

Romance Scam Research Center

SOCIAL TECHNOLOGY AND SAFETY FOUNDATION

LIVING EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS

Victim Recovery

Victim Recovery after Relationship-Based Cyberscams (Coping, Recovery Support, Aftercare)

Across the reviewed evidence, recovery after relationship-based cyberscams is a multi-dimensional, processual experience involving emotional work (grief, shame, trauma), practical tasks (disentangling finances, seeking restitution), and relational rebuilding (restoring trust or withdrawing from future relationships). Victim trajectories are heterogeneous: some victims disengage, seek formal supports, or join peer networks; others continue emotional contact or payments after discovery, and a minority report persistent fear or severe safety concerns. Peer and online mutual-help activities commonly reduce isolation and provide validation, but available studies are descriptive and do not establish efficacy. Authors and reviews consistently recommend integrated, multi-disciplinary supports (psychological counseling, financial advice, legal aid, family support) and call for longitudinal, comparative, and outcome-focused research to test which interventions reduce fear, restore trust, and improve longer-term wellbeing. The evidence base is dominated by qualitative and descriptive work, with consistent calls for larger, diverse samples and standardized outcome measurement.

Published Aug 29, 2026 Updated Aug 29, 2026 Synthesis version 55

PUBLICATIONS	EVIDENCE STATEMENTS	CITED SOURCES	SYNTHESIS VERSION
28	120	28	55

Across the reviewed evidence, recovery after relationship-based cyberscams is a multi-dimensional, processual experience involving emotional work (grief, shame, trauma), practical tasks (disentangling finances, seeking restitution), and relational rebuilding (restoring trust or withdrawing from future relationships). Victim trajectories are heterogeneous: some victims disengage, seek formal supports, or join peer networks; others continue emotional contact or payments after discovery, and a minority report persistent fear or severe safety concerns. Peer and online mutual-help activities commonly reduce isolation and provide validation, but available studies are descriptive and do not establish efficacy. Authors and reviews consistently recommend integrated, multi-disciplinary supports (psychological counseling, financial advice, legal aid, family support) and call for longitudinal, comparative, and outcome-focused research to test which interventions reduce fear, restore trust, and improve longer-term wellbeing. The evidence base is dominated by qualitative and descriptive work, with consistent calls for larger, diverse samples and standardized outcome measurement. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[4\]](#) [\[5\]](#) [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#) [\[8\]](#) [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#)

Multidimensional character of recovery

Multiple qualitative studies describe recovery as overlapping emotional, practical, and relational tasks rather than a single end-state: victims commonly report grief, denial, shame, and self-blame alongside efforts to disentangle finances, seek legal redress, or rebuild daily routines and relationships. [\[5\]](#) [\[11\]](#) [\[12\]](#)

Because emotional and practical harms are intertwined in victims’ accounts, several authors recommend integrated supports—combining counselling, financial advice, and legal assistance—to address both psychological and material consequences of scams rather than treating these needs separately in recovery plans. [\[13\]](#) [\[12\]](#)

Trajectories of involvement, disengagement, and social support

Reported post-discovery trajectories are heterogeneous: some victims disengage and access supports, whereas a subset continue emotional contact or keep sending money despite recognizing the fraud, patterns that authors describe as reflecting emotional dependency, relapse, or addictive-like attachment. [\[1\]](#) [\[4\]](#)

Family or close-other support sometimes helps victims terminate scams and begin recovery, but lack of support or victim-blaming is frequently reported as a barrier to effective disengagement and recovery, contributing to isolation and delayed help-seeking in some cases; two documented instances also show that some who continue dating after a scam later became repeat victims. [\[2\]](#) [\[14\]](#) [\[15\]](#)

Support types, perceived effectiveness, and service limitations

Victims and authors consistently recommend psychological counseling, financial advice, and legal assistance as central elements of recovery support; many reports describe these services as necessary to address intertwined emotional and economic harms, though descriptions of effectiveness are mostly experiential rather than experimentally validated. [\[9\]](#) [\[10\]](#) [\[11\]](#)

Existing help and treatment for victims are described across several studies as insufficiently professional or detailed, and some reports characterize available support as limited or basically non-existent in particular contexts; counselling was often ineffective when providers lacked knowledge of the crime. [\[16\]](#) [\[3\]](#) [\[2\]](#) [\[17\]](#)

Peer, mutual-help, and online support

Analyses of forums and case studies show that peer and mutual-help activities can reduce isolation, provide validation, enable victims to tell their stories and regain narrative control, and allow experienced survivors to advise others; these benefits are consistently described across large forum-analytic studies and small face-to-face group investigations. [\[18\]](#) [\[19\]](#) [\[20\]](#)

However, the literature on mutual-help is largely descriptive: studies identify potential benefits and report participant-reported empowerment, but they also note limitations such as selection bias, anxiety among new members in face-to-face groups, lack of standardized facilitation guidance, and absence of rigorous evaluations measuring outcomes or harms. [\[8\]](#) [\[20\]](#) [\[19\]](#)

Researchers also call for systematic assessment of online mutual-help practices—including measurement of benefits and harms, facilitation best practices, and linkage between forum-based support and formal services—to understand when and how peer support can complement professional aftercare without causing inadvertent harm. [\[18\]](#) [\[19\]](#) [\[8\]](#)

Restitution, community programs, and economic rebuilding

Victims sometimes pursue legal redress or restitution as part of recovery strategies; doctrinal and country-focused studies note legal provisions for confiscation or restitution in some jurisdictions but also document practical barriers—such as offenders being unlocated and the absence of automatic compensation mechanisms—that limit victims' ability to obtain monetary recovery. [\[21\]](#) [\[12\]](#) [\[22\]](#)

Community-level interventions in the reviewed Indonesian program aimed to rebuild victims' confidence in using social media and to help them establish low-capital businesses after scam losses; the reported outcomes included new businesses created by participants, and program authors recommended deeper work to restore victims' trust in social-media use. [\[23\]](#)

Special populations and safety concerns

Certain groups show distinctive recovery needs: survivors with acquired brain injury often face cognitive barriers, stigma, and limited clinician awareness that complicate recognition, disengagement, and emotional recovery; co-designed psychosocial frameworks have been developed for this group but remain untested for effectiveness. [\[24\]](#) [\[25\]](#) [\[26\]](#)

A subset of victims report severe and persistent fear or safety concerns after romance fraud—some expressing desires for drastic safety-restoring actions such as changing identity or moving house—but lack of resources commonly prevents implementation of such measures, leaving ongoing insecurity that affects recovery options. [\[16\]](#) [\[27\]](#)

Methodological patterns, evidence gaps, and future directions

Across reviews and primary studies, authors prioritize outcome-focused research: prospective longitudinal studies of recovery and resilience, comparative research on age-related differences in recovery, and rigorous evaluation of peer, psychological, financial, and legal interventions to determine which approaches reduce fear, restore trust, and improve longer-term wellbeing. [\[6\]](#) [\[7\]](#) [\[28\]](#) [\[16\]](#)

Multiple reviews and primary studies identify specific evidence gaps for victim recovery research—including limited comparative and longitudinal evidence, scarce evaluation of peer-support facilitation, and insufficient guidance for clinical and service responses for particular populations—and they recommend longitudinal, comparative, and intervention-focused studies to address these gaps. [\[28\]](#) [\[8\]](#) [\[25\]](#) [\[6\]](#)

References

1. [Whitty, MT. \(2013\). The Scammers Persuasive Techniques Model: Development of a Stage Model to Explain the Online Dating Romance Scam DOI](#)
2. [Whitty, MT.; Buchanan, T. \(2015\). The online dating romance scam: The psychological impact on victims – both financial and non-financial DOI](#)
3. [Wang, C. \(2022\). Online Dating Scam Victims Psychological Impact Analysis DOI](#)
4. [Wang, F.; Topalli, V. \(2022\). Understanding Romance Scammers Through the Lens of Their Victims: Qualitative Modeling of Risk and Protective Factors in the Online Context DOI](#)
5. [Coluccia, A.; Pozza, A.; Ferretti, F.; Carabellese, F.; Masti, A.; Gualtieri, G. \(2020\). Online Romance Scams: Relational Dynamics and Psychological Characteristics of the Victims and Scammers. A Scoping Review DOI](#)
6. [Kassem, R.; Carter, E. \(2023\). Mapping romance fraud research – a systematic review DOI](#)
7. [Cross, Cassandra; Holt, Thomas J. \(2025\). Does age matter? Examining seniors’ experiences of romance fraud DOI](#)
8. [Cazanis, Alyxandra; Carminati, Jao-Yue; Chew, Kimberly; Cross, Cassandra; Ponsford, Jennie; Gould, Kate Rachel \(2025\). “Falling into a Black Hole”: A Qualitative Exploration of the Lived](#)

Experiences of Cyberscam Victim-Survivors and Their Social Support Networks DOI

9. Wang, Fangzhou; Kelsay, James D (2025). The prevention of online romance scams using a crime script analysis from the victim's perspective DOI
10. L. Burton, Dr. Sharon; D. (Vickerson) Moore, Dr. Pamela (2024). Pig Butchering in Cybersecurity: A Modern Social Engineering Threat DOI
11. Thumboo, Sharen; Mukherjee, Sudeshna (2024). Digital romance fraud targeting unmarried women DOI
12. Bimantari, N.; Kusnadi, SA.; Purwaningtyas, FD. (2023). Legal Protection for Victims of Love Scam Crimes DOI
13. Nakhma'ussolikah; Iman Subasman; Lina Marliani (2025). Reality Counseling Approach to Increasing Career Woman Awareness (Case Study Love Scam) DOI
14. Thiel, C. (2020). Love scam in cyberspace DOI
15. Cross, Cassandra (2015). No laughing matter DOI
16. Cross, C.; Lee, M. (2022). Exploring Fear of Crime for Those Targeted by Romance Fraud DOI
17. Cross, C.; Dragiewicz, M.; Richards, K. (2018). Understanding Romance Fraud: Insights From Domestic Violence Research DOI
18. Cantin, Pascale-Marie; Ream, Fyscillia; Dupont, Benoît (2025). The Online Mutual Help Practices of Romance Fraud Victims DOI
19. Cantin, Pascale-Marie; Ream, Fyscillia; Dupont, Benoît (2025). CHAPTER 10 The Online Mutual Help Practices of Romance Fraud Victims DOI
20. Cross, C. (2019). "You're not alone": the use of peer support groups for fraud victims DOI
21. Aborisade, Richard Abayomi; Ocheja, Akoji; Okuneye, Babatunde Adekunle (2023). Emotional and financial costs of online dating scam: A phenomenological narrative of the experiences of victims of Nigerian romance fraudsters DOI
22. Adnan, I. (2025). A Juridical Review of Love Scam Crimes from the Perspective of Criminal Law and the Electronic Information and Transactions Law in Indonesia DOI
23. Esfandari, DA.; Satria Putri, BP. (2021). E-Marketing: Utilizing Social Media and Marketplaces to Start Businesses for Online Love Scam Victims in Indonesia DOI
24. Gould, Kate R.; Carminati, Jao-Yue J.; Ponsford, Jennie L. (2021). "They just say how stupid I was for being conned". Cyberscams and acquired brain injury: A qualitative exploration of the lived experience of survivors and close others DOI

25. [Gould, Kate Rachel; Carolan, Matthew; Ponsford, Jennie Louise \(2022\). Do we need to know about cyberscams in neurorehabilitation? A cross-sectional scoping survey of Australasian clinicians and service providers DOI](#)
26. [Chew, Kimberly Ann; Ponsford, Jennie Louise; Gould, Kate Rachel \(2025\). "This is a lifesaver": co-designing a novel cyberscam psychosocial recovery intervention framework for people with acquired brain injury DOI](#)
27. [Cross, C.; Lee, M. \(2023\). Exploring Fear of Crime for Those Targeted by Romance Fraud DOI](#)
28. [Gujarathi, Palak; Verma, Shankey; Nair, Vipin Vijay \(2026\). Pig Butchering Scams as Cyber-Enabled Financial Crime: A Scoping Review of Dimensions, Modus Operandi, and Victim-Offender Dynamics DOI](#)

This AI-assisted synthesis is based on reviewed evidence records. It may contain errors or omissions. Follow the publication and DOI links, consult the original works, and make your own judgment about the evidence.

About this document

This living evidence synthesis was produced through AI-assisted analysis of approved RSRC publications. Claims are linked to supporting evidence and checked for source consistency. It may change as the corpus is updated. Readers should consult the cited publications when making research, policy, or practice decisions.

Current web version: <https://romancescamresearch.org/research-insights/victim-recovery-after-romance-and-relationship-based-cyberscams-synthesized-evidence>