

# Honey trap scam

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By Cam Lucadou-Wells

Marriage turned bitter for a 74-year-old Noble Park man, who says he fell prey to a partner visa scam based in a Springvale cafe.

As a regular coffee customer, he'd got to know a 47-year-old worker at the cafe over several years.

In October, the Vietnamese woman's visa was expiring. He wanted to help her to stay in Australia and they agreed to wed.

He thought it was love but friends of the bride knew he was being used.

And that she had a "plan" to get rid of him.

Depressed and duped, he says he's part of a growing number of retired single men who are being snared in a 'honey trap' in Springvale's shopping district.

The Star Journal spoke to several retired men, who were either victims or friends of victims.

"They are looking for candidates – or some other dumb b\*gger," one of the men tells the Journal. "They're looking for single men."

Others have told the Journal that unregistered migration 'agents' are charging tens of thousands of dollars for marriage visa shams.

It's an unlawful rort squeezing money out of new arrivals who wish to marry into Australian citizenship.

The Noble Park man says soon after the couple wedded, she treated him with disdain.

She stayed over only twice or three times a week. They slept in separate rooms, she refused to hold hands in public.

The nadir was in March when she alleged family violence – that he was forcing her to have sex and that he'd slapped her shoulder when she refused.

He emphatically denies the allegations. And says he is desperate to "clear my name".

Police had arrived at the home, escorted him to the police station, had his mug-shot and fingerprints taken.

No charges were laid but he's subject to a 12-month family violence intervention order.

"I haven't been in in Springvale since because I can't be near her (due to the IVO).

"I tried to do the best thing for her and it cost me."

On the same day he was served the IVO, she tried to lure him to breach the court order with scores of text messages that night.

She claimed she missed him and loved him. If he replied with even a word, he would have breached.

"I deleted all the messages."

South-east based lawyer Charlie Bulos says unlawful agents were telling visa applicants to "make up stories" of family violence in order to stay in Australia.

"Sometimes the reasons are valid and genuine. We can't make a blanket statement.

"But sometimes these people get advice from dodgy people. To keep her in Australia, they will say do this to expedite their visa.

"If the police and the judge believe that the family violence is true and correct, then you can remain in Australia."

He believes the agents' clients are often "innocent" and under direction of unregistered agents – charging them more than \$20,000.

The Noble Park man's wife was believed to be paying \$27,000 to a pair of females based in the cafe – for a visa application that costs little over \$7000.

A retired Springvale man told of meeting his wife in Vietnam by arrangement of the same pair.

Eight years on, his 44-year-old bride has got permanent residency in Australia and still lives with him.

But she was still paying off a \$14,000 debt to the women, he said.

"My wife has permanent residency – they can't kick her out. I tell her she shouldn't have to pay them a dollar."

Migration agent Thay-Horn Yim said it was difficult to detect 'underground' migration agents, accruing millions from partner visa scams across Australia.

"People have to be careful in being involved in these sort of marriages, without engaging in a proper process and getting proper support."

Recently, the Australian Government issued a warning after two unregistered migration agents were prosecuted.

A 38-year-old Western Australian woman was jailed for six-and-a-half years for extensive migration fraud.

Recently, Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Jason Wood warned people to check their migration agent is registered on the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (OMARA) website.

“Only registered migration agents can legally give immigration assistance in Australia,” he said.

“Consumers seeking advice from those not listed with the OMARA risk being provided incorrect information, or being charged thousands of dollars for a fake service and no visa outcome.”

The Department of Home Affairs was contacted for comment.

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