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Consumer Council of Fiji



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PRESS RELEASE

**Consumer Council of Fiji Issues Alert on Sophisticated Impersonation Scam Targeting Education Sector**

The Consumer Council of Fiji is issuing a fresh alert to the public regarding a new and highly sophisticated form of impersonation scam that has recently come to our attention. Scammers have evolved their tactics to exploit the trust of individuals in the education sector, posing a financial threat to teachers and prominent figures within the education sector. The Council's CEO, Seema Shandil, is urging the public to take heed of this new development as this scam will potentially spill-over and target the general public.

In this latest mutation of the Viber impersonation scam, hackers have infiltrated Viber accounts of several prominent figures in the education sector and are sending messages to teachers and colleagues, requesting funds to be transferred to certain M-PAiSA accounts. This manipulative scheme preys on the goodwill of individuals who genuinely want to help, and it has already caused financial distress to some victims.

One disturbing case involved the hacking of the Viber account of Mr. Muniappa Gounder, the General Secretary of the Fiji Teachers Union. Messages were sent from his compromised account to teachers and other individuals in the education community, requesting urgent fund transfers, often citing critical reasons.

Another targeted individual was Ms. Sangeeta Singh, the CEO of the Fiji Teachers Registration Authority (FTRA). Her Viber account was also compromised, with fraudulent messages sent to teachers and other prominent figures in the education sector, imploring them to send money.

In one particularly cunning tactic, a high school assistant principal received a call, purportedly from an educational institution, claiming to have sent him important information. He was asked to click on a link sent via text messages, which ultimately led to the hacking of his Viber account. Subsequently, messages were sent from his account to teachers, urging them to transfer money.

The scammers have been utilizing various excuses to persuade their victims to send funds, including urgent medical attention and an immediate need for cash. They exploit the goodwill of the victims, creating a sense of urgency and panic.

A significant challenge in this new iteration of the scam is that when consumers attempt to call the number via Viber to verify if the person genuinely needs assistance, the call is answered by the scammers themselves. As a result, the Council strongly advises consumers to make a normal cellular call to the individual in question before transferring any money to ensure their identity.



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Consumer Council CEO Seema Shandil accentuates the importance of vigilance and thorough verification. She states, "It is alarming to see the evolution of these fraudulent impersonation schemes. We urge all teachers and individuals in the education sector to exercise extreme caution and verify the identity of those requesting financial assistance. If you receive messages that seem suspicious, contact the individual directly to confirm their need for help, via a known and secure method such as a regular phone call."

Consumers are also reminded to urgently switch-on two-factor authentication for their viber app to reduce vulnerability to such hacking.

The Council is actively engaged with the Multi-Interagency Taskforce, led by the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Trade, Cooperatives, SMEs, and Communications. This collaboration aims to devise effective strategies and actions to address such scams and protect consumers from further harm.

Individuals who have fallen victim to such scams are urged to contact the Council immediately through the national consumer helpline at 155 or via email at [complaints@consumersfiji.org](mailto:complaints@consumersfiji.org).

Seema Shandil  
**Chief Executive Officer**