

Dating app suspends teen access after rape reports

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A dating app for smartphones has suspended access for teen users after reports that it was used in a series of child rapes in the United States.

A dating app for smartphones has suspended access for teen users after a series of reported rapes of underage users in the United States.

The app called Skout, which was designed as a location-based dating service, made the move after learning that some of its users had been victimized.

"The safety of our community is our number one concern," founder and chief executive Christian Wiklund said on the company blog Tuesday.

Wiklund said the San Francisco company has been actively monitoring and screening to keep the under-18 users and adults in separate

communities.

"However, it's become clear to us that these measures aren't enough," he said.

"In recent weeks, we've learned of several incidents involving a few bad actors trying to take advantage of some of our younger members.

"We thought carefully about what to do. We know how much Skout means to our teen community, and, at Skout, our community means everything to us. For now, we believe that there's only one thing we can do: until we can design better protections, we are temporarily shutting down the under-18 community."

Skout, with more than five million subscribers, is the largest location-based dating app. It was originally aimed at adults but added a separate service for 13- to 17-year-olds last year after kids started using the app.

The New York Times reported that three men have been accused of raping children they met using the mobile app.

According to the report, the men were accused of posing as teenagers in the Skout teen forum.

It said a 15-year-old Ohio girl said she had been raped by a 37-year-old man. A 12-year-old girl in California and a 13-year-old Wisconsin boy were also assaulted.

"I'm disgusted by what's happened here," Wiklund told the newspaper. "One case is too many. When you have three, it looks like a pattern. This is my worst fear."

On the blog, Wiklund said, "We are extremely sorry about this, but we

don't believe we have any other choice. We will not compromise the safety of our community, and right now, our concerns are too significant to simply stand by and do nothing."

He said the company is working "to build better safeguards, including mechanisms for age verification."

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