

'Young girl, eager to please, price negotiable'

A dating site matching sugar daddies with 'sugar babies' is raising fears that underage teenagers are putting themselves in danger

Rebecca Myers, Robin Henry and Louis Goddard

March 19 2017, 12:01am, The Sunday Times



Brandon Wade, with wife Tanya, founded the SeekingArrangement website in 2006



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Keira does not give much away about herself, like many girls on the dating website SeekingArrangement. She is a "young girl" who is eager to please the right man at a "negotiable" price.

Even her photograph is carefully cropped so as not to reveal her whole face, just her nose and smile, supposedly protecting her identity as she seeks dates from men willing to pay for her company.

However, within minutes of viewing her profile, The Sunday Times was able to find her home address in a village in southern England, and her real name and date of birth — which revealed her to be a schoolgirl who signed up for the site last year, when she was 15, by ticking a box stating that she was over 18.

SeekingArrangement is the world's biggest sugar-daddy dating website, with more than 10m users. It says it offers over-18s a chance to find discreet, "mutually beneficial" relationships, connecting "daddies" with "sugar babies" who can experience a little luxury, including paying off student debt. The site's home page highlights the company's "commitment to privacy".

An investigation by this newspaper, however, has found security flaws that expose the locations of more than 1,700 UK users, including at least 270 teenagers. In many cases their home addresses could be accessed through the site, leaving them vulnerable to blackmail, harassment and stalking.

SeekingArrangement has long been notorious for its brazen marketing to university students and claimed last year to have more than 250,000 UK students registered as sugar babies. In

lollipop, can be seen standing in front of a blackboard. The writing on the board reads, “you + SeekingArrangement = No college debt”.

“

One girl says on the site: ‘I don’t have much experience in bed so you’ll have to help me out’. Small wonder: she is 16

The site is clear that “financial security” is a sugar-baby perk and members are even able to set their price via a “lifestyle expectation” option on their profile. This ranges from a “minimal” spend of £600 a month to a “high” of “£6,000” a month; alternatively, as in Keira’s case, they can simply leave it open to negotiation.

In a 2011 interview, the site’s founder acknowledged that “after a relationship forms, sex becomes part of the relationship”.

While sugar babies can operate free of cost, sugar daddies must pay a monthly fee, from £48.95. So-called diamond members have their income and identity verified for an extra fee of about £1,000.

“Sugar baby” Charlie, who lists herself as 18, says: “I don’t have much experience in bed so you’ll have to help me out,” while also describing her love of books and part-time job as a barista. She says she is looking for a sugar daddy to help her out with a “tricky financial situation”. In reality, it is not surprising Charlie lacks sexual experience: she is 16, not 18, and her social media profiles show smiling selfies of her and her friends in school uniform.

Some sugar babies offer to sell their Snapchat usernames, photographs and phone numbers for an additional price, though listing these details is against the site’s guidelines. One, named Emily, who was 17 when she signed up for the site last year, offers to engage in online relationships for money, explaining that she is only available online after “awful” experiences with arrangements in person.

The NSPCC charity said it was “gravely worried” by The Sunday Times’s findings. This newspaper has passed details of its investigation to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, part of the National Crime Agency. The charity said it wanted to see strong default privacy settings for every young person on social websites “so that they are properly protected and cannot be tracked down by anybody who may want to harm them”.



A model advertises the SeekingArrangement service
SOCIAL MEDIA

The security flaws emerged little more than a year after the Dragons' Den star Doug Richard appeared in court charged with child sex offences after meeting a 13-year-old on SeekingArrangement and having sex with her in a flat he had rented. Richard, then 57, told the court he had met more than 100 women through SeekingArrangement and had thought the girl, who was 5ft tall and weighed less than six stone, was 17.

The father-of-three admitted having sex with the 13-year-old, but was found not guilty of sexual activity with a child on the basis that he reasonably believed she was over 16. The fact that the girl had listed herself on a site for adults supported his claim that he thought she was older.

SeekingArrangement's blog advises users to add "a little sensuality" to profiles — "hints and subtle sexual nods get them interested" — and says: "An extra wide age gap shouldn't scare you off."

The oldest UK sugar daddies are in their eighties. One 74-year-old, who claims to be worth £30m, says he is seeking a "nubile slim girl 18 to 30". He describes himself as "married but looking" and explains: "My wife although 20 years younger does not like sex or travel."

Another man advertises his profile with the tagline "daddy issues?! Pocket money for good little girls!" He claims to be a 40-year-old analyst earning more than £150,000 and the father of a seven-year-old boy. He also claims to have had a previous "daddy dom/little girl" relationship, which ended when the girl had to focus on her exams.

The site was founded in 2006 by Brandon Wade, a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and tech millionaire, born Lead Wey in Singapore, after disappointing online dating experiences. "My mom had told me that if you studied hard and were successful, the women would line up," he said in 2011. He says on the homepage of his own website, askbrandonwade.com: "Love is a concept invented by poor people."

As well as SeekingArrangement, he runs MissTravel.com, a website matching "generous travellers who hate to travel alone with attractive travellers who would love the opportunity to

former has been criticised as dangerous and the latter for being indistinguishable from prostitution.

Linda Papadopoulos, a psychologist who wrote a report in 2010 for the Home Office on the sexualisation of young people, says the internet can create a false sense of security for young people. "Very simply, access to very young women by older men has never been as easy as it is today. It feels safer even though it's much more sinister, so you think, 'I'd love a Gucci handbag; maybe this is just a dinner,' and you don't think about it in the way you would if it felt more real."

She also highlighted the vulnerability of young girls using the site to being pressured by older users, saying: "If you're in your teens, you have less experience of interpersonal relationships and negotiation — because we're talking about a business negotiation here.

"Most girls on these sites don't tell their families and friends and, as a consequence, that also makes them vulnerable."

The security flaws exposed by The Sunday Times involve location data, which can be accessed by anyone. Most social media and dating sites, including Facebook, Twitter and Match, remove the data to protect users' privacy.



Former Dragons' Den star Doug Richard faced three counts of sexual activity with a child
JONATHAN BRAXY/PRESS ASSOCIATION

SeekingArrangement said it had become aware of this "major privacy concern" in October last year and had implemented measures to remove the data at the beginning of this year. It had not informed users of this security issue. Instead the company said that its focus was on resolving it, a process it hoped to complete by the end of the week. At the time of going to print, this data was still available on the site.

The website said: "SeekingArrangement is not in the business of connecting people with children," but that "despite there being age limits on a range of sites, children tend to find a way to gain access anyway". It said the "yes I am 18 or older" check box is a standard security measure adopted not only by dating sites but also by general sites such as YouTube and Facebook.

individually approved by our in-house support team before any activity on the site can occur. We have also recently added search terms to identify underage users, and internally conduct our own searches to proactively weed out underage members.”

It added that suspected underage members were immediately suspended and if they could not provide legal proof of age, they were then banned from the site.

The company accepted that these were “not foolproof methods of prevention” but said: “We sincerely do our best to remove all of the underage profiles we discover.” The site is also looking into implementing new procedures.

The Information Commissioner’s Office said: “UK businesses and organisations are required under the Data Protection Act to keep people’s personal data safe and secure. If people have concerns about the way an organisation is handling personal data, they can report them to us.”

Names and profile details of users have been changed to protect their identity

Finding a match for pet lovers

The dating world has come a long way since the first personal advertisement appeared in a newspaper more than three centuries ago.

Today more than 90m people worldwide use dating websites or apps and about one in five UK relationships start online.

By 2031 it is predicted that at least half of all couples will have met through the web.

Alongside the increase in popularity of classic sites and apps such as Match.com and Tinder, niche operations have sprung up to meet even the most unusual demands.

Wingman is an app matching travellers in airports, while Twindog caters to pet owners, Bristlr to beard fanatics and Sizzl to those who love bacon. There are also some sites that help to match people of a certain faith such as ChristianMingle and the Muslim-orientated Minder.

There are now more than 1,400 dating websites and the UK industry is worth more than £300m annually. Many sites have courted controversy including those aimed at sugar daddies, polygamists, adulterers and one that matches only white people.

Last year the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children warned parents of the dangers of the new app Yellow — dubbed “Tinder for teenagers” — which lets users swipe if they like each other.

The app maker has stated in the past, however, that Yellow does not connect under-18s with over-18s or vice versa.

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Rebecca Myers, Louis Goddard and Robin Henry

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Irene Ellard -So 12 days ago

A very sad state of affairs.

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A Klein Mar 20, 2017

I find it disgraceful that a 28 year old footballer is in prison serving a sentence as a sex offender after having a relationship with a 15 year old, and a 58 year old man can have sex with dozens of young girls, including a 13 year old girl and be acquitted because this particular girl told him she was 17. One rule for the goose...

4

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Steve Hill Mar 19, 2017

'including at least 270 teenagers.'

I take no moralistic position on any of this, but how many of those 270 were (a) over 16 therefore over the age of consent, or (b) over 18 and therefore legally adults?

Without that information it is a little hard to avoid the conclusion that you are hyping up the rhetoric here...

2

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Vicious Hippo Mar 19, 2017

It's all a bit sad and sordid - for both sexes.

1

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Come and Go Mar 19, 2017

The article has given me the idea for a new word -

But maybe the time has come to deter them (and save them from themselves)...

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James Bailey Mar 19, 2017

[@Come and Go](#) ?

Recommend Reply

Come and Go Mar 19, 2017

[@James Bailey](#)

Hadn't thought of it that way!

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Christopher Green Mar 19, 2017

Certainly have to be careful out there. It's very difficult meeting people,

Recommend Reply

M. Anderson Mar 19, 2017

I founded very difficult to meet the right person due to working and traveling. I'm not surprised about the statistics on Internet dating and the apps. I personally opted for traditional matchmaking (I used Seventy Thirty exclusive matchmaking) and I was given a fantastic personal service, all the members are checked including me, and I met a very special person. I would advocate to people to chose carefully when using Internet dating and apps, due to the fact that users can fake their age, and all other information about themselves.

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David Mar 19, 2017

It's always been the case, one supposes, that some young girls have sex with older men. The internet brings the behaviour out into the open and it thus perhaps becomes more controllable. Don't the police have the nous to intervene?

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Whitestone Mar 19, 2017

[@David](#) Easy enough to get age proof. For example it's possible to generate a code to allow a third party to check your drivers license endorsement record. Having a license proves you are 17. These dating sites should at least do that simple check, although I suppose it's possible to impersonate someone else.

Recommend Reply

Simon Wang Mar 19, 2017

ok

Recommend Reply

BMP Mar 19, 2017

He says on the homepage of his own website, askbrandonwade.com: "Love is a concept invented by poor people."

The poverty evident in that statement is greater than any worldly riches can alleviate.

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