



QUARTERLY SCAM UPDATE

Issue 9

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

April 1, 2023 – June 30, 2023

Social Security-Related Scams

The Social Security Administration (SSA) and SSA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) continue to receive reports of scammers impersonating government employees or alleging a Social Security-related problem to steal money or personal information from victims.

Since October 2019, OIG has shared information on its efforts to combat Social Security-related scams with the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Social Security; U.S. Senate Committee on Finance; and U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging. OIG began publicly releasing the Quarterly Scam Update in the third quarter of Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 to provide information about these scams and its efforts to combat them.

This report shares information about Social Security-related and government imposter scam allegation trends in the third quarter (Q3) of FY 2023 (April 1 through June 30). Examples of SSA and OIG's recent efforts to disrupt and raise awareness of scams are also included.

Figure 1

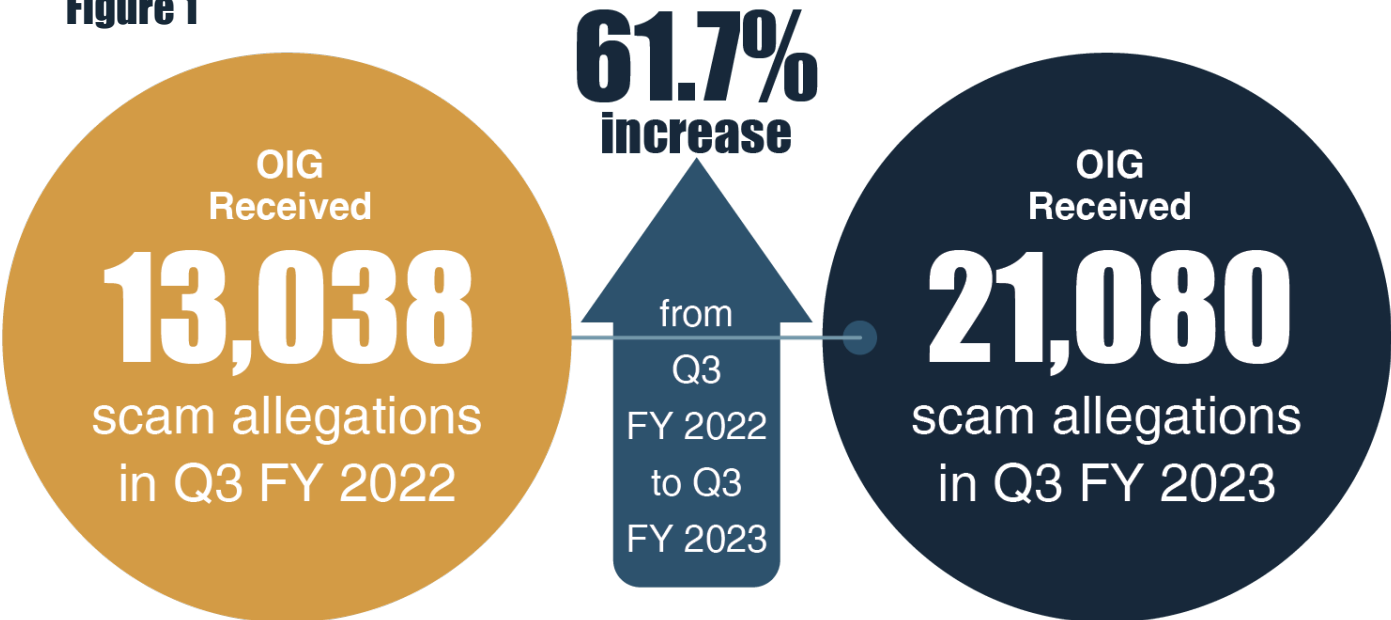
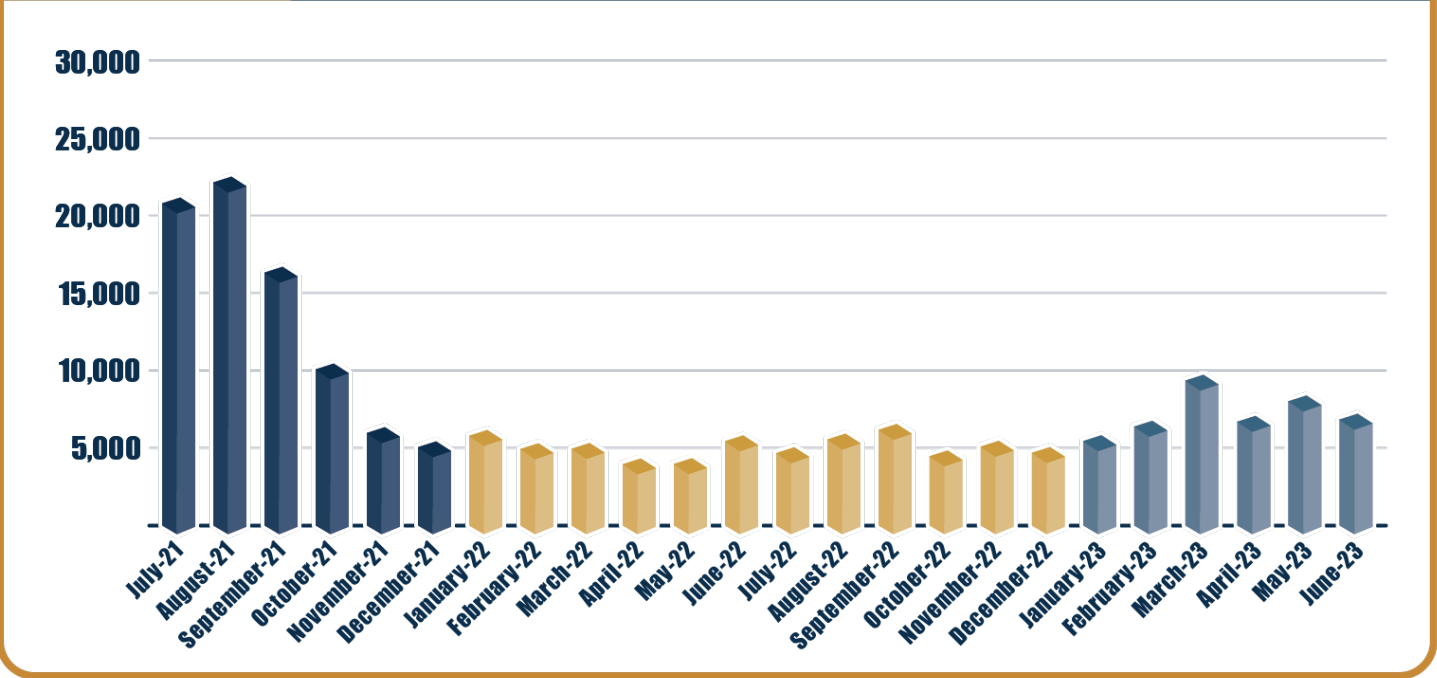


Figure 2







Imposter Scam Complaints Received by SSA OIG
July 2021 to June 2023



SSA OIG receives the majority of Social Security-related scam allegations from OIG's dedicated online scam reporting form.¹ While the form states it is for those who "believe [they] have been a victim of a Social Security Administration Scam," the form also allows individuals to report whether the scam involved the impersonation of officials from federal, state, or local government agencies other than SSA.

Figure 3

Q2 and Q3 FY 2023 Complaint Trends – Percentage of Total Imposter Allegations from the Scam Reporting Form¹

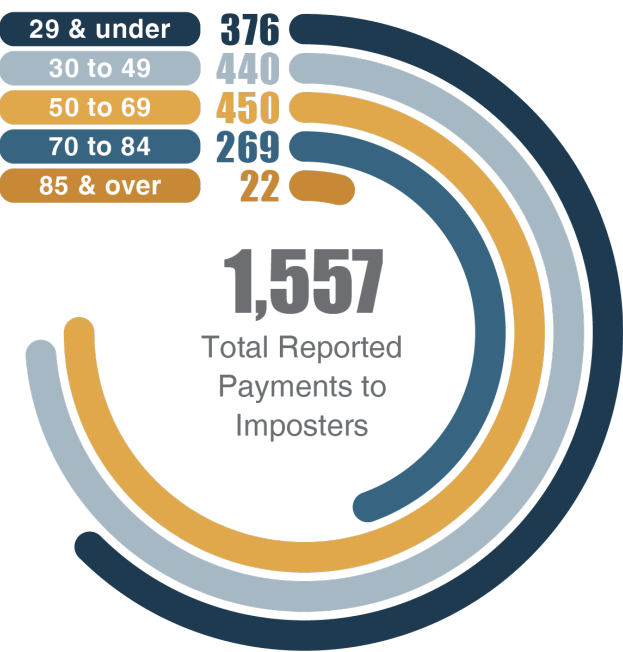
Complaint Characteristics		Q2 1/1/23–3/31/23	Q3 4/1/23–6/30/23
	The imposter mentioned a problem with your Social Security number	43.1%	45.0%
	The imposter mentioned a problem with your Social Security benefits	17.0%	15.5%
	The imposter used documents or images (such as a federal logo) when communicating with you	29.7%	30.7%
	The scam involved the impersonation of officials from federal, state, or local government agencies other than the Social Security Administration	35.8%	34.9%
	The imposter mentioned a coronavirus or COVID-19 related issue, or referred to a coronavirus or COVID-19 stimulus check, stimulus payment, or economic impact payment	2.4%	2.1%
	None of the Above	28.2%	27.2%

Note: The percentages were calculated based on the total number of allegations each quarter. The percentages do not add to 100 percent because individual allegations may include more than one complaint characteristic.

1. SSA OIG also receives allegations from other sources, including SSA OIG's Hotline and directly from SSA employees. SSA OIG has been tracking Social Security-related scam allegations since April 2018. SSA OIG launched the dedicated online reporting form in November 2019, which increased its ability to track scam reports.

In [Q2 FY 2023](#), slightly more individuals under 50 years of age reported financial losses than those 50 years of age or older. Figure 4 (below) shows that in Q3 FY 2023, this trend continued: 816 individuals under 50 years of age reported losses, compared with 741 individuals 50 years of age and older.

Figure 4
Number of Reported Payments to Imposters, by Reported Age
4/1/2023 – 6/30/2023



In [Q2 FY 2023](#), individuals 50 years of age and over reported higher average losses than those under 50 years of age. Additionally, during January 1 through March 31, 2023, the highest average losses were reported by individuals 85 years of age and over. Figure 5 (below) shows that in Q3 FY 2023, individuals 50 years of age and over continued to report higher average losses than those under 50 years of age. However, during April 1 through June 30, 2023, the highest average losses were reported by individuals 70 to 84 years of age.

Figure 5
Average Dollar Value Reported Payments to Imposters, by Reported Age
4/1/2023 – 6/30/2023

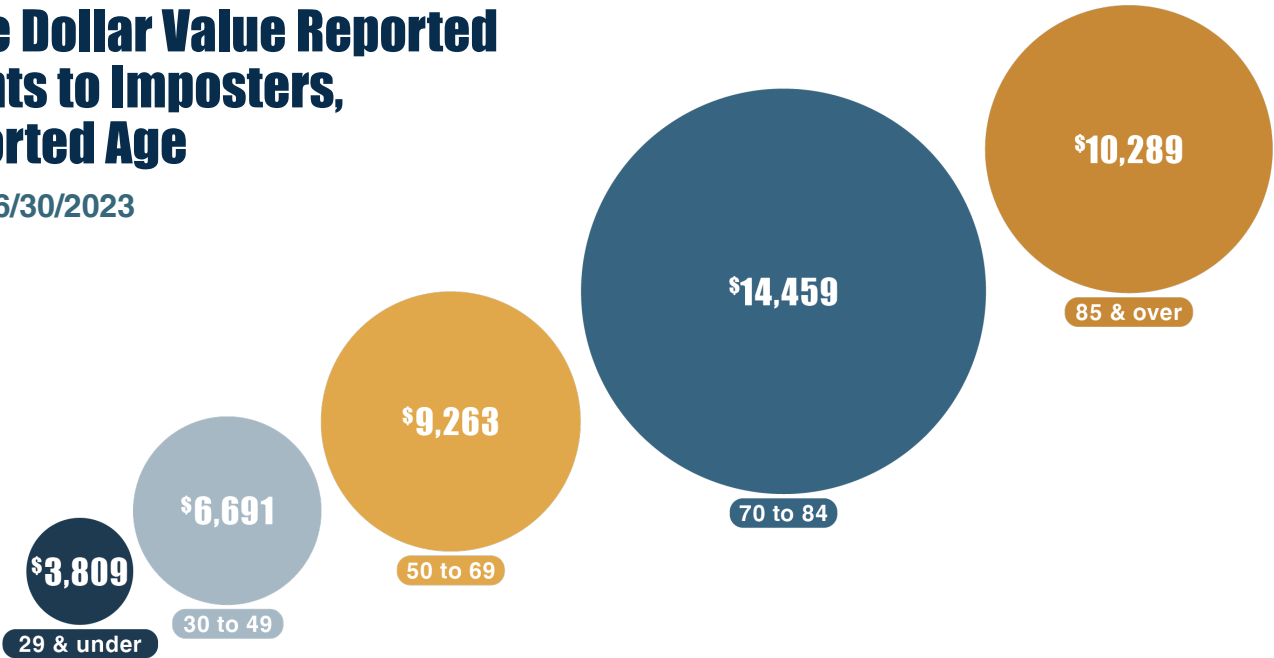
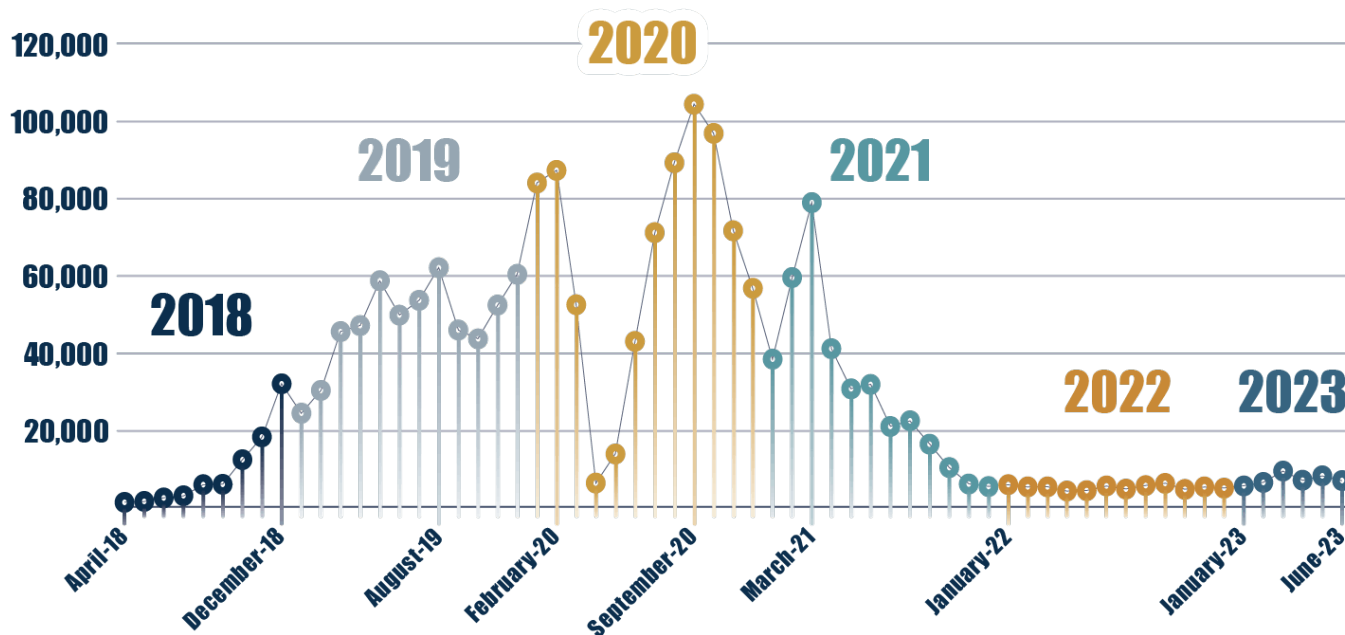


Figure 6

Long-term SSA-related Imposter Scam Allegations April 2018 to June 2023



According to the FTC, government imposter scam complaints have declined since 2021; however, Social Security-related scams [remain](#) the top government imposter type reported to the FTC.² Therefore, while the decline is promising, OIG and SSA continue to fight these scams.

In Q3 FY 2023, SSA mailed 33.3 million letters to the public with a scam message printed on the back of envelopes (right). Through June 30, 2023, the Agency had mailed approximately 841.3 million of these letters to date.

⚠ SCAM ALERT ⚠

Scammers are pretending to be government employees. They may threaten you and may demand immediate payment to avoid arrest or other legal action. Do not be fooled!

If you receive a suspicious call:

1. HANG UP!
2. DO NOT GIVE THEM MONEY OR PERSONAL INFORMATION!
3. REPORT THE SCAM AT oig.ssa.gov



SSA's latest Scam Awareness Public Service Announcement (left), which started airing in late October 2021, generated 82.3 million impressions in Q3 FY 2023.

2. This information is based on data reported to the FTC as of July 25, 2023.

Q3 FY 2023 Additional Internal and External Education Efforts

SSA and SSA OIG engaged in additional outreach and education efforts with members of the public, government and non-government organizations, and SSA employees to raise awareness of scams targeting American residents. Some examples of these efforts during Q3 FY 2023 included the activities below.



SSA participated in World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, on June 15, by raising awareness of scams and elder financial exploitation using a range of activities including employee broadcasts, internal training, and blogs on how to identify and stop elder abuse.

In May 2023, SSA presented on a Consumer Fraud Panel on best practices related to fraud and scam training for the public and employees at the Federal Information Systems Security Educators Association (FISSEA) Conference. SSA OIG also presented at the FISSEA Conference on Social Security-related scams and efforts to combat them.



SSA and SSA OIG presented at the AmeriCorps Seniors 2023 Conference on best practices to fight scams and elder financial exploitation.

SSA OIG's Major Case Unit was interviewed on InvestigativeTV on Cost-of-Living-Adjustment and SSA imposter scams.



SSA OIG's Office of Investigations participated in an elder fraud webinar sponsored by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which covered scams directed against senior citizens.

SSA OIG's Chief Counsel presented at the International Telecoms Week Conference in May 2023, discussing Section 1140 of the Social Security Act and SSA OIG's collaboration with the private sector to prevent Social-security related fraud.



Q3 FY 2023 SSA OIG Social Media Related to Scams

In addition to SSA's ongoing web and social media efforts, SSA OIG continued raising awareness of scams using its Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn accounts. In April 2023, media outlets ran stories based on SSA OIG's outreach efforts.



Falsa Carta de Seguro Social



Record Increase in Social Security Benefits Leads to Surge in Scams

Q3 FY 2023 Website Page Views and Social Media Impressions

An SSA and SSA OIG joint scam page redesign resulted in a 169% increase in visits to the scam page. Scam awareness emails, search engine marketing, and SSA's scam banner have driven 1.74 million additional visits to the scam page. Since the redesign, there have been 91,019 clicks on the Report a Scam button and 85,801 clicks on the Report a Social Security-related Scam button.

Clicks
Received

245k

Number of clicks
on SSA.gov
scam banner

Page
Views

29k

Number of
page views
to SSA's
scam FAQ
webpage

Social
Impressions

14.5m

Number of impressions
from SSA's paid social
media campaign
(Facebook/Instagram ads)
promoting scam
awareness.

Page
Views

55.4k

Number of
page views to
SSA's Spanish
language scam
awareness
page

Page
Views

848k

Number of
page views to
SSA's English
language scam
awareness
page

Consumer Protection: Telecom Gateway Providers

Section 1140 of the *Social Security Act*, as amended, protects the public from advertisements, solicitations, and other communications that convey the false impression that SSA approved, endorsed, or authorized the communication. SSA OIG continued efforts to protect consumers from Social Security-related scam calls by seeking corrective action against U.S. telecommunications companies, acting as gateway carriers, who profit by accepting Social Security-related scam calls into the U.S. telecommunications system, and passing them to unsuspecting consumers. During Q3 FY 2023, SSA OIG resolved matters with 4 gateway carrier telecommunications companies, including imposing \$47,000 in penalties. As a result of SSA OIG's Section 1140 and other efforts, the telecommunications industry is on notice of the potential legal ramifications for transiting Social Security-related calls. Telecommunications companies are taking more proactive steps to prohibit scam calls from entering the U.S. or are discontinuing the gateway carrier segment of their operations or operations entirely. In addition, SSA OIG initiated 8 take down requests for misleading Social Security-related social media accounts during Q3 FY 2023. SSA OIG continues to stay vigilant regarding Social Security-related imposter social media accounts, recognizing the public's vulnerability to harm from social media scams and these scams' interference with the Agency's ability to effectively communicate via its robust social media program.

Indian National Pleads Guilty to Money Laundering Conspiracy Based in Colorado

In April 2023, a 40-year-old former resident of Wray, Colorado pleaded guilty to conspiring to commit money laundering. In January 2020, he began his involvement in a Social Security-related government imposter scam where victims were contacted by individuals impersonating government officials from various federal agencies, including SSA. The imposters threatened victims with arrest or deportation unless they paid and that their payments would be held in trust. Typically, the imposters told victims to immediately withdraw cash from their bank accounts and remain on the phone during the entire bank transaction. The imposters told the victims to mail packages of cash via FedEx locations, typically inside Walgreens stores, or United Parcel Service stores. It was also found that two other runners were co-conspirators in the scheme. The Indian National coordinated the receipt and pickup of packages and operated in a management role overseeing his co-conspirators. This investigation was conducted jointly with investigators from SSA OIG, United States Postal Inspection Service (USPIS), Department of Homeland Security-OIG, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and the Sterling, Colorado Police Department. You can read more about the case [here](#).

Individual Pleaded Guilty to Key Role in Indian Call Center Scam

In May, 2023 a 28-year-old Indian citizen entered a guilty plea in a years-long international conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud. Between 2017 and 2020, an individual who was illegally residing in Heber Springs, Arkansas, assisted Indian call centers in a telemarketing scheme that extorted millions of dollars from hundreds of victims in the U.S. He first acted as a runner in the scheme, going to different Target stores in the Chicago, Illinois area and depleting funds from gift cards that victims had transferred to the call centers. In later years, he managed other runners as they traveled around the country, picking up packages filled with cash that call center victims had mailed. One common script used in the scheme involved coercing victims into believing federal agents, from SSA and other agencies, were investigating them. The fake agent on the phone would convince the victim the only way to clear their name from investigation was to buy gift cards and transfer the redemption codes to the call center or mail cash in a package to a name and address the call center provided. Runners in the U.S. would then deplete the gift card funds and pick up the packages. As part of the plea agreement, the individual will pay restitution to the scheme's identified victims. SSA OIG, Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration, USPIS and HSI conducted the investigation with the assistance of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Heber Springs, Arkansas Police Department. You can read more about the case [here](#).



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