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Scammers reel in elderly victims with freebies

PETALING JAYA: More scammers are targeting the elderly for their life savings, using freebies and small amounts of money as bait.

Social activist Kuan Chee Heng, also known as Uncle Kentang, reported an increase in the number of elderly individuals defrauded of their savings.

"Many who fall for scams are greedy for money, especially smaller amounts," he said.

The most common scams targeting the elderly are promises from scammers to get subsidies or help from the government.

"These scammers offer RM200 or RM300. It is easier to believe when it is a small amount of money.

"The victims are greedy for that extra money and see no harm in trusting the scammers," he said.

He added that the supposed subsidy comes in all forms, such as Bantuan Mandani and Bantuan JKM.

Elderly scam victims are particularly unfortunate, he added, because they may lose their life

savings without being able to recoup the funds.

MCA Public Services and Complaints Department head Datuk Seri Michael Chong said that the department received 16 cases this year, and it is only the tip of an iceberg.

"Despite warnings by the authorities and media attention, there have been increasing reports from victims throughout the years," he said.

The majority of victims he encountered are professionals and well-educated individuals who are specifically targeted by scammers.

Common ones are investment and love scams, he said.

Criminologist Datuk Dr P. Sundramoorthy of Universiti Sains Malaysia's Centre for Policy Research said the elderly should be cautious with unsolicited calls, emails or visitors, as scammers often use high-pressure tactics to get personal information or money.

"They should never give out sensitive information over the

phone or the Internet.

"Use caller ID and don't answer calls from unfamiliar numbers.

"If it's an important call, the person can leave a voicemail. Be wary of 'free' offers or prizes that require payment or personal information.

"Legitimate lucky draws don't require payment to claim a prize.

"Ask a trusted family member or friend to help review financial statements and spot any suspicious activity.

"Having a second set of eyes can help identify potential scams. Be aware of the red flags," he said.

Sundramoorthy said it was crucial to raise awareness of the typical con games that prey on the elderly, like investment fraud, romance scams and fake charitable appeals.

He said they should use call-blocking technology and spam filters on phones and computers to filter out unwanted calls and emails.

"Never feel rushed or pressured to make a decision. Take

time to research and verify any offer or opportunity before providing any information or money. Report suspected scams to the relevant authorities.

"The key is awareness, scepticism and involvement with trusted loved ones.

"With vigilance, seniors can learn to identify and avoid scams," he said.

Sundramoorthy said those with elderly parents and relatives, especially those with large savings, should keep watch and constantly remind the seniors of the various scams out there.

He advised the elderly to consult their children or a trusted friend or relative before making any fund transfers.

Sundramoorthy said those who are not IT-savvy should also stay away from services advertised online but instead turn to their children, relatives or friends to assist them in looking for such services.

He said scammers are constantly finding new ways to exploit banking technology and phone

applications to defraud victims.

"Scams can be classified as a major socioeconomic problem. Besides investment scams and other similar offences, banking scams are becoming more common.

"Law enforcement agencies and banking institutions must also address bank scams.

"Many scammers are able to use banking apps to fleece victims," he said.

Sundramoorthy recommended that banks use sophisticated analytics to detect suspicious activity in order to implement better fraud detection and prevention systems.

He advocated for educating consumers on how to identify and steer clear of common banking scam tactics.

"Ultimately, it's an evolving problem that requires a multi-faceted approach.

"There must be close collaboration between banks, regulators, and law enforcement to share intelligence and coordinate responses to the issue," he said.