important not only to make them aware of the research findings, our suggested interventions, as well as to bring about awareness of the courses we were involved in creating with the NPIA. Both of the papers given to lay audiences were conferences specialising in fraud.

We also disseminated in professional publications – again to increase awareness of our findings, suggested interventions as well as the courses we had help create.
D Please outline who the findings and outputs outlined above had an impact upon. This can include specific academics/researchers through to broader academic groups. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

In the main, as intended, the findings have had societal impact. However, the academic impacts have been the dissemination of findings to those researching cyber security, fraud, psychological impact of mass marketing fraud on victims, and criminality in general. This has lead to the development of a couple of bids for further funding. One of these is an RCUK bid to learn more about how to detect, prevent and support victims of mass marketing fraud in general. The second is a bid for a Horizon 2020 project, which in part, intends to find new ways to protect individual’s privacy and as a consequence prevent individuals from becoming victims of mass marketing fraud in the first place. Furthermore, we are looking to apply for some European money to disseminate best law enforcement practice to deal with mass marketing fraud across Europe.

The specific academics involved in these bids include:
Professor Awais Rashid, University of Lancaster; Professor Mark Blythe, University of Northumbria; Professor Mark Button, University of Portsmouth; and Professor Adam Joinson, University of West of England), Professor Tim Watson (Head of the Cyber Security Centre, University of Warwick), Professor Carsten Maple (University of Warwick), and Professor Ulf Reips (University of Konstanz, Germany).
2. Economic and societal impact

A Please summarise below the economic and societal impact(s) your project has had. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

Given that ‘follow on grants’ support impact activities, economic and societal impact were core to our project. Ultimately, the impact from this project was the development of better standards in how victims of romance scam are treated in the UK. In addition, given that the PI sits on the International mass-marketing fraud working group, the dissemination of this project has been on an international level – where law enforcement across the globe have considered and some have implemented some of our suggestions on a) how to improve how victims of romance scam and b) their treatment in court as vulnerable victims.

Our evaluation of our learning packages suggest that they were effective in educating and changing attitudes held by law enforcement regarding romance scam victims. However, the evidence is not definitive as the course is yet to be rolled out to the entire UK police force. Our sample of victims who had experienced a trained law enforcement officer compared with those who had not often demonstrated a stark difference. Victims who encountered trained law enforcement did feel supported and felt that the officer had a good understanding of their situation and psychological state. This understanding is critical given that many of these victims feel depressed and some suicidal. Moreover, often their families and friends do not offer up the sort of support you would normally expect for a victim of crime (given they often blame the victim).

The work that we conducted in this project was used in the first court case in the UK to trial a romance scam criminal. In Operation Podium the victims were treated as intimidated witnesses, meaning they could provide their evidence via video link. Moreover, their point of contact was a Family Liaison Officer, which meant they had someone who had previous experience and training in dealing with victims of abuse. Furthermore, in this court case the judge considered our research findings to help him decide on the final sentencing.

B Please outline the findings and outputs from your project which have had the economic and societal impact(s) outlined in 2A. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

Although there were quite a number of impact outputs from the romance scam research, this project was funded to support two impact outputs:

Work package 1: Develop and evaluate a toolkit to be used by UK police. In this WP we worked together with SOCA and NPIA to develop a classroom and e-learning training package for the police on how to deal with fraud. These will be used across the UK at the three levels of policing (First Responders, CID and Fraud Academy). Our findings on the romance scam were incorporated into the package on fraud. We provided information on how to best notify victims, take statements, advise victims to act if they are contacted again, and to ensure that victims are provided with appropriate support. We outlined the psychological impact on these victims and the lack of support these victims often receive from family and friends. A case study based on our work was also included in the package. The toolkit was also evaluated.

Work package 2: Develop an intimidated witness toolkit to be used by SOCA, NPIA and the police in the UK.
Our previous research found that the psychological impact on victims of this crime is different to victims of other fraud cases. Victims build up an intensely loving relationship with the criminal and are sometime sexually abused (e.g., asked to perform sexual acts in front of a web cam). Confronting the criminal in court could, therefore, lead to further trauma. Because of this, we would expect that having to testify in court will be an extremely intimidating and traumatic experience for witnesses, leaving them in a more vulnerable state as well as potentially jeopardising the case. Moreover, they need special care in the build up to the trial. Given our research findings, victims of the online dating romance scam ought to treated as intimidated witnesses. Work package 2 draw from our previous findings to develop best practice on how to treat witnesses of the online dating romance scam. Again, we evaluated this toolkit.

C Please outline how these impacts were achieved. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

The impacts were achieved by working together with SOCA and the NPIA. We were able to evaluate the packages in two main ways:

**Metropolitan Police Operation Podium:** UK based criminals were successfully prosecuted for conspiracy to commit fraud by misrepresentation. Sixty-two victims were identified from America, Canada and Trinidad/Tobago. Whitty worked with the MET to develop strategies for treating victims; these were evaluated then included in the training packages. The researchers interviewed victims. Those who had a trained police officer dealing with their individual case reported feeling understood and supported. They were extremely positive about their experience with the police officer. Some were dealt with police officers prior to the implementation of training and these victims reported a much more negative experience. Victims were pleased about being treated as ‘intimidated witnesses’ and most preferred to testify via a video link rather than live in court.

**Breaking news to victims and providing support - SOCA and Devon and Cornwall police:** SOCA initiated a trial to determine the best way to break the news to victims and support them once they accept they have been scammed. Whitty advised SOCA on how to best do this and after evaluating the best practices were included in the training packages developed by Mr Paul Downing. We tested the effectiveness of notifying potential victims via letter writing and found that this prevented repeat victims that gave small amounts of money, but not large amounts. This was compared with a control group. In addition, all victims were encouraged to attend a meeting with SOCA officers, police officers, Victim Support and Whitty. Victims were given more information and we ran a peer-support group. A random selection was followed up to evaluate their experience and via intelligence we learnt whether victims continued to send money. A report (restricted material) was included in the training materials.

D Please outline who the findings and outputs outlined above had an impact upon. This can be at a broad societal level through to specific individuals or groups. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

In the UK it has been found that at least 500,000 individuals have become a victim of the online dating romance scam – and these are the individuals who are aware they have been defrauded. Given the number and the severe psychological impact this crime has on victims the impact from this project was very much needed and timely.
The main benefit, therefore, from this project was to victims, potential victims and family and friends of victims of the online dating romance scam. Our toolkits, we believe, and our evaluation goes some way in supporting these people. It means that they will receive better care and understanding from law enforcement. This means better care for individuals who: simply report the crime and is not taken any further, those who report the crime and are later asked to be testify in court and those who are unsuspecting victims who law enforcement approach to notify them of becoming a victim of the online dating romance scam. It addition, we have identified a strategy to help prevent re-victimisation (at least with people who lose small amounts of money).

The other beneficiaries are law enforcement. These training packages and guidelines on how to treat victims in court will mean that they will be able to improve their practice in caring for victims and have a better understanding of the true impact of this crime. Although the original intention was that this project would have impact just in the UK, given that the work has been disseminated on a global scale to law enforcement (e.g., The Netherlands, USA, Canada, Spain, Australia) this means that victims of this crime and law enforcement in other countries might also benefit from our project.
3. **Unexpected and potential future impacts**

A  **Unexpected Impacts**

Please note which, if any, of the impacts that your research has had were unexpected at the outset of the project, explaining where possible why you think this was the case. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

When we planned the research we did not expect to have the opportunities to learn from and evaluate the packages via real life operations. We were fortunate to be able to do this via Operation Podium as well as the work with SOCA and Devon and Cornwall police.

B  **Potential Future Impacts**

If you have a clear idea of the impact your project is likely to have in the future please detail these below. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

Future impacts are already planned. These include:

- Further dissemination. Prof Whitty will be working in Australia during her sabbatical with Queensland State police to disseminate these training packages in more detail and to work with them to consider changes in their own practices. Moreover, she will be disseminating this work to Queensland University Technology (criminology department) who she shall be working with for a month.
- Grant applications. Grants have been written and will presently be submitted to potentially support further work in the field of mass-marking fraud.
- Enhance impact scheme. Professor Whitty was successful at being included in the enhanced impact scheme run by RCUK. She has been working with Rd. Tristram Riley-Smith to develop further impact by developing a training package for Victims Support in the UK and another training package for the judiciary.

4. **Impact limitations**

A  **Limited scientific impact**

Please state below any major scientific difficulties that have limited the scientific impact of your project. The statement should refer to an effect on impact rather than simply detail research difficulties or other project activity problems. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

There was limited scientific impact given that this was a ‘follow on’ grant – the objectives of such a grant are to carry out economic and societal impact based on previous scientific research.
B Limited economic and societal impact

ESRC recognises that some of the research it funds will not have an economic or societal impact in the short term. Please explain briefly below if this is the case for your project, and refer to your grant application where relevant. [Max 2000 Characters with spaces]

n/a