
Sexual assault survivors who met their abuser online are often reluctant to seek support or speak out – local trends

Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS) CEO Jill Maxwell met with the service's senior counselling staff this week to discuss concerning trends among Tasmanians who have been sexually assaulted by people they have met online.

The online dating landscape is well established and now seen as a normal means of meeting a partner for long and short-term relationships. Reports of people having numerous online profiles, fake photos or identities – known as catfishing – are also not new.

“Most people engaging with online dating sites are very aware that they will come across some exaggerated information and possibly fake or filtered photos” says Jill Maxwell. “Navigating through that seems to be common practice.”

“The issue that we are concerned about at SASS is the number of clients, particularly women, who have met someone online and been sexually assaulted by that person, but are fearful of speaking out or seeking support.”

“There seems to be a trend of people feeling a sense of shame or guilt because the initial meeting was through a website. We want to send a very strong, clear message to people who have been raped or assaulted that they have absolutely nothing to feel ashamed about. Our team at SASS is here to provide them with support, both at the time of the assault and into the future.”

Other current or emerging trends raised this week by SASS senior practitioners, based on recent communication with clients, include:

- Males who behave respectfully and safely for the first few sexual encounters with a female but after gaining her trust then sexually assault her;
- Older gay males meeting young gay males on Grinder, luring them into isolated locations and assaulting them;
- Drink spiking with alcohol and drugs, often after trust is gained at a initial meeting.

In addition to working on a strategy with the team at SASS, Jill has also engaged with local Hobart woman Stacey* who is a survivor of sexual assault that occurred in a relationship with a man she met online.

Stacey's story received national coverage a few years ago. She says it is still very difficult to talk and think about what she went through, but she hopes her determination in speaking out can make things easier for others.

“Never be ashamed of what happened to you” says Stacey, stressing that “it is the abuser that must be held to account for the violence they inflict.”

MEDIA CALL

Friday 5 November 2021



“And don’t let their violence be your story – there are wonderful people and organisations such as SASS that can assist you. And sharing your story with someone is a very important part of your healing process.”

CEO Jill Maxwell will be joined by Stacey* for a media conversation about these trends. They will also talk about some of the red flags that people may identify early in the communication.

We invite your attendance:

Date: **Friday 5 November 2021**
Time: **10.30am – 11am**
Location: **Parliament House lawns (near rotunda)**

Ends.

Please note – Stacey* is a pseudonym used in media for privacy and protection. Stacey will be speaking with media but is unable to be photographed or filmed in any way that reveals her identity.

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