



CONGRESSIONAL STATUS UPDATE

Social Security-Related Phone Scams

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

**APRIL 1, 2021 – JUNE 30, 2021
ISSUE 1**

Social Security-Related Phone Scams

In this report, we address our ongoing efforts to raise public awareness of, and disrupt, Social Security-related phone scams.

For the better part of a decade, Americans' landlines and mobile phones have been plagued by callers impersonating government agencies, in an effort to mislead victims into giving them personal information or money. In the fall of 2018, we experienced an increase in complaints about callers impersonating Social Security employees or alleging a Social Security number problem. Among other efforts, we developed a dedicated online form for the public to report these scams.

Since October 2019, we have been sharing updates on our efforts to combat Social Security-related phone scams with the House Committee on Ways and Means, Social Security Subcommittee; Senate Committee on Finance; and Senate Special Committee on Aging.



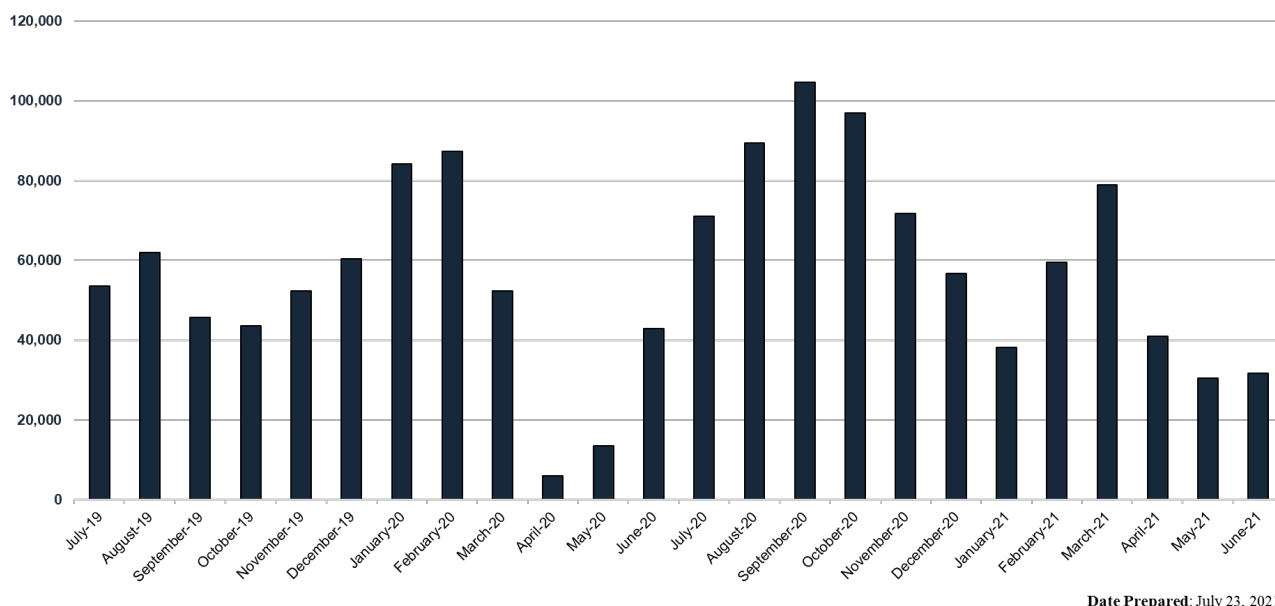
OIG.SSA.GOV



Status of Efforts to Address SSA-Related Phone Scams

During the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2021 (April 1 through June 30), incoming Social Security-related phone scam complaints¹ decreased from the previous quarter, with approximately 32,000 complaints received during June 2021, amounting to less than half the volume received in March 2021. The second quarter of 2021 contained the two lowest volume months over the previous 12 months. The following figures show the trends in two different formats.

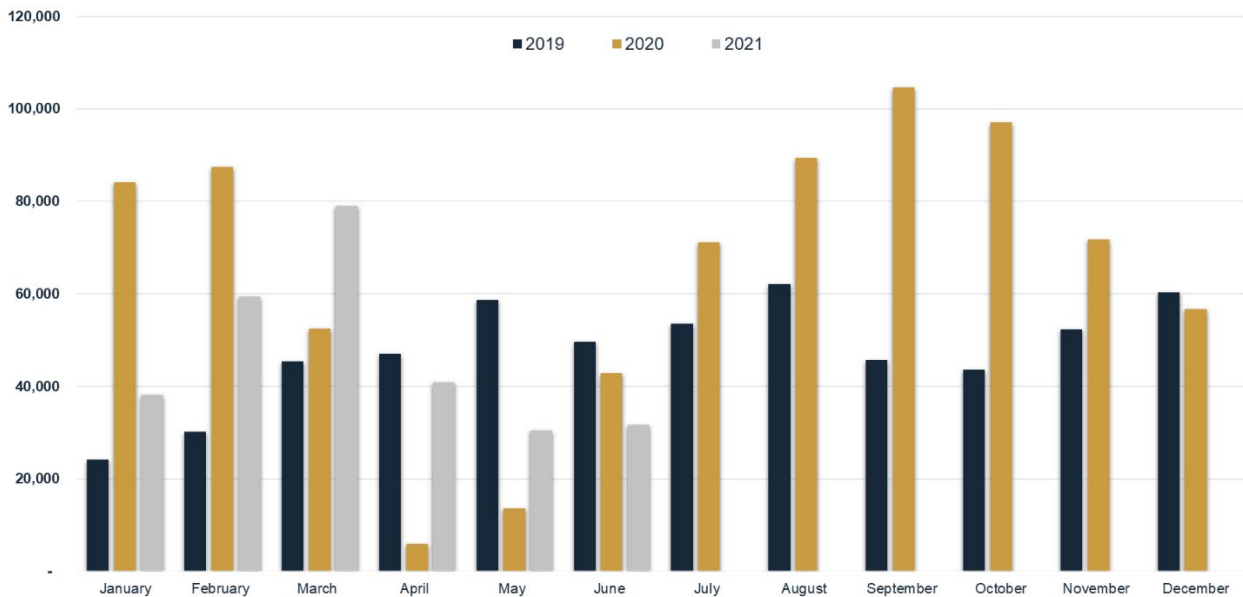
Figure 1 **Impersonation Scam Complaints Received by SSA OIG**
(July 2019 to June 2021)



¹ The number of Social Security-related phone-scam complaints SSA OIG receives may not reflect all scam-related phone calls. This is because a complaint is a self-reported allegation. Similarly, complaints of financial losses to scammers may not reflect all actual losses for this same reason.

Figure 2

**Impersonation Scam Complaints Received by SSA OIG
(January 2019 to June 2021)**



Date Prepared: July 23, 2021

Overall, the incoming complaint trends have remained relatively constant. We have seen no change in complaints associated with COVID-19 and a small percentage point increase in those with reported financial losses (see Table 1 below). The percentage of complaints associated with those receiving SSA payments or benefits fell slightly below the rate for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020. We continue to monitor these trends and discuss the reported loss trends in detail below.

Table 1

Measure	FY 2020 (Percent)	First Nine Months of FY 2021 (Percent)
Receiving SSA Payments	35.6	35.5
Associated with COVID-19	0.9	0.9
Reporting a Loss	1.4	1.9

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has a dedicated online fillable form, where the public can report Social Security-related phone scams. A deeper look at the reported loss figures from our [SSA Scam Reporting Form](#) for FY 2021 shows various trends, including a higher volume of reported payments to scammers among younger victims, yet a higher dollar amount of reported payments to scammers among older victims. We note this analysis is based upon data from complainants who voluntarily self-reported both a date of birth and a loss dollar value. The results are consistent with earlier trends reported by the Federal Trade Commission (and referenced in the Inspector General's January 2020 [testimony](#) on imposter scams before the Senate Special Committee on Aging).

Figure 3 **Number of Reported Payments to Imposters, by Reported Age**

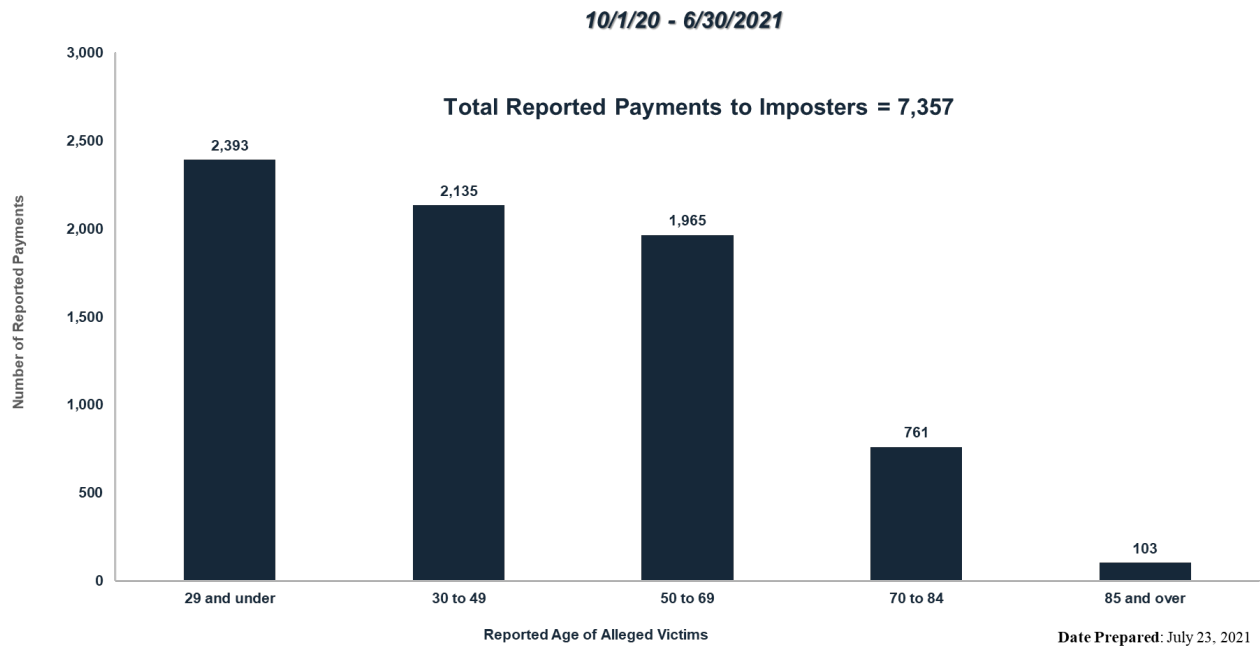
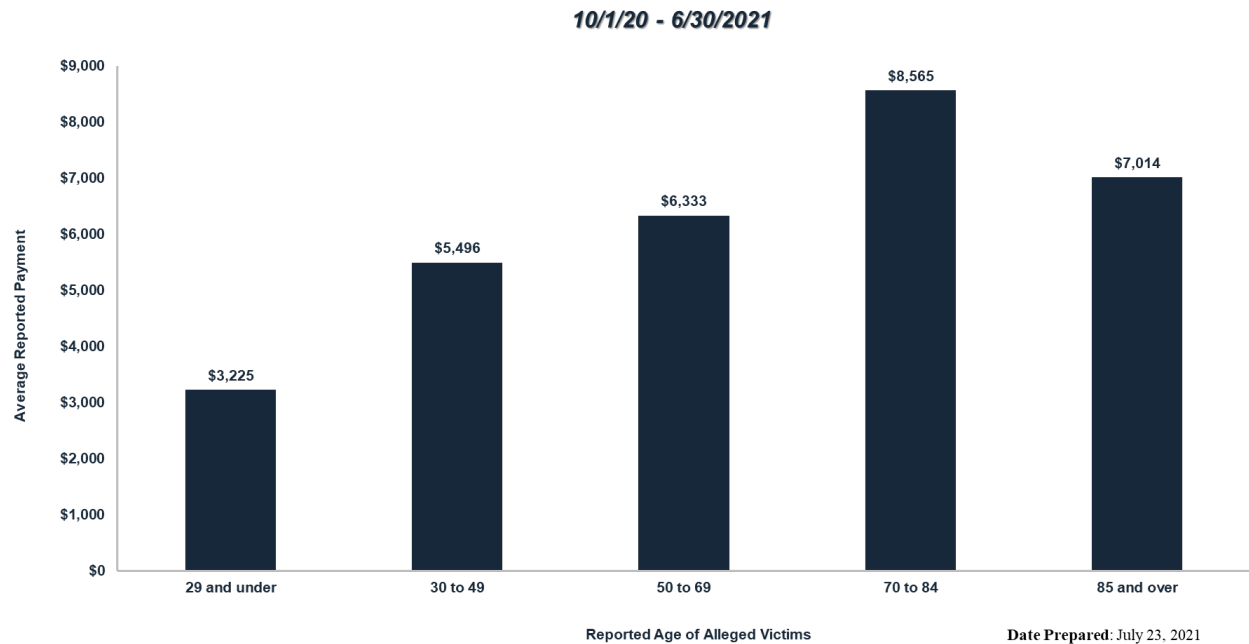


Figure 4 **Average Dollar Value of Reported Payments to Imposters, by Reported Age**



We also reviewed the lowest and highest average reported payments to scammers at the state level using all data collected via the dedicated online form, since its inception in November 2019. Figures 5 and 6 (below) provide the national average rates for comparison. This analysis is based upon data from complainants who voluntarily self-reported both state of residence, and a loss dollar value. The reported national average



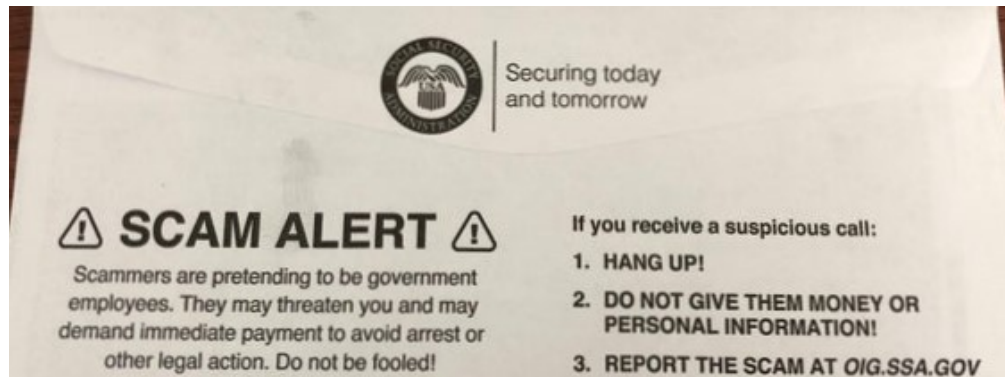
In addition to the data analysis, we note the following investigative actions and outreach efforts during this quarter:

- **Investigation – Routing Robocalls:** On April 28, 2021, Vermont Attorney General T.J. Donovan announced a settlement with a small Florida-based company, Strategic IT Partner, which routed thousands of foreign scam robocalls to Vermont residents who reported the scam robocalls to the Vermont Consumer Assistance Program. The settlement will prevent Strategic IT Partner from bringing any robocalls into the U.S. from abroad, unless the company first verifies they are wholly legitimate. In October 2020, thousands of Vermonters received the same fraudulent robocall impersonating the Social Security Administration. In response to the scam reports, the Attorney General traced these calls back to the Florida company, Strategic IT Partner. Strategic IT Partner is an “interconnect” carrier that routed fraudulent calls from a source in India to Vermont. With investigative help from the Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General, the Attorney General then discovered:
 - Strategic IT Partner serviced customers based in India, the Philippines, the United Arab Emirates, and Hong Kong;
 - Strategic IT Partner took no meaningful steps to verify these customers’ legitimacy prior to accepting their call traffic;
 - In one day alone, Strategic IT Partner routed hundreds of thousands of fraudulent robocalls from these foreign customers to the U.S., including thousands to Vermont; and
 - Strategic IT Partner ignored red flags that these foreign customers and their call traffic were illegitimate.

You can read more about these recent events [here](#).

- **Investigation – Chaitali Dave:** On April 28, 2021, Chaitali Dave, 36, of Lamar, South Carolina, was sentenced to 20 months in prison to be followed by 3 years of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$320,550 in restitution. On October 6, 2020, Dave pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Amy Totenberg to charges of laundering over \$500,000 on behalf of India-based phone scammers. The October 6, 2020, DOJ [press release](#) announcing the guilty pleas of Dave and her husband, Mehulkumar Manubhai Patel, noted, “As part of their Social Security scam, India-based callers pose as federal agents in order to mislead victims into believing their Social Security numbers were involved in crimes. Callers threatened arrest, and the loss of the victims’ assets, if the victims did not send money. The callers directed victims to mail cash to aliases used by other members of the fraud network, including Patel and Dave.” Patel was sentenced on December 1, 2020, to 30 months in prison to be followed by 2 years of supervised release, and ordered to pay \$259,217 in restitution. You can read more about these recent events [here](#).
- **Investigation – Success Story:** Earlier this year, OIG personnel recovered and returned a scam victim’s entire life savings to her. As a single mother of young children, the victim was convinced by a Social Security imposter scammer that she had to mail \$20,000 in cash to a pharmacy in Phoenix, Arizona, to avoid arrest. SSA OIG contacted the shipping company and successfully intercepted the package prior to arrival. The OIG also coordinated with other agencies to connect this event to existing investigations. The victim wrote a heartfelt thank you to those responsible for recovering this money. This was a case where our OIG was able to engage with our private sector and law enforcement partners to disrupt this criminal activity and ensure funds were returned to a vulnerable victim in less than 24 hours.

- **Mini “Slam the Scam” Efforts:** The OIG and SSA continue to work closely on new outreach efforts between the annual National “Slam the Scam” Days. We are keeping the momentum going to inform the public and minimize the impact of imposter scams. We are finalizing plans for upcoming events.
- **Public Mailings:** In the last quarter, SSA mailed 26 million letters to the public, with a fraud message printed on the back of all envelopes. Through June 2021, the Agency has mailed approximately 293 million of these letters in total. Below we provide a photo of an envelope with the imposter scam alert.



Please contact us with any questions:
oig.dcom@ssa.gov.



OIG.SSA.GOV