

# Online scams rise during COVID-19 pandemic

**2020**

**BBB Scam Tracker<sup>SM</sup>  
Risk Report**





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**Online scams rise  
during COVID-19  
pandemic**

 **INSTITUTE for  
MARKETPLACE  
TRUST<sup>SM</sup>**

# Table of contents

4	<b>Introduction</b>	28	<b>Spotlight on military families and veterans</b>
5	- About BBB Scam Tracker <sup>SM</sup>	30	<b>Spotlight on students</b>
6	<b>Snapshot of 2020</b>	31	<b>Spotlight on impersonated organizations</b>
7	- COVID-19 related highlights	32	<b>Understanding general scammer tactics can help you avoid scams</b>
9	- 2020 Risk Report highlights	34	<b>BBB impact in the marketplace</b>
10	<b>BBB Risk Index: A three-dimensional approach to measuring scam risk</b>	35	<b>Working together to stop scammers</b>
12	<b>10 riskiest scams of 2020</b>	35	<b>Conclusion</b>
14	- Top product categories used for online purchase scams	36	<b>10 tips for avoiding a scam</b>
15	- Pet-related scams spike during COVID-19 pandemic	37	<b>BBB Institute research</b>
16	- Employment scams remained risky in 2020	39	<b>Acknowledgments</b>
17	<b>Demographics</b>	40	<b>Appendix A: Scam type data table, consumer scams</b>
17	- Age	41	<b>Appendix B: Top 10 consumer scam types by overall risk, exposure, monetary loss, and susceptibility</b>
19	• Monetary loss for people ages 18–24 rises in 2020	42	<b>Project team</b>
20	- Gender	43	<b>About BBB Institute</b>
21	- Racial background		
22	- Other protective factors		
23	<b>Scam delivery and payment methods</b>		
25	<b>Spotlight on Canadian consumers</b>		



# Introduction

The BBB Institute for Marketplace Trust (BBB Institute), the educational foundation of the Better Business Bureau (BBB), is pleased to present the *2020 BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report*. This report is produced each year using data submitted by consumers to BBB Scam Tracker<sup>SM</sup> ([BBB.org/ScamTracker](https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker)) to shed light on how scams are being perpetrated, who is being targeted, which scams have the greatest impact, and much more. Key highlights of the 2020 report are provided in Figure 2 (page 9).

BBB has promoted trust between consumers and businesses in the marketplace for more than 100 years. The annual *BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report* is one critical component of our fight to curtail fraud. The findings provided in the risk report and our other research are used to inform BBB Institute's educational programs, which aim to empower consumers and businesses to protect themselves from scams. These efforts are critical to limiting the financial and emotional damage to individuals who experience a scam and creating a level playing field in which honest businesses can prosper.

BBB Scam Tracker empowers people to avoid scams and fraud; 22.2% of those who visited the crowd-sourced tool said BBB Scam Tracker helped them avoid a scam, with 60.5% saying they visited the site to see whether a situation they were experiencing could be a scam.<sup>1</sup> Of those who visited BBB Scam Tracker, 97.8% wanted to warn others about the scam, 91.0% wanted to bring justice to the perpetrator, and 52.9% were trying to get their money back.<sup>2</sup>

The data and insights gleaned from BBB Scam Tracker reports provide critical information we need to tell the full story about the impact of scams. BBB Scam Tracker data enables us to explore differences in risk borne by particular subsets of the population and create effective messaging on how consumers and businesses can avoid falling prey to scams. The BBB Risk Index (Figure 3 on page 10) is a multidimensional approach to evaluating scam risk that considers three measurements: exposure, susceptibility, and monetary loss. This information enables us to provide a more meaningful measure of the relative risk of a given scam type.

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<sup>1</sup> Web-intercept survey with 1,272 unique respondents who visited BBB Scam Tracker in December 2020. Respondents could choose multiple reasons for visiting BBB Scam Tracker.

<sup>2</sup> BBB Scam Tracker Annual Survey conducted from December 31, 2020 to February 15, 2021, with 5,025 responses from people that reported scams to BBB Scam Tracker in 2020.

This report would not be possible without the consumers and business leaders who shared their stories via BBB Scam Tracker. Thanks to their willingness to come forward, we can provide valuable insights about how to stop fraudsters and help others avoid losing money to scams. We extend our thanks to the more than 231,000 citizen heroes who chose to speak out by reporting scams.

We also acknowledge that the fight to stop scammers requires a multisector effort by government agencies and law enforcement, not-for-profits, the media, and the business community. By working together, we can prevent scammers from stealing billions and eroding marketplace trust.

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## ABOUT

### BBB Scam Tracker<sup>SM</sup>

Data in the *2020 BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report* is provided through BBB Scam Tracker, an online platform that enables consumers and businesses to report scams and suspicious activities to BBB. These reports are then made available to the general public, thus empowering consumers to avoid losing money to scammers. The website features a searchable "heat map" so users can view the number, types, and details about scams reported in their communities.

BBB Scam Tracker data informs BBB's efforts to educate consumers and stop fraudsters by leveraging the power of technology and our network of Better Business Bureaus (BBBs) serving communities throughout North America.



# Snapshot of 2020

In 2020, more than 46,000 scams were published on BBB Scam Tracker, a 24.9% increase over the number reported in 2019. These reports were filed by a cross-section of the population, including business owners and consumers across North America. BBB Scam Tracker accepts reports from consumers and businesses, classifying them into **30 consumer scam types**, **13 business scam types**, and an “other” category, which represented 5.0% of all reports.<sup>3</sup> The data collected included a description of the scam, the dollar value of any loss, and information about the means of contact and method of payment.<sup>4</sup> The BBB Scam Tracker tool also collected optional demographic data—age, gender, and postal code—about those who were targeted by scammers, along with military and/or student status. See Appendix A (page 40) for detailed data by scam type.

Approximately 1.4 million unique visitors used BBB Scam Tracker in 2020, up 17% from 2019. The majority of those visitors used the BBB Scam Tracker tool to prevent themselves from losing money from a scam. We estimate that consumers and business owners saved \$21 million in 2020 by checking BBB Scam Tracker while experiencing what they believed was a scam. The impact of BBB Scam Tracker in detecting and preventing fraud goes far beyond the tool itself. Better Business Bureau’s fraud prevention messaging based on BBB Scam Tracker data resulted in 5,700 media mentions in 2020 alone. In addition, BBBs present workshops across the United States and Canada that reach vulnerable populations with limited or no access to online resources.

One positive sign in this year’s report is a 28.1% drop in the reported median dollar loss, from \$160 in 2019 to \$115 in 2020. This is the lowest median dollar loss since we began reporting BBB Scam Tracker data in 2016. It is concerning, however, that susceptibility (the percentage of consumers who lost money when exposed to a scam) increased significantly, with more consumers likely to lose money when exposed to a scam. Susceptibility climbed from 35.1% in 2019 to 46.7% in 2020, as shown in Figure 1. This 33.0% rise over last year, as well as the 195.6% increase since 2017, may be related to the rise in online purchase scams, which made up 38.3% of all scams reported to BBB Scam Tracker in 2020 (up from 24.3% in 2019 and 20.6% in 2018). Susceptibility to online purchase scams is 78.8%, the second highest susceptibility rate for all scam types behind moving scams. Nearly two-thirds (64.7%) of all scams with a financial loss reported to BBB Scam Tracker were online purchase scams.

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<sup>3</sup> BBB Scam Tracker has 31 consumer scam types. Scholarship scams were not included in this year’s report due to the low incidences of reports in 2020.

<sup>4</sup> All dollar values in this report have been converted to USD (except the values provided in the Canada section).

## COVID-19 related highlights

It is impossible to provide a snapshot of 2020 without considering the overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a survey of individuals that reported a scam in 2020 to BBB Scam Tracker, 43.1% of respondents said they were spending more time online because of COVID-19 and 57.1% said they were purchasing more online because of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Many were forced to social distance and conduct a larger portion of their personal and professional lives online, and others lost their jobs which forced them to seek new jobs online. These factors likely played into online purchase and employment scams remaining the riskiest scams in 2020.

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COVID-19 related factors likely played into online purchase and employment scams remaining the riskiest scams in 2020.

Following the release in March 2020 of the *2019 BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report*, BBB Institute published timely research to help consumers protect themselves during the pandemic. In June 2020, we published the *2020 Employment Scams Report* and in October we published the *2020 Online Purchase Scams Report*. Throughout this year's risk report you will find additional data and references regarding the impact of COVID-19. In 2021, BBB Institute will publish new information to help consumers as the pandemic continues.

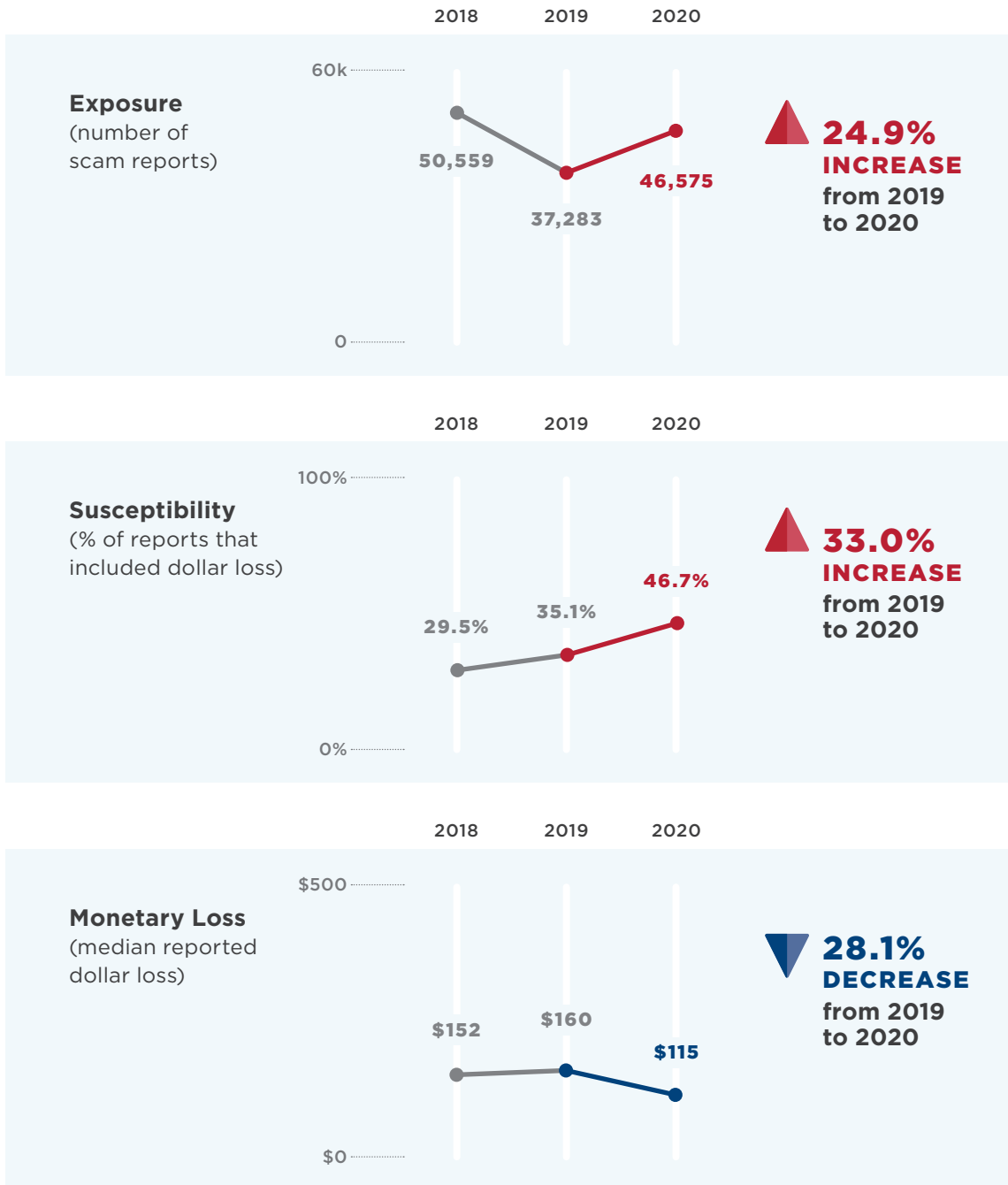
This year's risk report offers greater detail about specific scam types and the demographic groups that are more vulnerable to certain types of scams. We encourage readers to dig deeper into the data and insights provided here. More must be done to ensure consumers know how to detect the tactics and persuasions commonly used by scammers. The *2020 BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report* is one piece of a larger multifaceted consumer education effort. Learn more about our programs and educational efforts at [BBBMarketplaceTrust.org](https://BBBMarketplaceTrust.org).

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<sup>5</sup> BBB Scam Tracker Annual Survey conducted from December 31, 2020 to February 15, 2021, with 5,025 responses from people that reported scams to BBB Scam Tracker in 2020.

**FIGURE 1**

### Snapshot of 2020 compared with 2018/2019



Although the median dollar loss decreased by 28.1%, susceptibility increased significantly, with more consumers likely to lose money when exposed to a scam.



FIGURE 2

# 2020 Risk Report highlights

SCAM REPORTS

**46,575**

MEDIAN REPORTED LOSS

**\$115**

LIKELIHOOD OF LOSS

**46.7%**



## ONLINE SHOPPING AND COVID-19

**43.1%** spent more time online because of the pandemic

**57.1%** purchased more online because of the pandemic

**THIS CONTRIBUTED TO A SPIKE IN ONLINE PURCHASE SCAMS**



**38.3%**

of all scam reports in 2020 were online purchase scams

Online purchase scams were

**THE RISKIEST SCAM for ages 18-54**

**and second riskiest for ages 55+**

**Pet- and PPE-related scams**

spiked during the pandemic



## 2020 CHANGES IN RISK



**Susceptibility** is at an all-time high, with nearly 1 in 2 reports noting financial loss.



For the first time, **adults ages 18-24** reported the highest median losses (\$150)—the same as adults 65+.



**Scams online and through social media apps** are riskier than scams by phone for all age groups (including older adults).



**Scams using online payment systems spiked**, while scams using prepaid cards and wire transfers decreased.



**Amazon** has become the second most impersonated brand by scammers.



**Learning about general scammer behaviors and tactics** is an effective prevention tactic, according to a survey of BBB Scam Tracker users.

# BBB Risk Index

## A three-dimensional approach to measuring scam risk

To better understand which scam types pose the highest risks, we assessed scams on the basis of three factors: exposure, susceptibility, and monetary loss. We call this unique formula the BBB Risk Index (Figure 3). By combining these three factors, we gain a more meaningful picture of scam risk that goes beyond merely the volume of reports received. This helps us better target our scam prevention outreach.

Risk cannot be determined by viewing just one of these factors in isolation. For example, scams that occur in high volumes typically target as many people as possible, but yield a lower likelihood of loss and potential losses of smaller amounts. In comparison, scams with a “high-touch” approach often reach fewer individuals, but those individuals exposed are often more likely to experience higher monetary losses.

FIGURE 3

### BBB Risk Index

The formula for calculating the BBB Risk Index for a given scam in a given population is

$$\text{Exposure} \times \text{Susceptibility} \times (\text{Median Loss} / \text{Overall Median Loss}) \times 1,000.$$

### BBB RISK INDEX



**EXPOSURE**  
is a measure of the prevalence of a scam type, calculated as the percentage of a particular scam type as part of the total scams reported.

**SUSCEPTIBILITY**  
is a measure of the likelihood of losing money when exposed to a scam type, calculated as the percentage of all reports that reported a monetary loss.

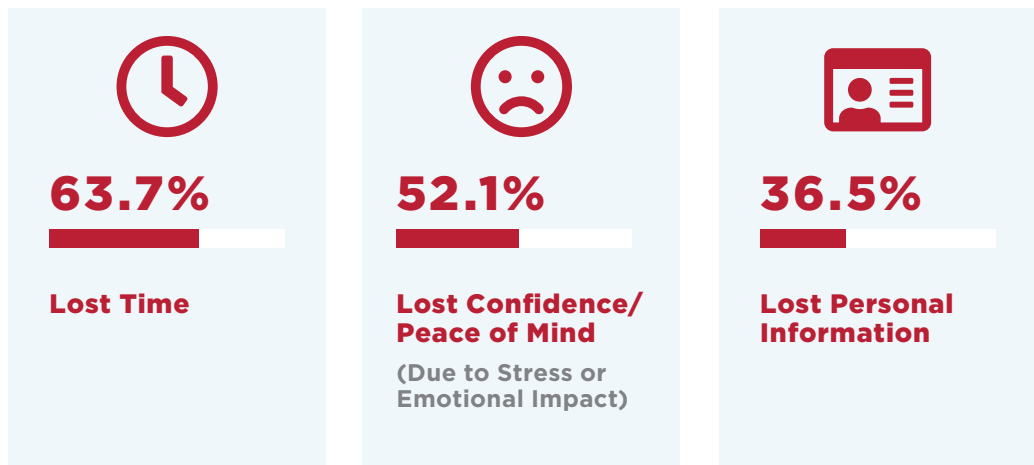
**MONETARY LOSS**  
is calculated as the median dollar amount of losses reported for a particular scam type, excluding reports where no loss occurred.

The BBB Risk Index provides a more accurate way to assess which scams have the biggest impact on those reporting to BBB Scam Tracker—and helps track changes in risk from year to year.<sup>6</sup>

The BBB Risk Index does not factor in the emotional and psychological harm scams can inflict or the damage done in diminishing trust between consumers and businesses. In our annual survey to individuals that reported a scam to BBB Scam Tracker, we asked people to share what non-financial impacts they had due to the experience (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4**

**Non-financial impacts of being targeted by a scam**



<sup>6</sup> It is important to acknowledge that no measure of risk is without limitations. The BBB Risk Index is calculated using data collected through BBB Scam Tracker, which is limited by the very nature of self-reporting as an imperfect measure of the extent of the problem. Because of the perceived stigma associated with losing money to a scammer, it is likely that scams are significantly underreported (which is explained further in [Cracking the Invulnerability Illusion](#), 2016). Moreover, although local BBBs review reports to determine whether they describe what a reasonable person would believe to be a scam, these reviews do not validate consumer allegations.

# 10 riskiest scams of 2020

Based on the BBB Risk Index and reports submitted to BBB Scam Tracker in 2020, the 10 riskiest scams listed in Table 1 pose the most significant risks to consumers. The 10 riskiest scam types in 2020 were the same as 2019, with some notable shifts in the rankings. Not

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Not surprisingly, online purchase scams reappeared as the riskiest scam in a year when people were spending more time online because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

surprisingly, online purchase scams reappeared as the riskiest scam in a year when people were spending more time online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online purchase scams made up 38.3% of all scams reported to BBB Scam Tracker in 2020, ranking as the scam with the highest exposure by far of all scam types. Median dollar loss for online purchase scams rose from \$76 in 2019 to \$96 in 2020, whereas the percentage of those who lost money (susceptibility) decreased slightly.

Employment scams, the riskiest scam in 2019, fell to the second most risky scam in 2020. This slip in ranking was caused by a decrease in the number of reports of this type of scam, a decrease in the dollar amount lost, and a decrease in the percentage of individuals who lost money.

Fake check/money order, romance, and home improvement scams all rose higher on the list in 2020; these scam types have a much higher median dollar loss when compared to median dollar loss overall. Though cryptocurrency scams fell to the seventh riskiest scam, they continue to be a risky scam type with a \$1,200 median dollar loss. While we added a COVID-19 scam type that consumers could use to categorize their scam, this did not make the riskiest scam list; however, mentions of the pandemic and its impacts were noted across multiple scam categories, including these ten riskiest scam types.

**TABLE 1**
**10 riskiest scams  
in 2020**

RANK		SCAM TYPE	BBB RISK INDEX	EXPOSURE		SUSCEPTIBILITY		MEDIAN \$ LOSS	
2020	2019			2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019
1 ↑	3	Online Purchase	251.9	38.3% ↑	24.3%	78.8% ↓	81.2%	\$96 ↑	\$76
2 ↓	1	Employment	99.1	7.1% ↓	9.3%	16.6% ↓	17.7%	\$967 ↓	\$1,500
3 ↑	4	Fake Check/ Money Order	65.4	2.7% ↓	4.7%	16.6%	16.6%	\$1,679 ↑	\$1,490
4 ↑	5	Advance Fee Loan	48.8	1.6% ↓	3.1%	47.1% ↑	41.8%	\$745 ↓	\$794
5 ↑	7	Home Improvement	42.6	0.7% ↓	1.0%	58.7% ↓	60.1%	\$1,193 ↓	\$1,800
6	6	Romance	41.9	0.5% ↓	0.6%	45.9% ↓	53.6%	\$2,100 ↓	\$3,000
7 ↓	2	Cryptocurrency	40.8	0.7%	0.7%	55.8% ↓	68.5%	\$1,200 ↓	\$3,000
8 ↑	9	Tech Support	37.9	3.1% ↓	4.2%	28.2% ↓	30.7%	\$499 ↓	\$500
9 ↑	10	Travel/Vacation/ Timeshare	35.5	0.7% ↓	1.0%	44.9% ↓	49.2%	\$1,300 ↑	\$1,097
10 ↓	8	Investment	33.2	0.6%	0.6%	67.2% ↑	61.4%	\$948 ↓	\$2,550

## Top product categories used for online purchase scams

Understanding the types of products being used to perpetrate online purchase scams enables us to better understand scammer tactics. We applied the BBB Risk Index to rank these online purchase categories from most risky to least risky (Table 2).

The most common products promised but not delivered once payment was made included pets and pet supplies and medical/nutrition products. Pet product scams spiked following the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pets and pet supplies made up 34.5% of online purchase scams, with 70.3% of people losing money when targeted by this scam type. The median dollar loss for pet-related scams was \$750, significantly higher than all other product types used for scams. Medical/nutrition supplies, which included masks and other products needed during the pandemic, made up 7.9% of online purchase scams reported and were especially prevalent at the beginning of the pandemic; 82.6% of people exposed to this product type lost money.

**TABLE 2**

**Top product categories used for online purchase scams**

RANK	PRODUCT	EXPOSURE	SUSCEPTIBILITY	MEDIAN \$ LOSS
1	Pets and Pet Supplies	34.5%	70.3%	\$750
2	Medical/Nutrition	7.9%	82.6%	\$100
3	Motor Vehicles and Parts	5.6%	51.6%	\$200
4	Clothing/Accessories	9.9%	91.0%	\$60
5	Digital Devices	6.6%	75.5%	\$90
6	Footwear	4.2%	87.0%	\$75
7	Fitness/Sporting Goods	2.7%	85.7%	\$89
8	Hobbies/Toys/Collectibles	3.2%	88.9%	\$70
9	Furniture	2.7%	91.9%	\$80
10	Home Appliances	2.0%	81.8%	\$92

## Pet-related scams spike during COVID-19 pandemic

The significant rise of scams related to the sale of pets and pet supplies contributed to online purchase scams being the riskiest scam type again in 2020 (one-third of all online purchase scams reported to BBB Scam Tracker this year were related to pet products). In fact, a spike in pet scams followed the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online purchase scams related to pets had a median dollar loss of \$750; 70% of people lost money when targeted by pet scams.

*"I was looking [online] for a Shih Tzu puppy and settled on a puppy named Tyson. I filled out paperwork and answered several questions, such as if I had [experience] raising a puppy and why I wanted one. Payment was arranged through Zelle for the \$650 fee plus an additional \$50 for shipping. The shipper contacted me and said because of the pandemic, they needed a special crate to ship the dog. It cost \$1,000, but \$950 of the cost would be refunded and a check would be sent along with the dog. I asked if I could fly out to pick up Tyson and was told no. They asked me to pay in American Express gift cards, so I went and bought two \$500 gift cards. They asked me to take a picture of the front and back of the cards with my phone to make sure I got the right cards and to send them the pictures. It was around this time, I suspected something was not right. The next morning after I sent the pictures, I went back to the store where I bought the cards to see if the cards still had money on them. They did not.*

*After discovering the gift cards were cashed out, I asked again about buying a plane ticket to pick up Tyson. I was told no and asked to buy more gift cards to buy insurance for Tyson and then that cost would be reimbursed. They put me in a corner by making me feel sorry for the dog waiting at the warehouse. They were very good at telling me Tyson was waiting for me at the shipping yard. If I did not pay for the shipping costs, I would be responsible for leaving Tyson at the shipping yard and they would send the police after me.*

*Now I look at the various websites and I know what not to do. Do not buy any pets online. Many of the websites are a scam. I am used to buying other things online. This was an expensive lesson."*

— Woman from Arizona, USA  
Age 65+

## Employment scams remained risky in 2020

Scammers perpetrating employment scams often use a high-touch approach, spending significant time preparing elaborate setups. For example, scammers conduct in-depth interviews via Google Hangouts and other online technologies, provide employment forms for targets to fill out, and ask their targets to perform job duties before the scam is discovered. Phony job offers often include part-time, flexible jobs that fit within the growing gig economy.

*"I was contacted by a company selling electronics via email. They said they wanted to hire me. They claimed that they support other companies and provide tech support. At the time I thought it was a great opportunity given the fact that the pandemic was just beginning. I started the job by communicating with so-called 'Kendall Phelps' using the app Telegram after I signed a contract. They said they needed to test my knowledge of bitcoin platforms. I had to transfer out 100 to BitBuy, convert that to bitcoins, then transfer that to a blockchain wallet, then to the company wallet. Then they sent 3,000 and 2,900 was then transferred out and they repaid me the 100 dollars. BMO (bank) then flagged my account and I lost access. They deleted all communication on Telegram. Once a user deletes the conversation thread, Telegram does not keep conversations on their servers.*

*I realized something wasn't right when they weren't responding to my emails or messages. These people were so convincing that it's scary. My advice to others is do your research. Take screenshots of everything because you do not know when you will need proof. Report scams. As much as it may seem small, they will continue to take advantage of others. Do your part. And know you are not alone."*

*— Woman from Ontario, Canada  
Age 25-34*





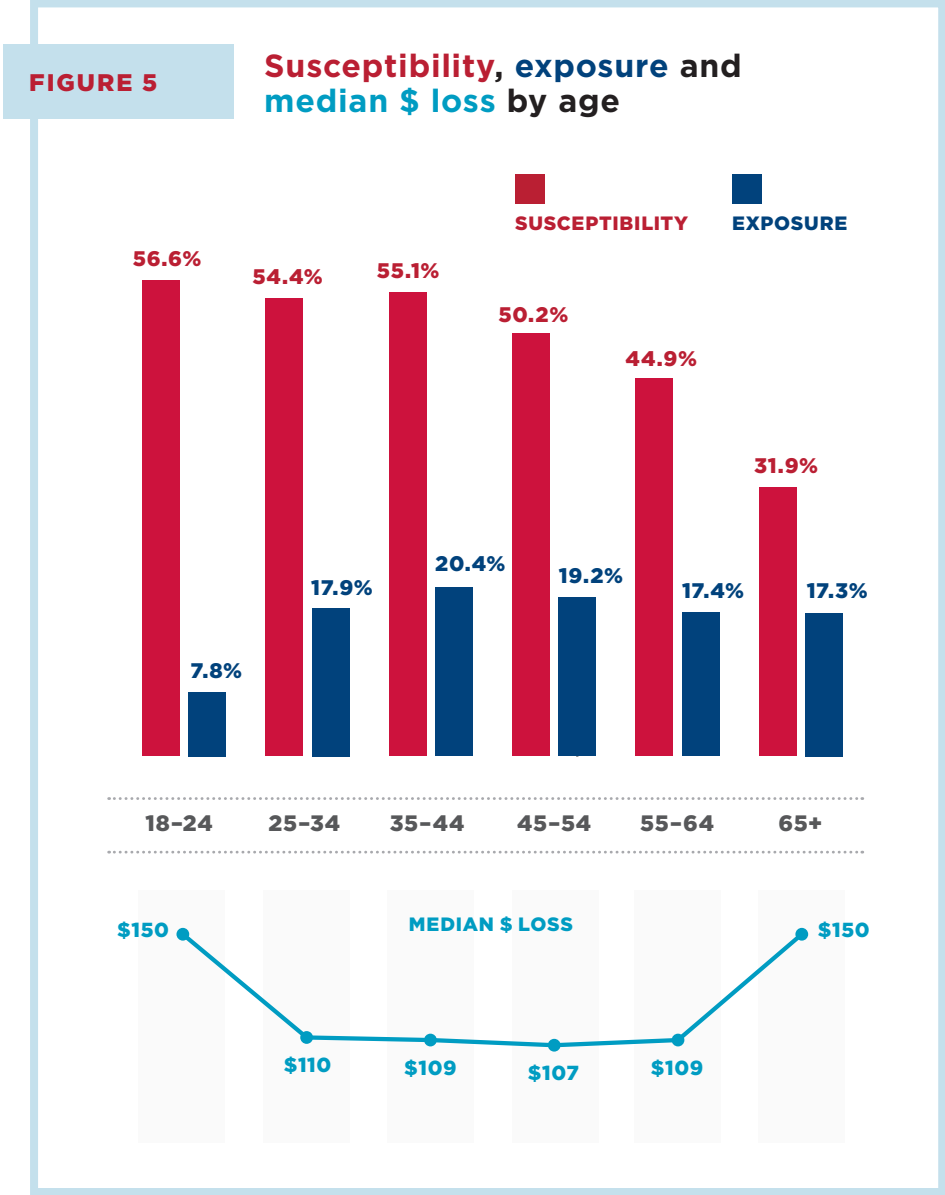
# Demographics

The collection of self-reported demographic data such as age, gender, and racial background enhances our ability to identify individuals most at risk and helps us better understand how the nature of risk varies across different subgroups of the population. We use this information to enhance how we target outreach and educational strategies. BBB creates content, resources, and programming aimed at empowering consumers and businesses alike to identify and avoid scams.

### Age

As in previous years, younger people lost money to scammers at higher rates than older people. However, for the first time since we began publishing the *BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report*, people ages 18-24 had the same median dollar loss (\$150) as that of ages 65+ (\$150) (Figure 5).

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In previous years, young adults lost money more often, but when older adults did lose money, they lost higher dollar amounts. This change may be due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with all ages spending significantly more time online in 2020.

Table 3 highlights the three riskiest scams by age. Online purchase scams were the riskiest for ages 18 through 54 and the second riskiest for ages 55+. Romance scams continued to be the riskiest scams for ages 55 through 64, and travel/vacation/timeshare scams were again the riskiest for ages 65+ in 2020.

**TABLE 3**

**3 riskiest scam types by age range**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>AGES 18-24</b>	Online Purchase	Fake Check/ Money Order	Employment
<b>AGES 25-34</b>	Online Purchase	Employment	Fake Check/ Money Order
<b>AGES 35-44</b>	Online Purchase	Employment	Investment
<b>AGES 45-54</b>	Online Purchase	Employment	Advance Fee Loan
<b>AGES 55-64</b>	Romance	Online Purchase	Investment
<b>AGES 65+</b>	Travel/Vacation/ Timeshare	Online Purchase	Romance

## Monetary loss for people ages 18–24 rises in 2020

### *Fake check/money order scams second riskiest for this age group*

Fake check/money order scams were the second riskiest for ages 18-24 and the third riskiest overall for ages 25-34. The monetary loss for fake check/money order scams was \$1,679, which is much higher than the median dollars lost across all scam types, and could be contributing to the higher-than-average median losses for the 18-24 age group. As the use of checks continues to decline and online payment methods gain popularity, younger consumers may be less knowledgeable about how checks work. More must be done to ensure young consumers understand that just because a check “clears” the bank does not mean it is legitimate. It may take weeks for the bank to realize it is a fake check.

*“I received an email to apply for a Walmart mystery shopper job. I was super excited because I’ve heard about mystery shoppers before and with COVID-19 and being a full-time college student, it’s a great opportunity. About a week ago I received an email stating I was selected to be a mystery shopper and that they would send me a package with instructions. I received a package with a check for \$3,885. They told me to deposit it and then they’d email me with instructions for my first assignment. I deposited the check and my bank put the check on hold; that’s when I started suspecting that something wasn’t right. The guy made me send him a picture of the deposit slip and I [sent] him a screen shot, blanking out my bank info. I emailed asking to receive instructions for my first assignment and got no response. I started getting really bad anxiety so I Googled it and I stumbled upon Walmart’s website that said they do not hire third parties and to look out for scams that are called “Wal-Mart mystery shopper,” which was the name of the “company” that contacted me. That’s when I really started panicking... I called the fraud department of my bank and spoke to a representative and she opened a case and helped me and told me everything was going to be okay, that scams like these are very common. Thankfully I realized what happened and didn’t use any of the funds if they did get deposited. It could’ve been a lot worse. It’s just horrible that people do this.”*

— College student from Florida, USA  
Age 18-24

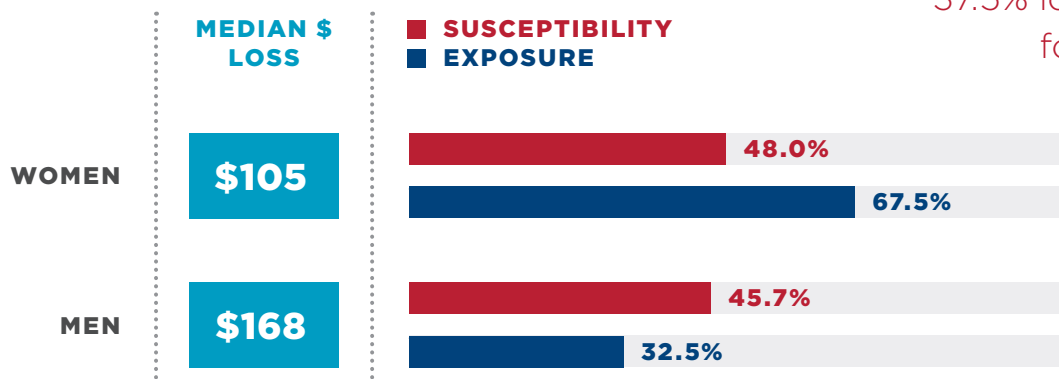
## Gender

In 2020, roughly two-thirds of reports to BBB Scam Tracker were submitted by women; one-third of reports were submitted by men. Overall, women were more susceptible to losing money when exposed to a scam (48.0%) compared to men (45.7%). Even more significant is the fact that the median dollar loss for women (\$105) was 37.5% lower than that for men (\$168) (Figure 6). Similar to the differences in losses by age group, this may reflect gender differences in access to financial resources or differences in the types of scams that tend to impact women versus men. Online purchase scams were the riskiest scams for both men and women in 2020 (Table 4). Employment scams dropped from the riskiest for both genders in 2019 to second riskiest for men and third riskiest for women in 2020.

**FIGURE 6**

### Median \$ loss, susceptibility and exposure by gender

The median dollar loss for women (\$105) was 37.5% lower than that for men (\$168).



**TABLE 4**

### Riskiest scam types by gender

	MEN	WOMEN
1	Online purchase	Online purchase
2	Employment	Romance
3	Home improvement	Employment

## Racial background

We surveyed thousands of individuals who reported a scam to BBB Scam Tracker in 2020 and asked them to self-identify their race/ethnicity. A large majority (79.0%) self-identified as white, with 11.0% identifying as Black, 6.8% identifying as Hispanic/Latinx, 3.8% identifying as Asian, 2.3% identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native, and 0.5% identifying as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.<sup>7</sup>

When we examined monetary loss among individuals who self-identified their racial background, consumers who self-identified as Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander reported higher incidences of losing money to a scammer (67.0% vs. 56.0%) and reported losing more than double the financial loss of those who self-identified as white (\$277 vs. \$135). Our research findings, combined with independent research from our collaboration with University of Minnesota and University of Southern California and other independent studies conducted by credible sources, appear to converge and, at a minimum, warrant further exploration to ensure we are working toward a more equitable marketplace for all.<sup>8</sup>

BBB Institute plans to work with our partners this year to do additional research to gain further insights about this finding and ensure that our consumer education initiatives are reaching all, particularly those demographic groups who are more likely to lose money to scams.

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These findings warrant further exploration to ensure we are working toward a more equitable marketplace for all.

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<sup>7</sup> 2,755 individuals self-identified their race/ethnicity in a survey of those who reported a scam to BBB Scam Tracker in 2020. Individuals were allowed to select more than one race/ethnicity.

<sup>8</sup> Similar research findings:

[https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/combating-fraud-african-american-latino-communities-ftcs-comprehensive-strategic-plan-federal-trade/160615fraudreport.pdf?utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/reports/combating-fraud-african-american-latino-communities-ftcs-comprehensive-strategic-plan-federal-trade/160615fraudreport.pdf?utm_source=govdelivery)

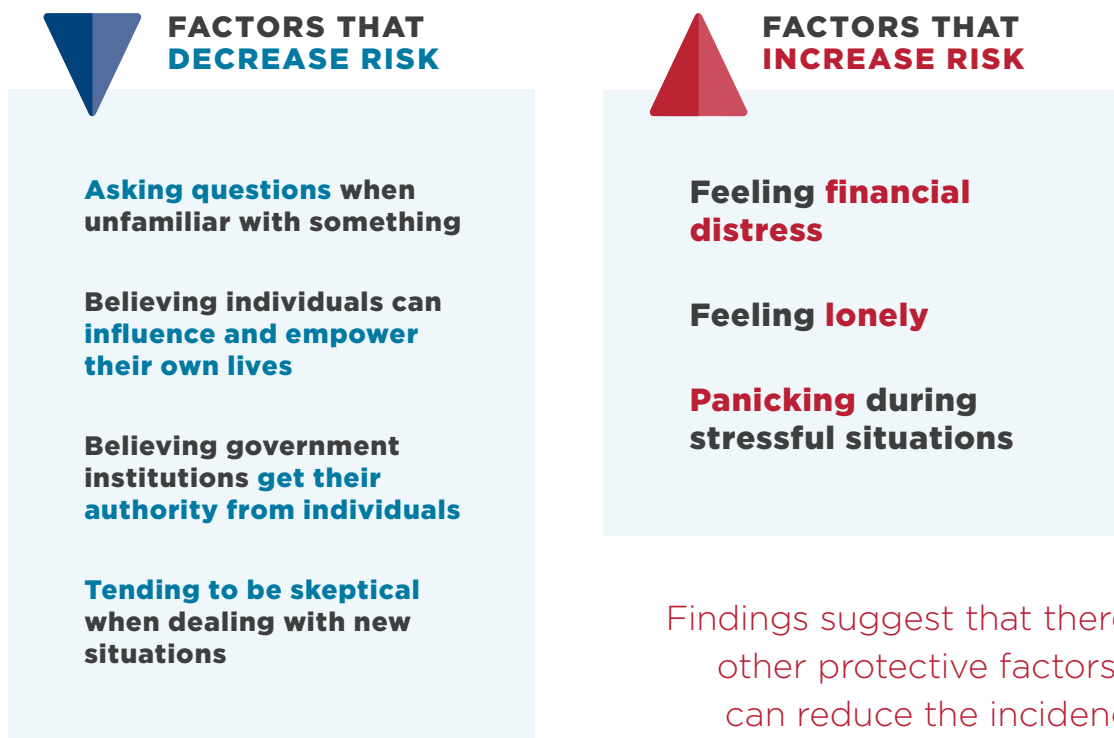
<http://www.devesh-raval.com/complaintBehavior.pdf>

## Other protective factors

As part of the 2019 report, *Exposed to Scams: What Separates Victims from Non-Victims?*, a partnership between BBB Institute, FINRA Foundation, and Stanford University, we conducted a qualitative analysis through in-depth ethnographic interviews.<sup>9</sup> The findings suggest that there are other protective factors that can reduce the incidence of losing money. Our own analysis of scam narratives identified some patterns, so we surveyed individuals who reported a scam to BBB Scam Tracker and asked them to choose between two statements that best described their beliefs or attitudes. As noted in Figure 7, factors such as: asking questions, believing individuals can influence outcomes and that government institutions get their authority from individuals, and being skeptical appear to reduce fraud risk. Risk factors that increase the chance of losing money include: feelings of financial distress, stress, and loneliness.

**FIGURE 7**

### Other factors that affect the likelihood of losing money



<sup>9</sup> *Exposed to Scams: What Separates Victims from Non-Victims?*  
Additional findings from these ethnographic interviews forthcoming.

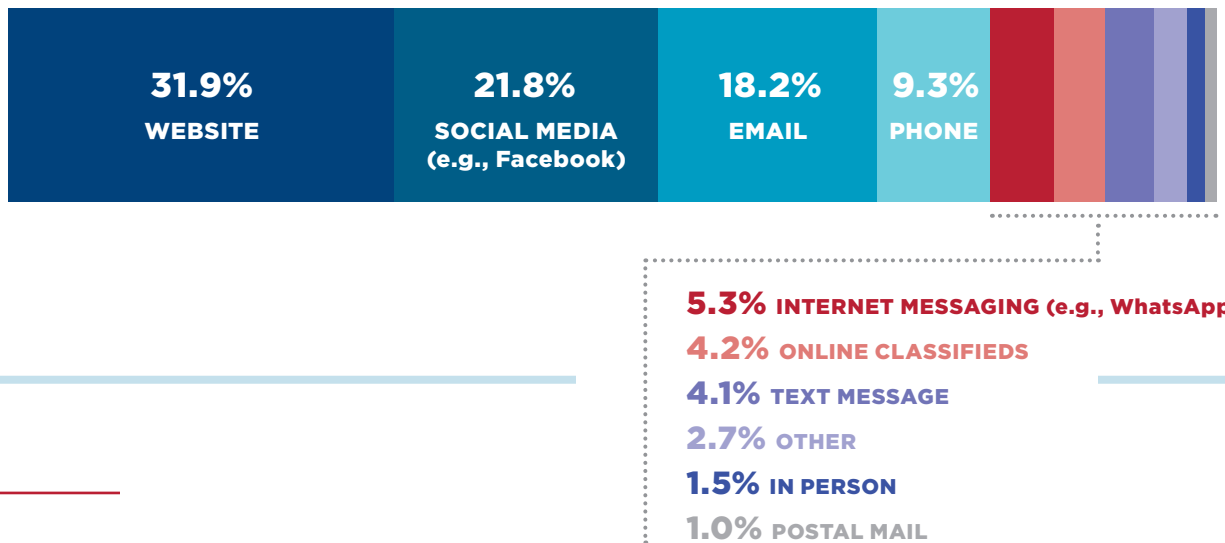


# Scam delivery and payment methods

In 2020, not surprisingly, more scams were perpetrated online and yielded the highest likelihood of financial loss. The top three contact methods in 2020 that resulted in a loss were website, social media, and email (Figure 8). The least common contact methods resulting in a loss were scams via postal mail and in person. In fact, the percentage of scams perpetrated in person was cut in half from 2019 (3.3%) to 2020 (1.5%), likely because of decreased opportunities caused by the pandemic.

**FIGURE 8**

## Means of contact with monetary loss (% total)



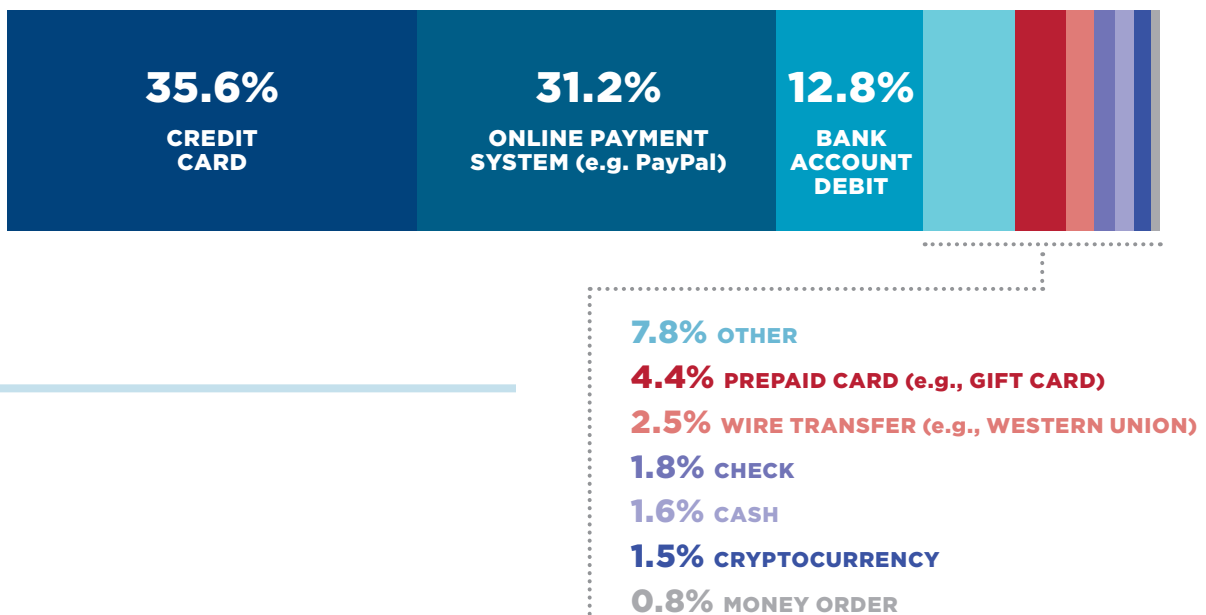
Scams initiated both via website and social media were more likely to result in a loss than scams initiated over the phone, even for adults ages 65 and over.

Phone was the most common contact method, as it has been for the past few years, and accounted for nearly half of all scams reported by ages 65 and over. However, phone scams are much less risky than scams perpetrated online; only 9.3% of scam encounters with a loss used phone as the initial contact method, which is down significantly from 2019 (15.2%). Even for adults ages 65 and over, scams initiated both via website and social media were more likely to result in a loss than scams initiated over the phone.

Credit cards (35.6%) remained the top payment method used by individuals who lost money to a scam in 2020 (Figure 9). Online payment systems were the second most common payment type resulting in a monetary loss and have been increasing significantly over the past few years—up from 13% in 2018 and 19.7% in 2019 to 31.2% in 2020. This spike in use is significant, because the other payment methods have all decreased, including prepaid and gift cards, which nearly halved from 8.3% in 2019 to 4.4% in 2020.

**FIGURE 9**

**Payment method resulting in a monetary loss  
(% total)**



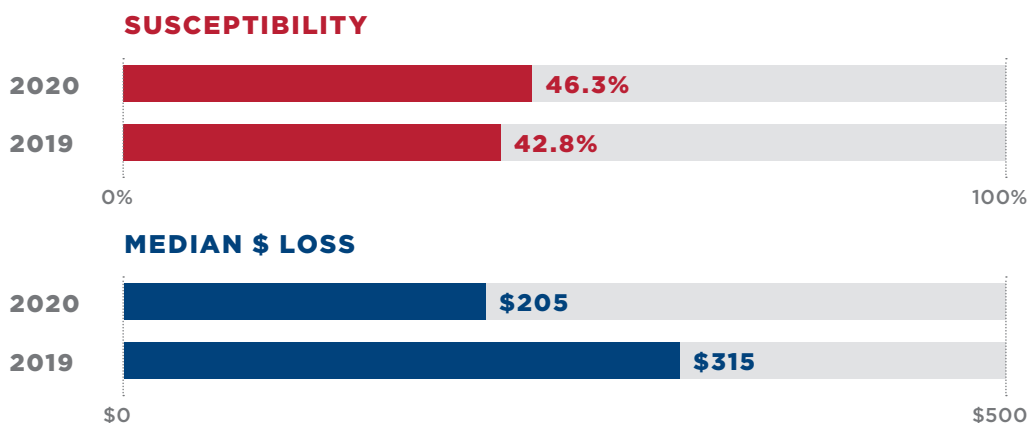


# Spotlight on Canadian consumers

In 2020, Canadian consumers reported 1,569 scam reports to BBB Scam Tracker (3.4% of total reports). The median reported loss was \$205 CAD, which is significantly lower than last year's \$315 CAD. Susceptibility increased from 42.8% in 2019 to 46.3% in 2020 (Figure 10). These trends—a decrease in median dollar loss with an increase in susceptibility—are consistent with findings from all BBB Scam Tracker reports, including those by Americans, in 2020.

FIGURE 10

## Susceptibility and median \$ loss 2020 versus 2019



### Top riskiest scams in Canada

The riskiest scam reported by Canadians in 2020 was advance fee loan scams, with a high susceptibility of 71.1% and the highest overall median dollar loss of \$1,400 CAD. The second riskiest scam was online purchase scams, accounting for over one-third of all reports (Table 5). The riskiest type of online purchase scam was pet and pet supply scams. Notably, travel/vacation/timeshare scams (the riskiest scam in 2019 for Canadians) were absent from the top riskiest list, likely because of limited travel during the pandemic. In addition, romance scams (third riskiest in 2019) did not make the riskiest list in 2020 because of a decrease in reports for this scam type. While we added a COVID-19 scam type for 2020 that consumers could use to categorize their scam, this did not make the riskiest scam list; however, mentions of the pandemic and its impacts were noted across multiple scam categories, including these top riskiest scam types.

**TABLE 5****Riskiest scams in 2020\***

SCAM TYPE	EXPOSURE	MEDIAN \$ LOSS	SUSCEPTIBILITY	RISK INDEX
Advance Fee Loan	6.2%	\$1,400	71.1%	301.0
Online Purchase	33.7%	\$116	75.4%	143.8
Home Improvement	2.9%	\$1,000	73.9%	104.5
Cryptocurrency	2.1%	\$1,300	57.6%	76.7
Employment	11.6%	\$500	11.0%	31.1
Fake Invoice/Supplier Bill	2.4%	\$333	39.5%	15.4
Credit Card	2.5%	\$250	46.2%	14.1
Phishing	9.6%	\$400	6.0%	11.2
Sweepstakes/Lottery/Prizes	2.3%	\$550	13.9%	8.6
Counterfeit Product	2.3%	\$97	75.0%	8.2

\* Only considered records larger than 30.

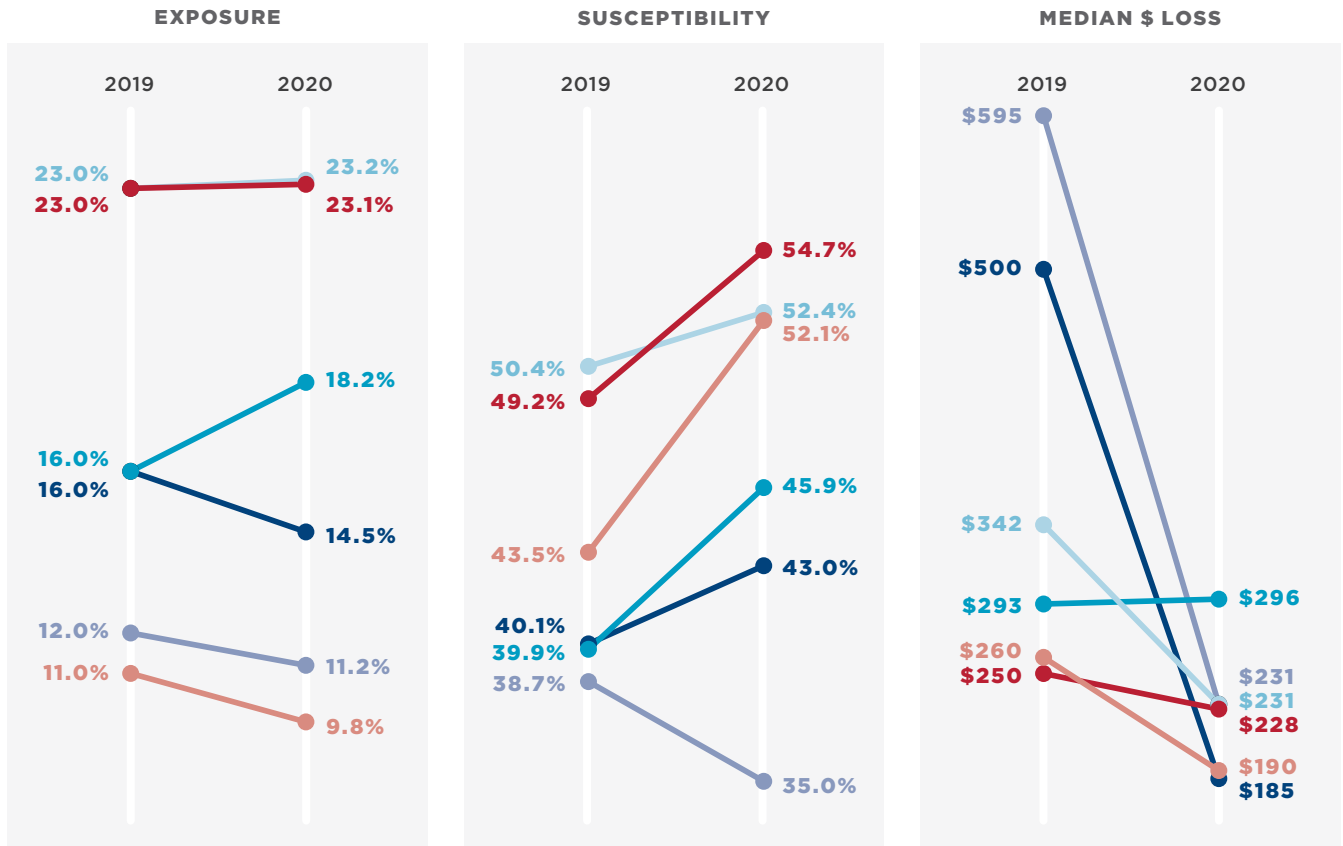
### Scam risk by age and gender in Canada

Canadians ages 45–54 reported the highest median dollar losses at \$296 CAD. Although this amount is very similar to their financial loss in 2019 (\$293 CAD), it is the only age group to lose more than in 2019—breaking the trend of overall decreases in median losses. In 2020, for example, adults ages 55+ reported similar losses to other age groups, while in 2019, they lost nearly double that of their younger counterparts (Figure 11 on page 27).

**FIGURE 11**

**Exposure, susceptibility and median \$ loss by age, 2020 versus 2019**

18-24 45-54  
25-34 55-64  
35-44 65+



Consistent with previous years and with American consumers, more women reported scams than men while men reported higher median losses (\$340) than women (\$180) (Figure 12). However, Canadian men report higher susceptibility at 48.7%, which differs from the trends noted by American consumers as well as Canadians in 2019.

**FIGURE 12**

**Median \$ loss, susceptibility and exposure by gender**



WOMEN  
MEN

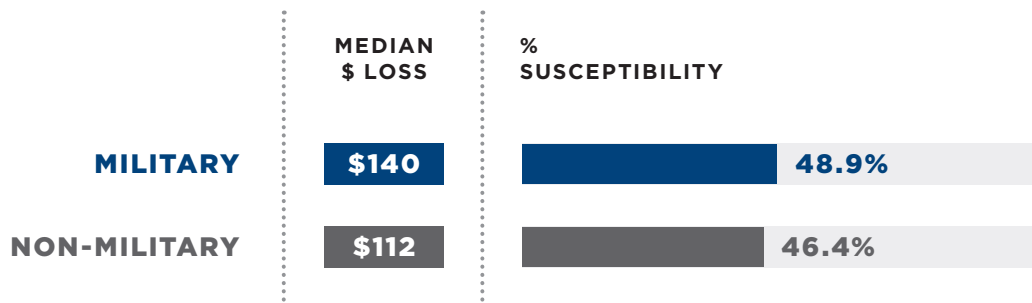


# Spotlight on military families and veterans

Members of the military community, including veterans, are commonly known to be at an increased risk for scams. Individuals who self-identified as being active-duty military personnel, spouses, or veterans represent 9.6% of reports submitted to BBB Scam Tracker in 2020. Military consumers consistently report higher median financial losses than non-military consumers (Figure 13). However, this was the first year when susceptibility was also higher; military consumers reported both higher likelihoods of losing money and higher median dollar loss.

**FIGURE 13**

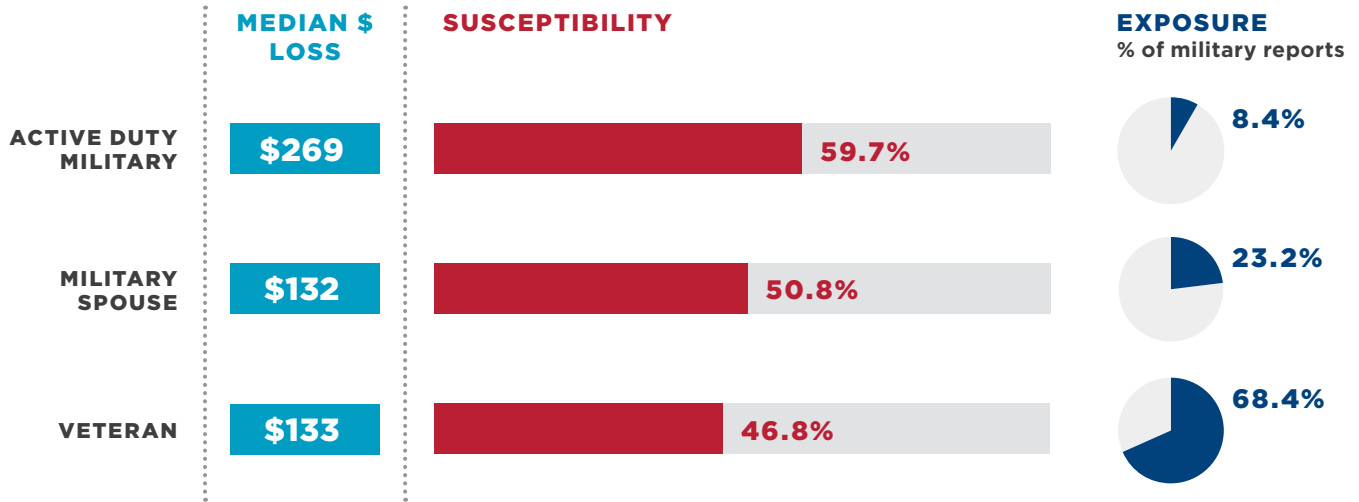
## Median \$ loss and susceptibility of military families and veterans versus non-military



When the findings are segmented between active-duty military, spouses, and veterans, it is clear that the most at-risk individuals are active-duty service members (Figure 14 on page 29). They lose more than double that of any other demographic category and report significantly higher incidences of loss. In previous years, veterans reported significantly higher financial losses (\$258 in 2019), but in 2020 the median reported loss of \$133 was similar to that of military spouses (\$132). This change is likely due to online purchase scams becoming the most risky scam type, and due to a decrease in the risk of travel/vacation/timeshare scams.

**FIGURE 14**

**Median \$ loss, susceptibility and exposure of military consumers**



The BBB Risk Index was applied to identify the three riskiest scams for military spouses and veterans (Table 6). Employment scams were the riskiest scam for military spouses, who sometimes struggle to find steady, reliable employment that can meet the needs of their family and lifestyle, especially following a permanent change of station (PCS) move. Online purchase scams were the riskiest scam for veterans, up from the third riskiest in 2019. Reports by active-duty service members were spread out among the 30 scam types, with only online purchase scams having a significant quantity of scam records.

**TABLE 6**

**3 riskiest scams: military spouses and veterans versus non-military**

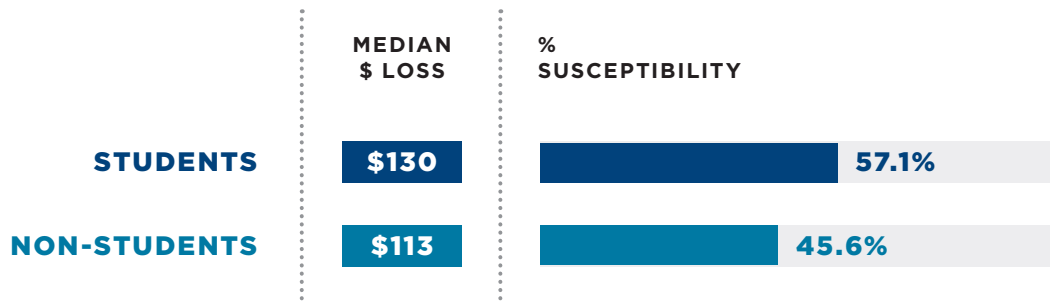
	MILITARY SPOUSES	VETERANS	NON-MILITARY
<b>1</b>	Employment	Online Purchase	Online Purchase
<b>2</b>	Online Purchase	Employment	Employment
<b>3</b>	Fake Check/ Money Order	Home Improvement	Fake Check/ Money Order

# Spotlight on students

Individuals who self-identified as students represented 9.0% of reports submitted to BBB Scam Tracker in 2020. As reported in previous years, students continue to be more vulnerable when exposed to a scam: 57.1% of students reported a loss when exposed to a scam, which is significantly higher than susceptibility of non-students at 45.6% (Figure 15). Students in 2020 also reported higher financial losses from scams (\$130). Table 7 includes the riskiest scams for students. All of the student findings, including the increased susceptibility, median dollar loss, and riskiest scam types, are consistent with the findings for individuals ages 18-24 this year, which is the age group into which most students fall.

**FIGURE 15**

## Median \$ loss and susceptibility of students versus non-students



**TABLE 7**

## 3 riskiest scams: students versus non-students

	STUDENTS	NON-STUDENTS
<b>1</b> .....	Online Purchase	Online Purchase
<b>2</b> .....	Fake Check/Money Order	Employment
<b>3</b> .....	Employment	Fake Check/Money Order



# Spotlight on impersonated organizations

## Scammers co-opt household brands to deceive their targets

“Impersonation” is one of the most common tactics fraudsters use to perpetrate scams. By pretending to be well-known and trusted companies, government agencies, and organizations, scammers can better manipulate their targets. Scams impersonating the Social Security Administration continued to be the most common type of impersonation scam in 2020 (Table 8). Impersonations of Amazon rose sharply in 2020 and were the second most common, likely due to the increase in online purchase scams during the pandemic.

**TABLE 8**

**Top 10 legitimate organizations/brands used for impersonation**

RANK	BUSINESS NAME	SCAMS
1	Social Security Administration	1,467
2	Amazon	771
3	Publishers Clearing House	359
4	Apple	280
5	Microsoft	151
6	PayPal	135
7	Medicare	117
8	Walmart	116
9	Dominion Energy	108
10	Cash Advance/Advance America	83

# Understanding general scammer tactics can help you avoid scams

Multiple protective behaviors can reduce the likelihood of someone losing money to a scam. As a follow-up to our findings in *Exposed to Scams: What Separates Victims from Non-Victims?*, we asked both consumers who had avoided financial loss and those who lost money what they believed helped them (or would help them) avoid losing money to scams.<sup>10</sup> The top three responses are shown in Figure 16.<sup>11</sup>

**FIGURE 16**

## Top 3 responses from people losing money vs. not losing money

### RESPONSES FROM THOSE WHO **DID NOT** LOSE MONEY



#### What helped them avoid a loss

**74.3%** I felt something wasn't right about the situation.

**40.7%** I knew about the methods and behaviors of scammers in general.

**35.2%** I researched the scam type/offer I was targeted for.

### RESPONSES FROM THOSE WHO **DID** LOSE MONEY



#### What they believe could have helped them avoid a loss

**62.5%** Knowing about this kind of scam ahead of time.


**51.4%** Checking the background of the scammer.

**46.6%** Knowing about scammer tactics and behaviors in general.

<sup>10</sup> *Exposed to Scams: What Separates Victims from Non-Victims?*

<sup>11</sup> Source: BBB Scam Tracker Annual Survey conducted from December 31, 2020 to February 15, 2021, with 5,025 responses from people who reported scams to BBB Scam Tracker in 2020. Individuals could identify more than one response.





A common theme we have heard from individuals, as well as practitioners and media sources, is that it is important to know about different kinds of scams—which is echoed in the feedback from people who lost money in Figure 16. Our *Exposed to Scams* report also posed that it is significantly more important to know the general methods and behaviors of scammers, because different scam types often employ similar tactics in an ever-changing scam landscape.

The feedback from our survey of people who did not lose money confirms the misconception that knowing about specific scam types is more important than knowing about scam tactics in general; only 16.1% of those who did not lose money said that knowing about the particular scam type was what helped them avoid losing money. When compared with the 40.7% who indicated they avoided a loss due to previous knowledge of the methods and behaviors of scammers, it becomes evident that we can maximize our consumer outreach by focusing more on general scam tactics rather than specific scam types.

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To help avoid scams, it is significantly more important to know the general methods and behaviors of scammers, because different scam types often employ similar tactics in an ever-changing scam landscape.

# BBB impact in the marketplace



Better Business Bureau is committed to building and advancing a better, more trustworthy marketplace for all. BBB Scam Tracker is one example of our effort to empower consumers, businesses, and like-minded organizations to help us stop scammers by shedding light on their tactics and strategies to steal money from consumers. This helps keep more dollars in a trustworthy marketplace where buyers get the goods and services they expect in exchange for their financial resources.

This year, BBB set out to quantify our impact as a purpose-driven nonprofit. BBB Scam Tracker is a great example of a free online tool that combats scams and supports communities across North America.

## BBB Scam Tracker saved consumers \$21 million in 2020

Approximately 1.4 million unique visitors used BBB Scam Tracker in 2020, up 17.0% from 2019. A December 2020 survey of BBB Scam Tracker users found that 60.5% visited BBB Scam Tracker to verify whether a situation they were experiencing was a scam and 22.2% believed the information provided by BBB Scam Tracker helped them avoid being scammed.<sup>12</sup> The median reported monetary loss to scams in 2020 was \$115. By multiplying this number by the number of potential scams averted, we estimate that BBB Scam Tracker was able to help prevent consumers and businesses from losing \$21 million to fraudsters in 2020.<sup>13</sup>

### 2020 BBB SCAM TRACKER IMPACT

**1,383,427**

UNIQUE VISITORS TO BBB SCAM TRACKER

**60.5%**

CHECKED BBB SCAM TRACKER FIRST

**22.2%**

OF THOSE WHO CHECKED FIRST SAID  
BBB SCAM TRACKER HELPED THEM SAVE \$

**\$115**

MEDIAN \$ SAVED

**\$21,367,929**

ESTIMATED DIRECT IMPACT

<sup>12</sup> Web-intercept survey with 1,272 unique respondents who visited BBB Scam Tracker conducted from November 30 to December 16, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Learn more about BBB's impact at [BBB.org/Impact](https://www.bbb.org/Impact).

# Working together to stop scammers

Individuals continue to turn to BBB when faced with a situation that could be fraudulent, but BBB is not alone in our efforts. In a recent survey of individuals who reported a scam to BBB Scam Tracker, 33.9% said they also contacted their financial institution, and 15.0% contacted the police or law enforcement. In addition, 23.1% asked their family/friend for advice either during or after the scam encounter. By spreading knowledge about scams to a wide audience and encouraging others to provide support both to those who lost money and those who did not, we can help combat scams and reduce the incidences of monetary loss in the future. This is why citizen heroes—those who take the time to report scams to BBB Scam Tracker—are such a valuable piece of the scam-prevention equation. Their efforts reduce the stigma around scams and empower others to avoid financial loss.

## Conclusion

Scams undermine trust in the marketplace, distort the level playing field, and siphon money from legitimate transactions that could benefit both businesses and consumers, thus impeding economic growth. A person who has been scammed not only has less money to spend in the market, but also may hesitate from engaging with new businesses in the future. In addition, a business whose trustworthy brand has been impersonated by scammers may find its customers have reduced trust in its brand. A healthy marketplace requires empowered and aware consumers and principled businesses that are proactively working to stop scammers and honor trustworthy relationships.

The *2020 BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report* is a critical part of our ongoing work to contribute new, useful data and analysis to further the efforts of all who are engaged in combating marketplace scams. We work with leaders in business, law enforcement, and government to determine the best ways to stop scammers, and we partner with corporate partners and like-minded organizations to better allocate resources to fight fraud and determine which prevention tactics are working. BBB Institute will continue its work in collaboration with BBBs across North America to reduce the impact of scams and help consumers and legitimate businesses prosper in a trustworthy marketplace.

# 10 TIPS FOR AVOIDING A SCAM

- 1 Never send money** to someone you have never met face-to-face.
- 2 Don't click on links** or open attachments in unsolicited email or text messages.
- 3 Don't believe everything you see.** Scammers are great at mimicking official seals, fonts, and other details. Just because a website or email looks official does not mean it is. Even Caller ID can be faked.
- 4 Don't buy online unless the transaction is secure.** Make sure the website has “https” in the URL (the extra s is for “secure”) and a small lock icon on the address bar. Even then, the site could be shady. Research the company first at [BBB.org](https://www.bbb.org).
- 5** Be extremely cautious when dealing with **anyone you've met online.**
- 6 Never share personally identifiable information** with someone who has contacted you unsolicited.
- 7 Don't be pressured** to act immediately.
- 8 Use secure, traceable transactions** when making payments for goods, services, taxes, and debts.
- 9** Whenever possible, work with businesses that have **proper identification, licensing, and insurance.**
- 10** Be cautious about **what you share on social media.**

**Learn more at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](https://www.bbb.org/AvoidScams)**

# BBB Institute research

## Examining scam risk and impact: recent research releases and collaborations

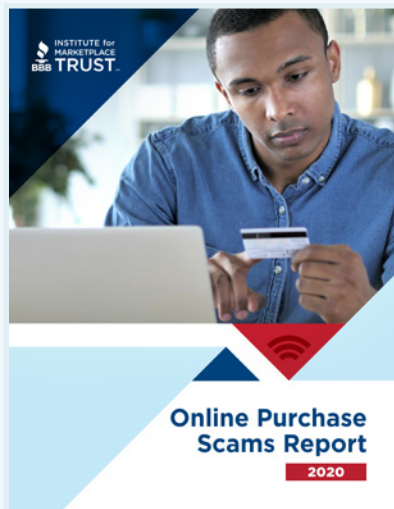
The *2020 BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report* is the fifth annual report published by BBB Institute that highlights the year's riskiest scams. We are committed to delivering new and timely research that enables us to continue creating and delivering programs that empower both consumers and businesses to avoid falling prey to scams. Below are descriptions of the reports released since June 2020.



### ***Employment Scams Report***

In response to the spike in employment scams in 2018 and 2019 and the unemployment resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, BBB examined how employment scams are being perpetrated, who is being targeted, the overall impact of these scams, and how we can help people avoid losing money to them.

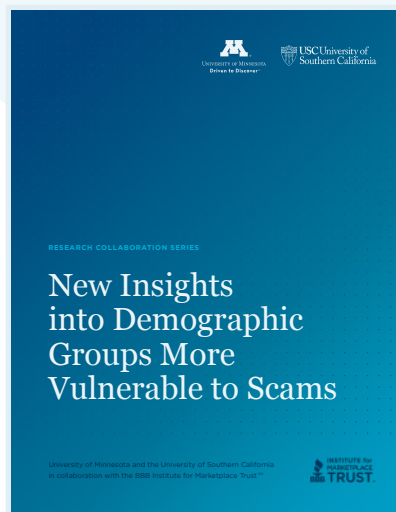
[BBB.org/EmploymentScams](https://www.bbb.org/employmentscams)



### ***Online Purchase Scams Report***

The COVID-19 pandemic forced people to social distance and increase their online presence, putting them at further risk of being targeted by online purchase scams. This report takes a closer look at this scam type, which was in the top three riskiest scams for multiple years in a row.

[BBB.org/OnlinePurchaseScams](https://www.bbb.org/onlinepurchasecams)



### ***Research Collaboration Series: New Insights into Demographic Groups More Vulnerable to Scams***

BBB collaborated with researchers at the University of Minnesota and the University of Southern California to gain a broader perspective on data collected through the BBB Scam Tracker consumer reporting platform between 2017 and 2020, with special attention to those most vulnerable to scams and the impact of COVID-19 scams. This report was created for use by other researchers and research organizations. Those interested in collaborating with BBB Institute can contact us at [Institute@IABB.org](mailto:Institute@IABB.org).



### ***Doing Good Together: BBB Social Impact Report—2020***

In this report, we communicate the story of BBB: who we are, what we do, and how we impact communities for the better. We also estimate our impact and return on mission as an organization bringing positive change to the marketplace in 2020.

[BBB.org/Impact](https://www.bbb.org/impact)

# Acknowledgements

The BBB Scam Tracker tool utilizes the strength of the 100-year-old BBB brand to collect data from people who have been targeted by fraudsters. The BBB Scam Tracker program and our research are made possible thanks to the dedicated, collaborative work of BBBs across North America. We harness the power and expertise of BBBs to review consumer reports to eliminate those that do not appear to be actual scams, thus ensuring the best data possible. Our system collects data as well as real-life narratives told in the words of people who were targeted by scammers.

We'd like to thank a team of BBB experts who provide guidance and input to BBB Institute regarding the BBB Scam Tracker program, including Warren King, president and CEO of the BBB Serving Western Pennsylvania; Jane Rupp, president and CEO of the BBB Serving Northern Nevada and Utah; Craig Turner, director of information systems of the BBB Serving Eastern & Southwest Missouri & Southern Illinois; Dené Joubert, investigations manager of the BBB Serving Northwest + Pacific; Jon Bell, the director of business relations of the BBB Serving Delaware; David Wheeler, vice president of innovation and development of the BBB Serving Central Florida; and Yolanda Moore, investigations director of the BBB Serving Western Pennsylvania.

We would also like to thank the International Association of Better Business Bureaus for its support of BBB Institute and the *2020 BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report*. In addition to the project team, we'd like to thank Katherine Hutt, IABBB chief communications officer, as well as Sandra Guile, IABBB director of communications, for their efforts to get the word out about our most recent findings, and Jody Thomas, IABBB director of brand management, and Angela Isabell, IABBB deputy general counsel and chief diversity officer, for their insights and input.

## APPENDIX A: Scam type data table, consumer scams

SCAM TYPE	RISK INDEX	EXPOSURE*	MEDIAN \$ LOSS	SUSCEPTIBILITY
Advance Fee Loan	48.8	1.6%	\$745	47.1%
Charity	0.7	0.4%	\$60	32.2%
Counterfeit Product	14.0	3.0%	\$78	68.6%
COVID-19	11.6	3.2%	\$65	64.2%
Credit Card	8.6	1.7%	\$134	43.4%
Credit Repair/Debt Relief	19.5	0.9%	\$785	31.8%
Cryptocurrency	40.8	0.7%	\$1,200	55.8%
Debt Collection	7.2	2.7%	\$302	10.2%
Employment	99.1	7.1%	\$967	16.6%
Fake Check/Money Order	65.4	2.7%	\$1,679	16.6%
Family/Friend Emergency	6.4	0.4%	\$910	20.3%
Foreign Money Exchange	1.6	0.1%	\$550	33.9%
Government Grant	22.1	2.0%	\$800	15.9%
Healthcare/Medicaid/Medicare	1.2	1.0%	\$119	11.8%
Home Improvement	42.6	0.7%	\$1,193	58.7%
Identity Theft	6.3	1.9%	\$260	14.7%
Investment	33.2	0.6%	\$948	67.2%
Moving	14.8	0.5%	\$410	82.9%
Online Purchase	251.9	38.3%	\$96	78.8%
Phishing	25.7	10.0%	\$348	8.5%
Rental	23.9	0.7%	\$800	49.1%
Romance	41.9	0.5%	\$2,100	45.9%
Sweepstakes/Lottery/Prizes	12.7	3.0%	\$430	11.3%
Tax Collection	4.6	0.2%	\$3,200	8.2%
Tech Support	37.9	3.1%	\$499	28.2%
Travel/Vacation/Timeshare	35.5	0.7%	\$1,300	44.9%
Utility	3.3	1.2%	\$336	9.4%
Other	63.0	5.0%	\$400	36.2%

\* Denotes percentage of all reports to BBB Scam Tracker. Business-related scams comprised the other 6.1% of scam reports.



## APPENDIX B: Top 10 consumer scam types by overall risk, exposure, monetary loss, and susceptibility

	<b>RISK INDEX</b>	<b>EXPOSURE</b>	<b>MEDIAN \$ LOSS</b>	<b>SUSCEPTIBILITY</b>
<b>1</b>	Online Purchase	Online Purchase	Tax Collection	Moving
<b>2</b>	Employment	Phishing	Romance	Online Purchase
<b>3</b>	Fake Check/ Money Order	Employment	Fake Check/ Money Order	Counterfeit Product
<b>4</b>	Advance Fee Loan	COVID-19	Travel/Vacation/ Timeshare	Investment
<b>5</b>	Home Improvement	Government Agency Imposter	Cryptocurrency	COVID-19
<b>6</b>	Romance	Tech Support	Home Improvement	Home Improvement
<b>7</b>	Cryptocurrency	Sweepstakes/ Lottery/Prizes	Employment	Cryptocurrency
<b>8</b>	Tech Support	Counterfeit Product	Investment	Rental
<b>9</b>	Travel/Vacation/ Timeshare	Debt Collection	Family/Friend Emergency	Advance Fee Loan
<b>10</b>	Investment	Fake Check/ Money Order	Bank/Credit Card Imposter	Romance

# Project team

**Melissa “Mel” Trumpower** is the executive director of BBB Institute for Marketplace Trust. Mel has more than 25 years of nonprofit leadership experience working with a wide range of nonprofit organizations and trade associations. In addition to overseeing BBB Institute, Mel manages the BBB Scam Tracker program and is author of the *Online Purchase Scams Report* (2020) and coauthor of the *BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report* (2017–2019), *Scams and Your Small Business* (2018), *Exposed to Scams* (2019), the *Employment Scams Report* (2020), and *Doing Good Together* (2021). Mel has a bachelor’s degree from Cornell University and a master’s degree from Johns Hopkins University.

**Melissa Bittner** is the curriculum development and training manager for BBB Institute for Marketplace Trust. Her role includes managing fraud-prevention programs facilitated throughout North America, including Fighting Financial Fraud and the Military & Veterans Initiative. Melissa is the author of *Military Consumers and Marketplace Trust* (2019) and is coauthor of the *BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report* (2018 and 2019), the *Employment Scams Report* (2020), and the *Doing Good Together* (2021). She has a master’s degree in public administration with a concentration in ethical leadership from Marist College.

**Dr. Sean Xiangwen Lai** is a research and development specialist at the International Association of Better Business Bureaus. Sean obtained his PhD in physics at Georgetown University and has experience in data gathering, processing, and data analysis and visualization. He has passed two levels of Charter Financial Analyst (CFA) exams and is pursuing a CFA charter holder. He has a great passion for implementing statistics,

programming, data analysis, finance, and marketing to decision-making and innovation that have a positive impact on society. Sean can speak English, Mandarin, and Hokkien fluently, as well as some Japanese and Korean. His hobbies include all kinds of outdoor activities.

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## About BBB Institute

The *BBB Scam Tracker Risk Report* is published each year by the BBB Institute for Marketplace Trust (BBB Institute), the charitable arm of the Better Business Bureau. Our mission is to educate and protect consumers, establish best practices for businesses, and solve complex marketplace problems. Our consumer educational programs, which include a wide array of resources on fraud prevention and education, are delivered digitally and by BBBs serving communities across North America. You can find more information about BBB Institute and its programs at

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