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### Psychological Dilemmas of People Trapped in Telecommunication Network Fraud Under the Post-Epidemic Situation and the Social Work Interventions

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#### Abstract

The consequences of telecommunication network fraud are becoming more and more serious, which seriously affects social harmony and stability. The psychological dilemmas of those caught in telecommunication network fraud constrain their mental lives and behavioral patterns and are a key element in cultivating a good social mindset to maintain social stability. A study of five victims aged 22-50 years old found that the psychological manifestations of those caught in telecommunication network fraud were different but similar, and their psychological dilemmas were mainly reflected in cognitive bias and irrational beliefs, many negative emotions and barriers to emotional support, and behavioral tendencies to escape from society and even suicide. The path of social work intervention includes: helping to establish rational cognition, providing targeted psychological counseling, helping to establish a social support network, and advocating to create a good social atmosphere.

**Keywords:** telecommunication network fraud, psychological dilemma, social work

#### Introduction

"Escaped the epidemic, but not the telecom scam." The 48th "China Internet Development Statistics Report" shows that as of June 2021, the size of China's Internet users is 1.011 billion, of which, the size of the national cell phone Internet users is 1.007 billion, at the same time, nearly 40% of Internet users have encountered network security problems in the process of Internet access<sup>1</sup>.

In recent years, telecommunications network fraud crimes continue to be high and frequent, criminals continue to renovate the means of crime, black and gray industry chain coiled, has become the current highest incidence, the largest losses, the public reaction to the most prominent criminal activities. As of November 2021, a total of more than 370,000 cases of network fraud, and the arrest of more than 549,000 suspects<sup>2</sup>.

It is especially worth paying attention to the fact that while the nation is fighting against the epidemic, a lot of news such as "committing suicide because of being cheated and carrying huge sums of money" and "choosing to end their lives in desperation", which frequently appear in front of the public because

<sup>1</sup> Sina.com. The 48th Statistical Report on the Development Status of the Internet in China [EB/OL]. [2021-08-27] <https://finance.sina.com.cn/chanjing/cywx/2021-08-27/doc-ikqcfnc5270431.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> China Government Network. "Public Security 2021" Year-End Stocktaking Report [EB/OL]. [2021-12-31] [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-12/31/content\\_5665884.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-12/31/content_5665884.htm)

of being caught in telecommunication network fraud, are not conducive to the physical and mental health of the cheated people. This is not conducive to the physical and mental health of those who have been cheated, nor is it conducive to the stable and harmonious development of society. In the complex environment of the new era, how to effectively detect the psychological characteristics of the deceived subjects and promoting their life adaptation and mental health is the key breakthrough to cultivating a good social mentality in China.

Existing research mainly revolves around the following perspectives. First, from the perspective of social governance, existing research focuses on the problems and countermeasures of telecommunication network fraud, focusing on disciplines such as law, economics, and statistics. On the issue side, research on the independent criminalization of telecommunication network fraud (Gao Shangyu, 2018), judicial recognition (Niu Yanwei, 2018), legal use (Li Ruiyi & Wang Ke, 2017), and joint criminality (Wei Jinghua & Lu Xu, 2018) is studied from criminology itself. Countermeasures are analyzed around the analysis of the current situation of telecommunication network fraud and countermeasures (Kong, Liming, 2017), the use of information technology for prevention and control (Lou, Yongtao & Tang, Xiang, 2020), the strengthening of law enforcement cooperation (Qiao, Shunli, 2018), cross-border cooperation (Ding, Chen, 2019), and social co-governance (Zhang, Mingwang, 2021). Overall, there is a lack of research on the psychological plight of the defrauded.

Second, from the perspective of social work, focusing on disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and finance, studies have been conducted mainly on elderly groups and campus college students, applying casework (Shi, Lili, 2021) to study the diversion of victims' hearts and emotions and how to prevent them (Li, Yang, 2020), and using group work (Yang, Yanrong, 2020) to enhance fraud prevention capabilities. Although attention has been paid to the adoption of social work methods to prevent telecommunication network fraud, it mainly stays at the stage of theoretical discussion and general description, and the research on social work interventions for multiple psychological problem dilemmas after being defrauded and the stage psychological characteristics of defrauded victims has not yet appeared.

## Concepts

### ***Telecommunication Network Fraud***

Telecommunication network fraud is a non-contact type of crime in which criminals conceal the truth and deceive people's property by concealing the truth through fictionalizing various fraud scenarios and concealing their identities, and transmitting data and texts to the public through the medium of electronic communication devices, networks or other communication tools for illegal possession (Zhang Mingwang, 2021).

By virtue of the non-contact characteristics of the Internet, the organizational form, external manifestation, illegal scope, and degree of influence of traditional crimes have changed greatly, constituting an intricate and complex cybercrime ecology. At the same time, the rapid development of Internet technology also provides technical support for criminals to evade the crackdown, making the detection of cases increasingly difficult and the number of victim groups increasing.

### ***Psychological Dilemma***

Telecommunication network fraud is a hurtful event with a strong impact on the deceived person, which will cause a sharp cognitive, emotional and behavioral tendency reaction, coupled with the vanity in loan fraud and shame to face the surrounding society, the deceived person will inevitably fall into a bad psychological state under the interaction of cognitive, emotional and behavioral tendencies, that is, fall into the psychological dilemma of the telecommunication network fraudster.

## ***Social Work***

The 1972 edition of the American World Social Science Encyclopedia has the following view: "The purpose of social work is to help socially damaged individuals, families, communities, and groups by creating conditions for them to restore and improve their social functioning and to save them from bankruptcy. The function of social work is in helping people to adapt to society and improve the social system. The task of professional social workers is to take all appropriate measures to assist those who are in difficulties due to poverty, illness, removal from work, conflicts, due to the dysfunction of individuals, families, or social groups in the economic and social environment, in addition to participating in the development of social welfare policy and social prevention programs."

The Chinese Encyclopedia of Sociology explains the entry "social work" as "a specialized enterprise and a discipline of the state and society to solve and prevent social problems arising from the lack of social life adaptability and social dysfunction of members of society. Its performance is to adjust social relations, improve the social system, promote social construction, and promote the stable development of society through social services and social management."(S.B. Wang & Y.G. Xiong, 2004)

## **Objectives**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To help the deceived person to de-escalate psychologically, regulate stress and resume a normal life.
- ii. To draw the attention of society to the psychological plight of the deceived and to give more care and help.
- iii. To fill research gaps and provide a basis for expanding social work intervention research in practice.

## **Methods**

### ***Study Setting***

This study was conducted on the Zhihu community platform, a high-quality Q&A community and original content platform for creators on the Chinese Internet. Zhihu community, as an important carrier of emotional expression for intellectual youth has strong influence and high persuasive power. When some current events happen, there are often a lot of comments on the event, reflecting the "shared emotional state" of the commenters.

### ***Study Design***

This study uses a phenomenological approach by conducting in-depth interviews. According to Cresswell (2007), phenomenological studies can provide in-depth knowledge and hands-on experience of the issues being studied. According to Donalek (2004), studies using a phenomenological approach are used to study the life experience of an individual through transparent storytelling based on experiences experienced by said informants. According to Alan and Robert (1994), qualitative studies are more sensitive to the specific environment studied and are seen to be holistic or more comprehensive toward the subject matter.

The study is conducted by interviewing 5 informants using sampling techniques based on phenomenological design. Cresswell (2007) argues that phenomenological research design deals primarily with small sample sizes because the study's features are more in-depth in terms of data collection. Five 5 to 25 informants are sufficient to develop a clear understanding of the subject under consideration. The research subjects were selected from the "Zhihu" community, and through screening

and communication, five people aged 22-50 years old who had fallen into telecommunication network fraud were selected as the research subjects, as shown in Table 1.

The method of data collection for this research was conducted through in-depth interviews using semi-structured and open-ended questions. Neuman (2003) argues that the responsibility of researchers is to protect the confidentiality of informants. Researchers should ensure that the information received is not exposed to others. Burns and Grove (2001) require researchers to maintain confidentiality while conducting qualitative research. To protect the confidentiality of personal information and informants, all informants involved are represented by a code of R1 to R5.

Table 1: Demography of The Study Subjects

Case number	Name	Gender	Age	Education	Marital Status	Job	Received Date	Type and amount of fraud (USD)
1	R1	Male	22	Middle School	No	Waiter	Oct 2020	Virtual Coins (7,923)
2	R2	Female	24	Postgraduate students	No	Students	June 2021	(26,938) in canceled accounts
3	R3	Female	35	University	Yes	Business Unit	Dec. 2021	(158,460) for the "pig killing tray"
4	R4	Male	50	University	Yes	Self-employed	May 2020	Financial investment (79,230)
5	R5	Female	27	Postgraduate students	No	Business Unit	Nov. 2021	Part-time job brush single (34,861)

Source: Results from this research, 2021

### ***Data Analysis***

Qualitative data from in-depth interviews took place by using NVivo 10.0 software. This is a computer program that organizes repeating themes and aids in the coding of transcripts, themes emerging from the interviews will be used to create categories and subcategories for the coding framework.

### ***Ethical Approval of the Study***

The process of data collection and use for analysis were also approved by the Zhihu Community Center platform and by the volunteers themselves. While surveying, if the research's voluntary participants feel uncomfortable with any question, they have the right to refuse to answer.

To eliminate the concerns of the research subjects and based on research ethical considerations, the interviews were not recorded, and data collation was done through timely recall after the interviews. The researcher confirmed the ambiguities encountered during data collation with the research subjects through WeChat or telephone.

## **Results**

### ***Cognitive Bias and Irrational Beliefs***

As shown in Table 2, those caught in telecommunication network fraud have different degrees of cognitive bias due to reasons such as amplification of their own problems and cognitive limitations, such as the belief that they are afraid that others will mock them if they know they have been cheated; that they have nothing to live for after being cheated; that they feel shame and disgrace; that they will never trust anyone again, etc. Most cheated people believe that they put themselves in a desperate situation,

that they are too negligent to let others know, but lack the professional means of appeasement. Some deceived people cannot discriminate and are easily caught up wholesale in the paradox of being deceived, creating irrational beliefs.

Table 2: Typical Cognitive Performance of The Study Participants

Name	cognitive performance	Partial Interview
R1	R1 thinks can't call the police and tell his family. R1 felt very lost in society and decided not to trust anyone in the future.	"I'm only 20 years old, nothing has started yet, just come out to be cheated, why is it that I met this kind of thing."
R2	R2 hated the despicable methods of the liar. R2 was deeply remorseful.	"The feeling of shame, self-blame, and shame mixed together after being cheated is really uncomfortable." "When I read the news, I thought that only fools would be deceived. Only now did I realize that I was the fool and became the target of other people's jokes."
R3	R3 felt extremely fearful and felt that her life, work and study were meaningless.	"I have chosen to leave this world, to leave those who love me, care about me, I feel sorry for them, do not deserve to live in the world".
R4	R4 thought that he would be ridiculed and sneered after being deceived. He was afraid of being told that he was too greedy, and even more worried and sad about his relatives.	"The savings that I finally had, are now back to the past when I had nothing, and I am full of debts. What travel funds, parents' pension funds, and children's education funds are gone. After so many years of struggle, everything has vanished."
R5	R5 has always clearly understood that she believes that this situation occurred by herself. As a result, I made mistakes and put my own money into it again and again, and the sequelae of the epidemic made it even worse.	"Why am a usually diligent and conscientious person like me still being deceived, and I am a highly educated person who feels that my IQ and self-esteem have been insulted." "I racked my brains for several nights, and my heart was broken, but I couldn't help but move forward. I didn't want my work to be affected. After all, work is my last source of funds. I have been forcing myself to stay calm and slowly find solutions. "

Source: independently processed

In general, although the cognitive bias of the deceived will change with time and the experience of being deceived, there is still much-biased cognition of the deceived that they are unaware of and difficult to improve. For example, R3 After being deceived had thoughts of suicide and felt that life was hopeless. Although her family stopped thinking about it for a while, she could not realize that this change in emotion and behavior was due to her reasons. At the same time, society's ridicule and prejudice against the deceived will be silently internalized into the cognitive structure of the deceived, causing them to degrade or deny themselves.

### ***There Are Many Negative Emotions and Obstacles to Emotional Support***

Picture 1 showed that, as a serious and damaging event in the life of the defrauded person, telecom network fraud will have a great impact on their emotions. Overall, the negative emotions of the defrauded person are mainly expressed as despair, fear, inner remorse, self-blame, pain, helplessness, anxiety, etc. Within two weeks of being defrauded, they are basically immersed in great emotional fluctuations and torment, and it is difficult to forget the fact and the passage of being defrauded.

Picture 1: Typical Emotional Expressions of The Study Subjects



Source: Independently processed

The following are some of the statements shared by the informants in this study. In the excerpts below are parts of the results from the interview with the informants involved in this study.

*R3: "No way, no way, it's not true, it's not a scam .....". "I'm so scared that I'm going crazy, I can't sleep all night, there's only one thought in my head, the money is gone, everything is gone. What's the point of living, how can I explain to my family, I'm sorry to my family, I deserve to die."*

*R4: "These liars conscience are fed to the dogs, why is the trust of society so disgusting, why should I believe you, this is why ah". "I hate myself, why do not know enough, do not get this play what is still in, and now everything is gone".*

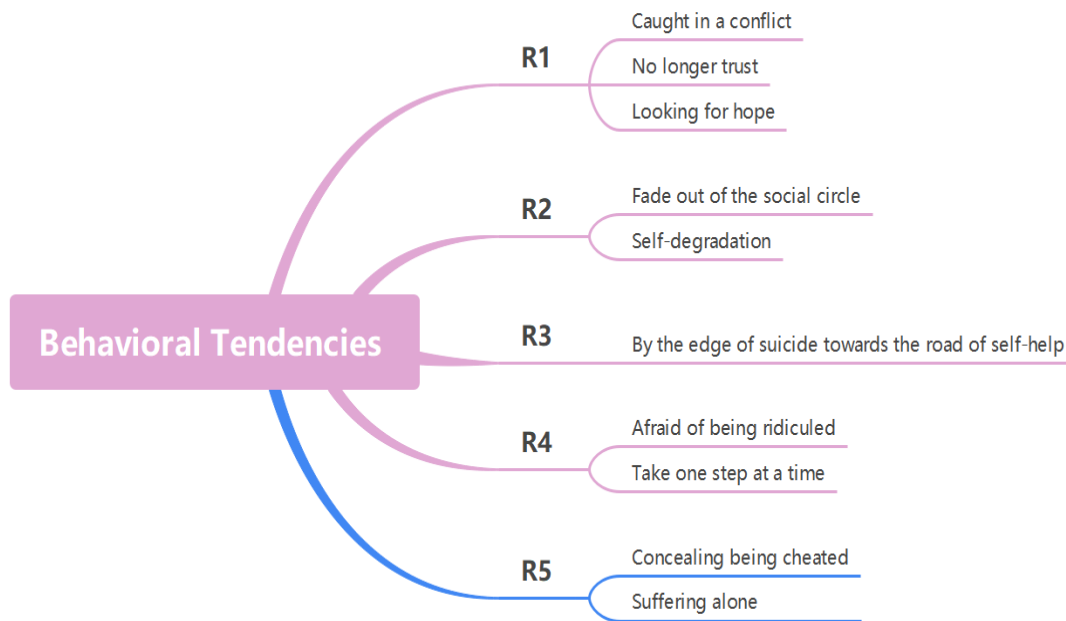
It is clear from this that those caught in telecommunication network fraud face many negative emotions and significant barriers in obtaining emotional support. Even if they can get some understanding and companionship from friends and relatives, they are not able to meet the emotional needs of the defrauded. The reason is that friends and relatives cannot empathize and understand their thoughts and emotions, and the defrauded often pretend to be strong in order not to worry about their friends and relatives, but make themselves feel tired.

In addition, because the deceived person's emotions change a lot, friends and relatives have limited energy and cannot provide timely and effective emotional support. In order to get more comfort and empathy, most cheated people will log on to "Zhihu", posting bars, or join QQ groups to express their thoughts and feelings more freely in the virtual network. However, due to the complexity and unorganized nature of the Internet, there is a risk of obtaining negative information and suffering malicious insults, which will undoubtedly increase the negative emotions of the deceived to a certain extent.

## ***The Tendency to Avoid Society and Even Suicide***

Picture 2 showed that the cold words and relentless ridicule of people around the society make those who are caught in the telecommunication network fraud afraid to reveal the fact that they have been cheated, and they think that this will put them in a disadvantageous situation, and their work and life will be greatly affected. Collectively, they fear: moral censure from society, alienation from friends, ridicule from others, involvement of their families, and a long road to the repayment of debts. To conceal the truth, the deceived person's speech and behavior become extremely sensitive and cautious, which may even affect their normal social interactions.

Picture 2: Typical Behavioral Tendencies of The Study Subjects



Source: Independently processed

R3: *"I can earn money again if I lose it, but I can't leave my family who love me so much, I have to live well to repay them."*

R5: *"Today listen to colleagues mentioned who who was cheated online, colleagues also said really stupid, I immediately feel very nervous, uncomfortable. If I was cheated and others knew about it, I would definitely be considered stupid. I can only hide everything, silently bear, feel so sad."*

In summary, it can be seen that after being cheated, they will deliberately avoid their families and friends, and will worry even when they return to a peaceful life. Some cheated people will have difficulty facing their families because of strong guilt or guilty feelings, choosing to close themselves off, refusing to answer phone calls or avoiding meetings, such as R2 who has been drowning in grief after being cheated, not going to class or studying, and R3 who cannot accept the truth, this avoidance tendency will instead worsen their plight and make them encounter new problems, and when the problems are not effectively solved, they are prone to extreme thoughts and even suicidal tendencies. even suicidal tendencies.

## ***Irrational Cognition, Negative Affect and Behavioral Tendencies Interact With Each Other***

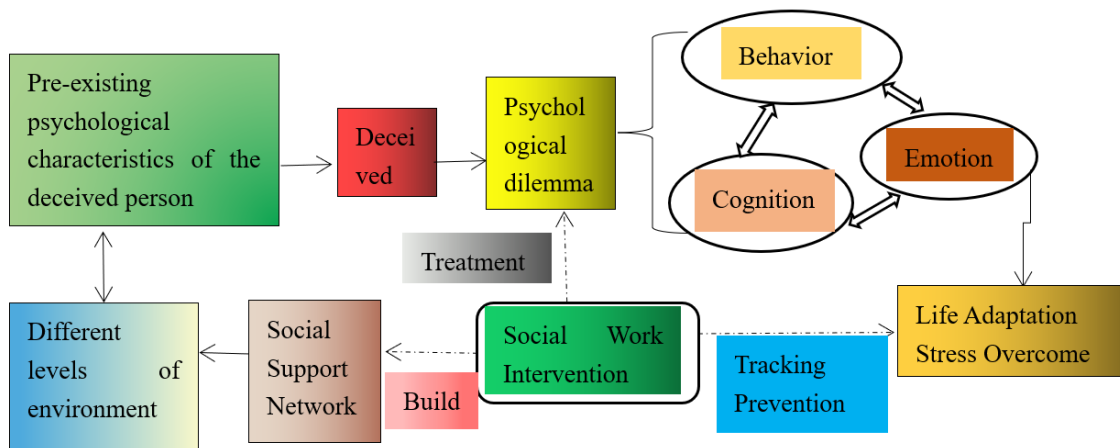
Cognition, emotion and behavioral tendencies are the three key dimensions of the psychological activity of the defrauded person, and the three interact and influence each other. People often tend to think in

unreasonable and frustrating ways after encountering things, forming wrong perceptions, thus adopting negative emotions to see and deal with things, as well as bad behavioral tendencies such as escaping from reality, etc. Negative emotions and bad behavioral tendencies in turn affect their interactions with the environment and influence the perceptions of people around them, as well as their perceptions of life and being defrauded, putting them in a state of psychological cross-traffic.

For example, Xiao Wang thinks that being cheated is something he is ashamed of, so he feels he cannot face it and adopts a self-degrading coping style, and his negative emotions make him exaggerate his unreasonable perception of the fact of not cheating and intensify his bad behavioral tendencies; Lao Zhuo thinks that he is still cheated at his age, and his shame makes him produce a scattered life, as well as the silent bearing of the pressure of repayment, which in turn reinforces his deviant perceptions and amplifies his negative emotions, making it difficult to improve both his cognitive and emotional.

Therefore, it can be seen that the interaction of irrational cognition, negative emotion and undesirable behavioral tendencies may cause the psychological problems of those caught in telecommunication network fraud to fall into a vicious circle, thus intensifying their psychological dilemma and seriously weakening their ability to adapt to the environment. Only through external interventions can they be helped to get out of their psychological difficulties better. Social work, as a professional service activity guided by altruism, based on scientific knowledge and using scientific methods (Wang Sibin, 2006), emphasizes the concept of people in the environment and takes the promotion of the adaptive balance between people and the environment as its fundamental purpose, which fits the psychological problems and needs of the defrauded, and can play a multi-level function such as changing misconceptions and targeted psychological counseling with its professional advantages to help It can play multi-level functions such as changing misperceptions and targeted psychological counseling with its professional advantages to help solve the psychological dilemmas of the deceived people, promote the reconstruction of their perceptions, cultivate a good social mindset and improve their social adaptability, as detailed in Picture 3.

Picture 3: Panoramic Image of Social Work Intervention in The Psychological Dilemma Of People Caught in Telecommunication Network Fraud



Source: Independently processed

## Discussion

### **Social Work Intervention in The Psychological Dilemma of People Caught in Telecommunication Network Fraud**

#### ***Help Establish Rational Cognition***

Psychological distress is mostly caused by cognitive impairment, and changing cognition can reduce distress and can cause emotional and behavioral changes. Social workers can play professional functions such as information link, resource integration and education guidance to provide diversified and effective information support for those caught in telecommunication network fraud and improve their cognitive ability so that they can avoid falling into unfavorable psychological distress.

The core of cognitive therapy is to identify and change false beliefs, focusing on the determination to change. People caught in telecommunication network fraud are depressed to the point of depression, have low self-esteem, are afraid of being criticized by people around them, think "everything is lost if the money is cheated", avoid communication and alienate people's information, and have many cognitive errors and lack rational thinking. They need social workers to help them change their misconceptions, learn to control their emotions, learn to communicate effectively with others, and integrate into their surroundings. Social workers should support and encourage the deceived person to take positive actions to change.

There is a transitional period from the time the deceived person is informed of the deception to the time he or she adjusts to life in debt, during which he or she may experience recurrent episodes of psychological distress. Social workers should focus on optimizing their emotions and behaviors by changing their irrational cognition. The specific methods include: clearly explaining the relationship between cognition and emotions and behaviors, helping them identify the causes behind their negative emotions and bad behaviors, and helping them identify their cognitive biases; pointing out the irrational aspects of their biased cognition through debates and other methods; helping them establish rational cognition through re-education and other methods. We also help them establish rational cognition through re-education.

#### ***Provide Targeted Psychological Counseling***

Although the psychological dilemmas of people caught in telecommunication network fraud have a lot in common, individual differences are also obvious. Therefore, social workers should adhere to the principle of individualization, design targeted psychological counseling plans based on the assessment of the problems and needs of the victims, achieve service goals together with the victims in the service, and focus on improving the ability of the initial victims to cope with the problems while solving them. People caught in telecommunication network fraud are more vulnerable and sensitive, especially to external gossip, which requires social workers to be more careful in providing services, to pay attention to the state of the case owner at all times, and to make adjustments to the plan according to the actual situation, so as to serve the case owner in a more targeted manner.

Social work services should be different for different stages of the infected person's needs. After being cheated, the cheated person faces the psychological difficulty of accepting the fact of being cheated, social workers should provide emotional counseling at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way; when the cheated person faces the difficult decision of whether to inform the police or family and friends of the fact of being cheated, social workers should help them analyze the pros and cons and finally let them make their own decision. If the victim decides to tell, the social worker discusses with them the appropriate way to do so. During the continuous follow-up stage, the deceived person may fall into despair when the situation is difficult to improve, and gradually fall into a deadly cycle of regret, fear, pessimism, loneliness and other endless negative emotions. In addition to relieving the negative emotions of the victims, social workers follow up on their integration into their lives, especially when

they are under great pressure to repay the loan, in order to provide necessary help and give timely and effective professional counseling to the possible psychological problems of the victims.

### ***Assistance In Establishing Social Support Networks***

Social support networks can provide individuals with the necessary emotional support, and instrumental assistance. (Thoits P A . , 1982:148) Strong relational strength support such as family members, close friends and colleagues can provide economic, emotional, and social interaction support for those who are defrauded, and weak relational strength support such as work units and social work agencies can provide professional psychological guidance and support for autonomy development although they provide limited resources, especially social work agencies assist those caught in telecommunication network fraud to establish a Peer support network to improve their self-help and mutual help ability.

Those caught in telecommunication network fraud often take a non-social, non-communication approach to the fact of being cheated, choosing to resist all the economic pressure alone, in this slow process of debt repayment, the cheated will inevitably generate negative emotions such as helplessness and despair, which requires social workers to do a good job of communication between the cheated and family and friends, to encourage, consolidate and play the role of family and friends in material, emotional, practical and other aspects of support, The role of help, to encourage normal interaction and help between relatives and friends, can make the deceived more confident and optimistic. Therefore, social workers can assist in establishing standardized QQ groups, WeChat groups or posting bars through group work methods to facilitate the construction of peer support networks for victims of deception and prevent the negative impact of unstandardized networks and malicious slander by netizens. Flexible and diverse peer support groups on the Internet can eliminate the awkwardness and pressure of face-to-face conversations, make communication more proactive and sincere, and provide more empathetic responses and interactions, so it is important to focus on their positive role as models.

### ***Advocate The Creation of a Good Atmosphere of Social Mentality***

Social mindfulness permeates every aspect of citizens' social practices and has both an impact on their mental lives and a constraining effect on their behavioral patterns (Si, Mingyu, 2018). In the fight against the new crown pneumonia epidemic, General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the need to strengthen psychological guidance and psychological intervention and to provide targeted humanistic care (Liu, Chang & Zhang, Y., 2021). Because of the epidemic, many normal lives were affected, and the deceived people were even under great psychological pressure due to property loss; in addition, the negative impact was more significant after the social cynicism was internalized into the cognitive structure of the deceived people.

Therefore, professional social work is of great significance for the intervention of the psychological dilemma of the defrauded. Social workers should devote themselves to optimizing the social environment of the defrauded in various ways. First, they should use various forms of publicity to actively promote the latest national laws and regulations on fraud combating and prevention, and enhance their ability to apply and judge right and wrong through these studies. Second, they should enhance their initiative and motivation, advocate hard work and hard work in a safe and rule of law economic environment, and form a rule of law social mentality. Third, social workers should play the professional role of policy advocacy, promote the rational design and implementation of relevant policies and systems, and strive to create a good atmosphere of social mentality.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study outlines the need for psychosocial support for those caught in telecommunication network fraud. The results show that the heart dilemmas of the defrauded are caused by the interplay of cognition, emotion, and behavior, and that the professional concepts and methods of social work are just right to meet the needs and provide social work services (rational cognition,

psychological counseling, support networks, etc.), thus indirectly will lead to effective intervention practices in the heart dilemmas of the defrauded.

In addition, the study reflects that there is still a lack of social attention to the problematic relief of the heart dilemmas of the deceived, especially in applying social work interventions, where and these research data have scientific implications for the care and attention of society in effectively meeting the psychosocial needs of the deceived.

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