



Reports of Child Sex Trafficking Allegations & Substantiations to Child Protective Services (2022-2023)

Prepared by:

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
Division of Safety and Permanence
Bureau of Youth Services & Bureau of Compliance, Research and
Analytics

Please email the Bureau of Youth Services at DCFYJ@wisconsin.gov
with any questions regarding this report.



Wisconsin Department of
Children and Families

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Introduction

Child Protective Services (CPS) is a key component of the Child Welfare System. CPS intervention is initiated when there is a report that a child may be unsafe, abused or neglected, or at risk of maltreatment. This report focuses on a subset of CPS responses in Wisconsin that relates to allegations and substantiated allegations of child sex trafficking. This report covers a two-year period from January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2023. A comprehensive report on the entirety of the Child Protective Services System, including an overview of the CPS process and key terms such as Initial Assessments and Access Reports, can be found in the annual [Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Report](#).

Passage of the federal [Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act \(Pub. L. 113-183\)](#) and [Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act \(Pub. L. 114-22\)](#) added child sex trafficking as a form of child abuse to the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). As a result of these federal law changes, [2015 Wisconsin Act 367](#) went into effect in Wisconsin on May 29, 2017. Act 367 requires child welfare agencies to screen-in referrals of suspected child sex trafficking, even if a parent or primary caregiver was not the suspected trafficker. Act 367 also requires that suspected cases of sex trafficking of a child under the age of 18 must be reported to local child welfare agencies or local law enforcement in Wisconsin. Under Wisconsin statute, child welfare agencies must report these cases to law enforcement, and law enforcement must report any suspected or alleged cases involving a minor to child protective services.

Under federal law, sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age (22 USC § 7102). Under [Wis. Stat. 940.302\(1\)\(a\)](#), a commercial sex act includes the following acts for which anything of value is given to, promised, or received, directly or indirectly, by any person: sexual contact; sexual intercourse; sexually explicit performance; and, any other conduct done for the purpose of sexual humiliation, degradation, arousal, or gratification.

Wisconsin Data on Child Sex Trafficking

This is the third report on child sex trafficking in Wisconsin. For data from June 1, 2017 through December 2021, please reference the previous [Reports of Child Sex Trafficking Allegations & Substantiations to Child Protective Services](#). Data for this report come from eWiSACWIS, Wisconsin's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System, a comprehensive automated case management tool that supports child welfare practice. Wisconsin counties use this system to document information for all child abuse and neglect referrals, allegations, and substantiated allegations made to their jurisdictions. While some counties had informal processes for tracking suspected child sex trafficking cases, 2015 Wisconsin Act 367 formalized the requirements for the child welfare response to child sex trafficking. Any data collected, analyzed, or reported prior to the Act's effective date of May 29, 2017, are not based on current state guidance or policy. Thus, readers are cautioned against making direct comparisons to previous reports issued on this topic by entities other than Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) and/or reports that use older data. Such reports may have applied different definitions and/or methodologies than those recommended and used by DCF in this report.

Additionally, DCF has undertaken extensive education and awareness efforts, both immediately prior to and after Act 367 went into effect; this affected the child welfare response to child sex trafficking in Wisconsin and collection of reliable administrative data in eWiSACWIS. These efforts provided training to CPS workers on identifying and understanding child sex trafficking and guidance on how to screen and assess suspected cases. However, DCF acknowledges that the information presented here likely still represents underreporting of cases. The child welfare system relies on individuals making a report of child abuse. As awareness of the problem and possible indicators of child sex trafficking grows, so too will the reports to authorities who are in a position to respond and intervene.

The importance of language

Throughout this report, the word "victim" is used sparingly. The word "prostitute" is *never* used to refer to children who have experienced sex trafficking. It is acknowledged that there are times when the word "victim" is appropriate, such as discussing the crime of sex trafficking and its victims; however, children may not want to be thought of or referred to as a victim. All individuals who work with young people and discuss these difficult issues in the public sphere are strongly encouraged to use judgement-free, person-first language when talking to children about their experiences. The [Guiding Principles](#) should be referenced for more information.

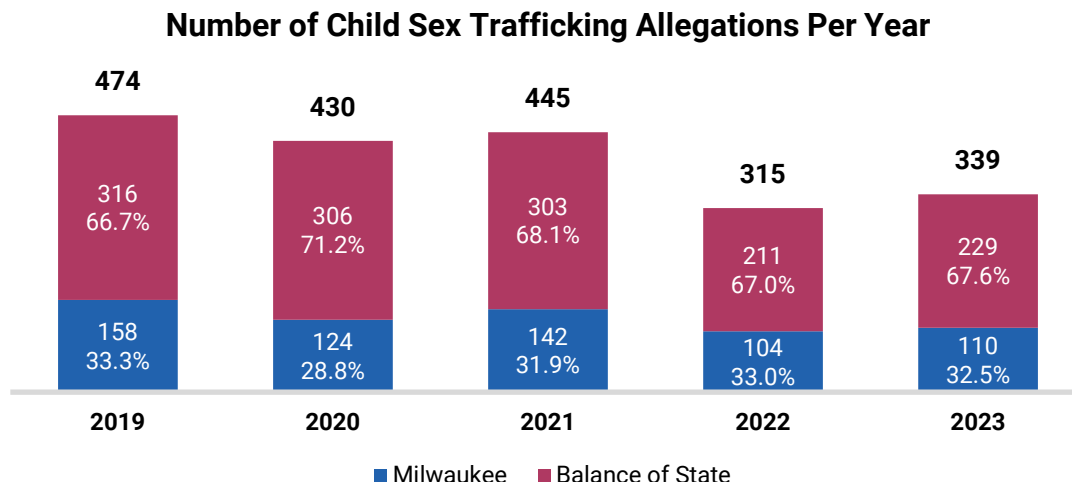
In May 2017, DCF issued guidance to counties on responding to sex trafficking cases in Appendix 9 of [Child Protective Services Access and Initial Assessment Standards](#). In Wisconsin, sex trafficking of a child falls under the definition of sexual abuse. When entering an Access Report, the child welfare professional selects the maltreatment allegation of sexual abuse with a descriptor of sex trafficking in eWiSACWIS. A few cases in this report also involved an allegation of neglect with a descriptor of sex trafficking by the primary caretaker for not providing sufficient protection to the child in their care. For ease of discussion, the term “child sex trafficking” is used in this report to refer to all these allegations.

This report uses eWiSACWIS data on child sex trafficking allegations and substantiated allegations from January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2023. Charts and tables provide information by Milwaukee County, Balance of State, and the total for Wisconsin’s 72 counties. Balance of State refers to the 71 counties in Wisconsin other than Milwaukee County. While these data provide important information about Wisconsin’s child welfare cases, it is important to note that an unsubstantiated finding does not necessarily mean that a child did not experience sex trafficking. For some cases, it could be that the responding child welfare agency did not have the preponderance of evidence available at the time of the investigation. There are many reasons that this can occur, including child welfare and/or law enforcement not being able to interview the alleged maltreater/trafficker, which is a requirement of Wisconsin CPS & IA Standards to make a substantiated finding. Additionally, a child may still be served in the child welfare system even if there was not a substantiation. This would occur if there was a safety determination made on the case that resulted in services being offered to the child and family.

Child Sex Trafficking Allegations & Substantiations

A child maltreatment allegation is an assertion of one type of child abuse or neglect involving one or more alleged maltreater(s) for a single alleged victim. Maltreatment types include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Sex trafficking is documented as sexual abuse with sex trafficking listed as a descriptor. Allegations are ‘screened-in’ when the allegation of child maltreatment in the Access report has been deemed as rising to the level of maltreatment or threat of maltreatment, as defined by Wisconsin statutes, and therefore must be assessed.

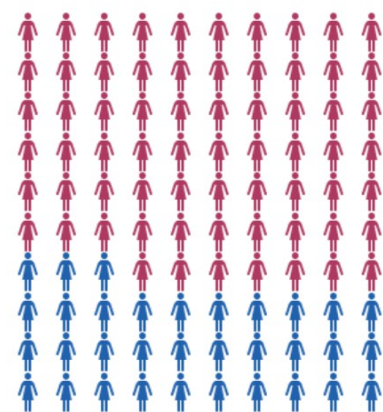
Such allegations are then subject to further assessment to determine whether the allegation is substantiated or not, meaning there is a preponderance of evidence (that is, the proof shows that the fact sought to be proved is more probable than not) that the maltreatment allegation has occurred. In general, a known maltreater is substantiated for the allegation of child abuse or neglect; however, an allegation can also be substantiated when the maltreater is unknown or not identified. As with other types of allegations, for child sex trafficking allegations the maltreater/trafficker can be someone other than the child’s parent or primary caregiver.



In 2022, there were 315 allegations of child sex trafficking across Wisconsin. This figure represents 279 unique individuals with a child sex trafficking allegation, as some youth had multiple allegations. Of the 315 allegations, 104 occurred in Milwaukee County, representing 33 percent of all child sex trafficking allegations statewide.

In 2023, there were 339 allegations of child sex trafficking across Wisconsin. This figure represents 304 unique individuals with a child sex trafficking allegation. Of the 339 allegations, 110 occurred in Milwaukee County, representing 32.4 percent of all child sex trafficking allegations statewide*.

About 33% of sex trafficking allegations occur in Milwaukee County.



2022 Allegations and Substantiations of Child Sex Trafficking

The below section will cover allegations and substantiations of child sex trafficking in 2022, the largest percentage of which were reported by law enforcement (26%).



26.0% of reports were received from law enforcement.

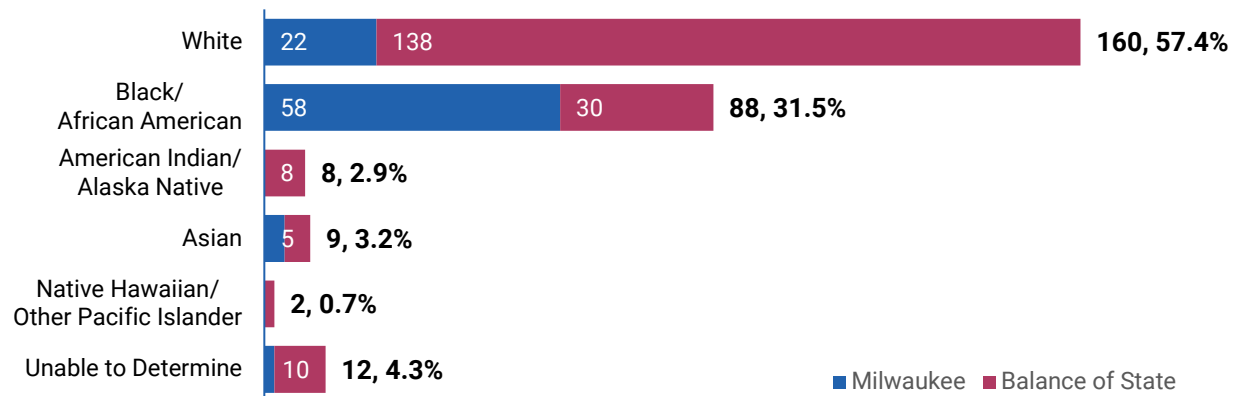


21.0% of reports were received from social workers.



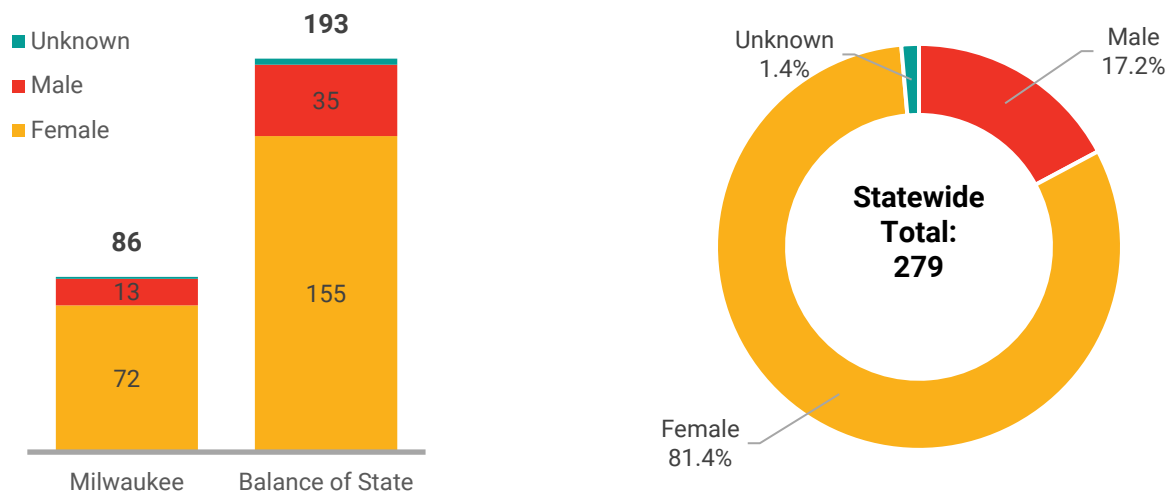
10.2% of reports were received from mental health professionals.

Primary Race of Children with Child Sex Trafficking Allegations in 2022

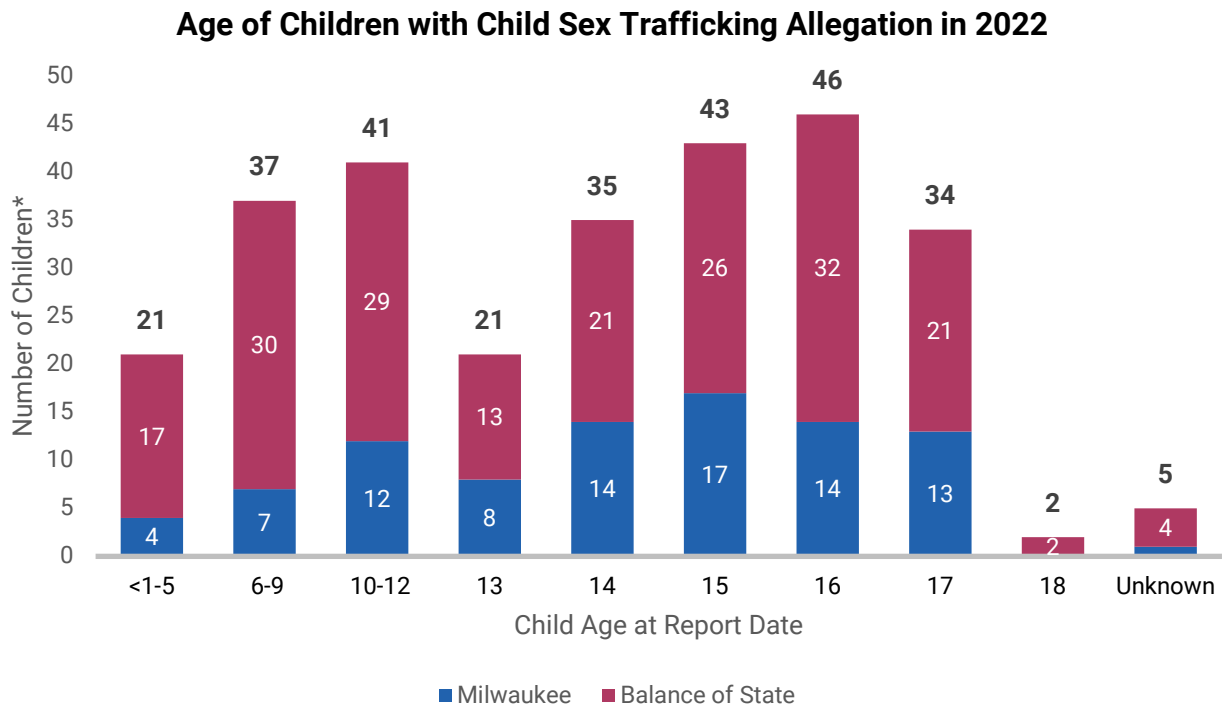


In 2022, across Wisconsin, 57.4 percent of allegations of sex trafficking involved a child identified as White, 31.5 percent involved a child identified as Black/African-American, 2.9 percent involved a child identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native, 3.2 percent involved a child identified as Asian, 0.7% involved a child identified as Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and 4.3 percent involved a child whose race was unable to be determined or not documented. The percentage of cases in which ethnicity was not documented was too high to accurately calculate the percentage of allegations involving a child identified as Hispanic.

Gender of Children with Child Sex Trafficking Allegations in 2022



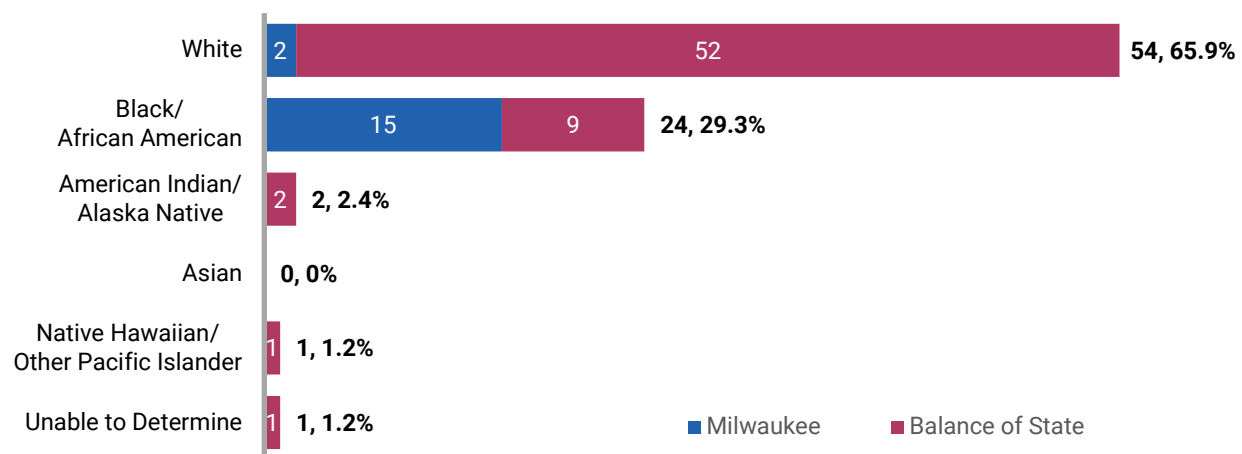
In 2022, 81.4 percent of allegations statewide involved a child identified as female, 17.2 percent of allegations involved a child identified as male, and 1.4 percent involved a child whose gender was documented as unknown.



In 2022, the majority of youth with an allegation of child sex trafficking were between the ages of 14-17. 58 children under the age of 10 were victims of reported sex trafficking. This remains consistent with data from previous years.

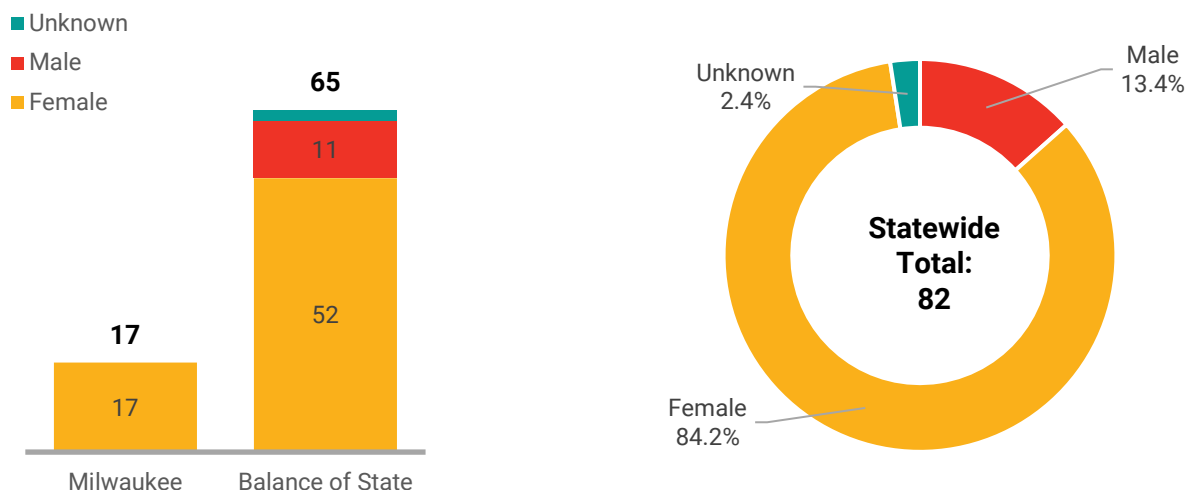
*An individual youth may appear in the chart above more than once if multiple allegations were made when they were different ages during the time period shown.

Primary Race of Children with Substantiated Allegations of Child Sex Trafficking in 2022

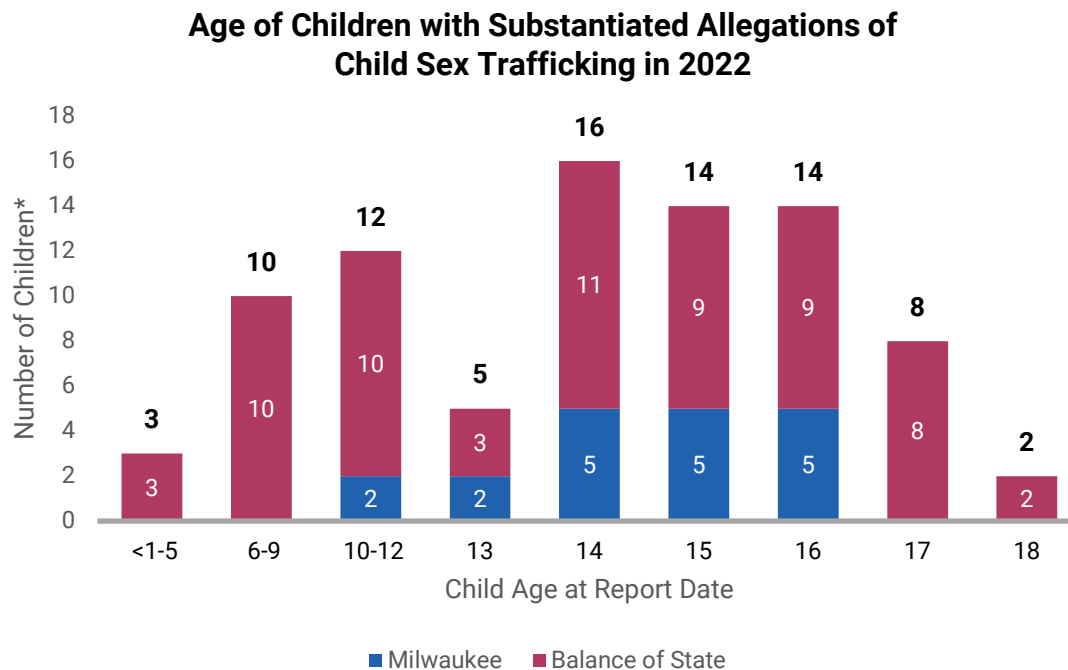


In 2022, across Wisconsin, 65.9 percent of substantiated allegations of sex trafficking involved a child identified as White, 29.3 percent involved a child identified as Black/African-American, 2.4 percent involved a child identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1.2 percent involved a child identified as Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and 1.2 percent involved a child whose race was unable to be determined or not documented. The percentage of cases in which ethnicity was not documented was too high to accurately calculate the percentage of allegations involving a child identified as Hispanic.

Gender of Children with Substantiated Allegations of Child Sex Trafficking in 2022



In 2022, 84.2 percent of substantiated allegations statewide involved a child identified as female, 13.4 percent of substantiated allegations involved a child identified as male, and 2.4 percent involved a child whose gender was documented as unknown.



In 2022, most youth with a substantiated allegation of child sex trafficking were between the ages of 14-17. This remains consistent with previous years.

*An individual youth may appear in the chart above more than once if multiple allegations were made when they were different ages during the time period.

2023 Allegations and Substantiations of Child Sex Trafficking

The below section will cover allegations and substantiations of child sex trafficking in 2023, the largest percentage of which were reported by social workers (22.7%).



22.7% of cases were reported by social workers

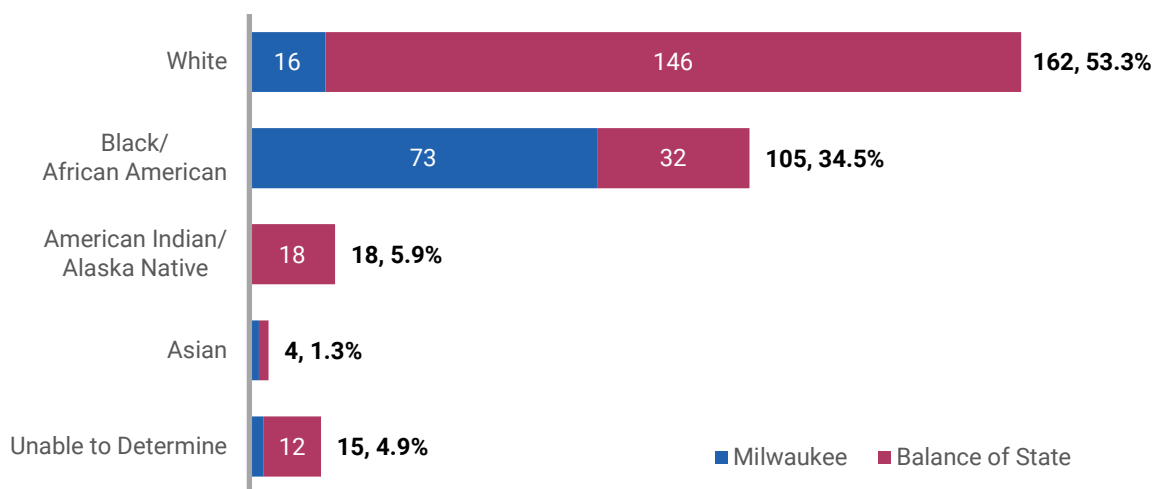


22.4% of cases were reported by law enforcement



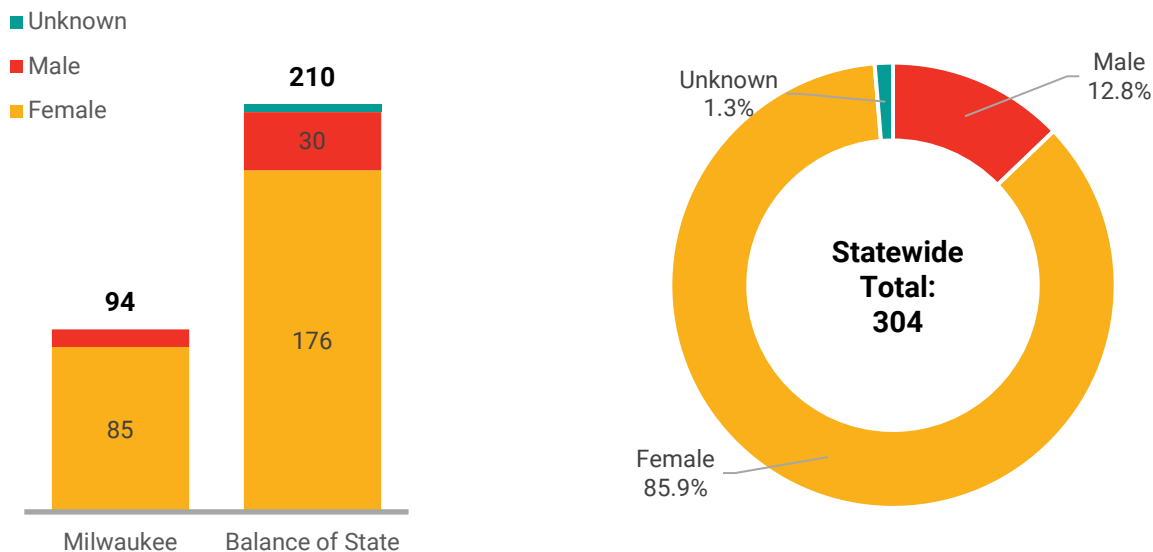
8% of cases were reported by mental health professionals

Primary Race of Children with Child Sex Trafficking Allegations in 2023



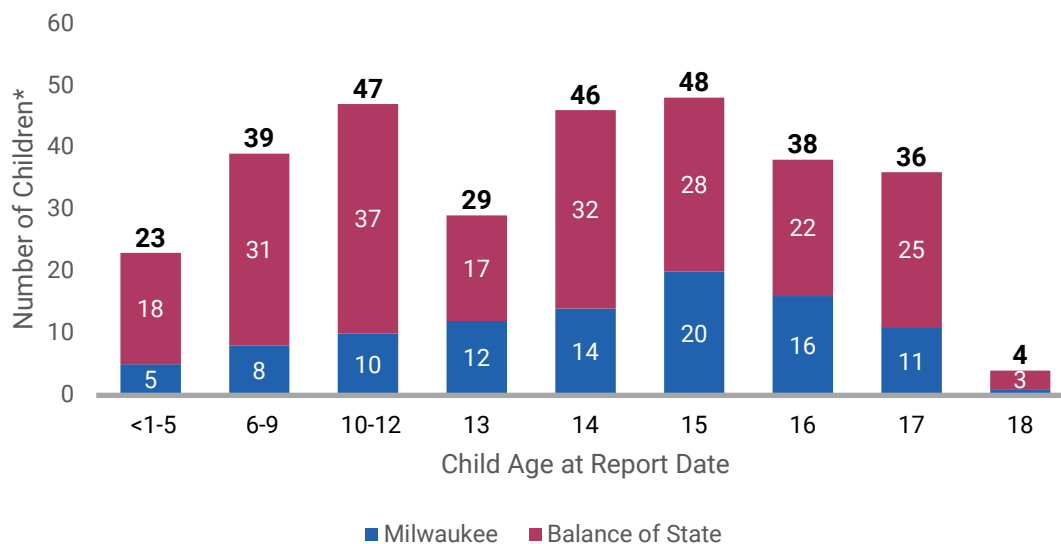
In 2023, across Wisconsin, 53.3 percent of allegations of sex trafficking involved a child identified as White, 34.5 percent involved a child identified as Black/African-American, 5.9 percent involved a child identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native, 1.3 percent involved a child identified as Asian, and 4.9 percent involved a child whose race was unable to be determined or not documented. The percentage of cases in which ethnicity was not documented was too high to accurately calculate the percentage of allegations involving a child identified as Hispanic.

Gender of Children with Child Sex Trafficking Allegations in 2023



In 2023, 85.9 percent of allegations statewide involved a child identified as female, 12.8 percent of allegations involved a child identified as male, and 1.3 percent involved a child whose gender was documented as unknown.

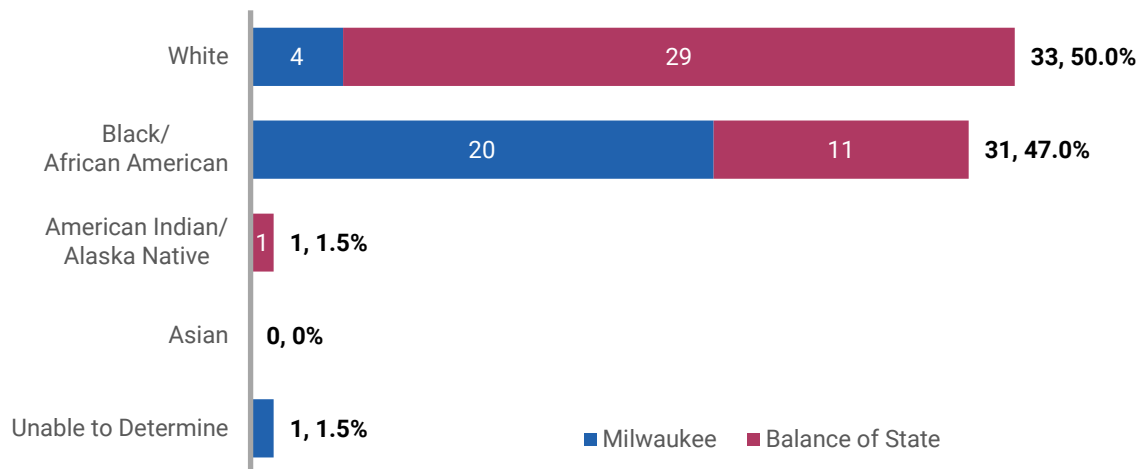
Age of Children with Child Sex Trafficking Allegations in 2023



In 2023, youth between the ages of 14-17 continue to represent a majority of allegations. 62 children under the age of 10 were victims of reported sex trafficking. This remains consistent with data from previous years.

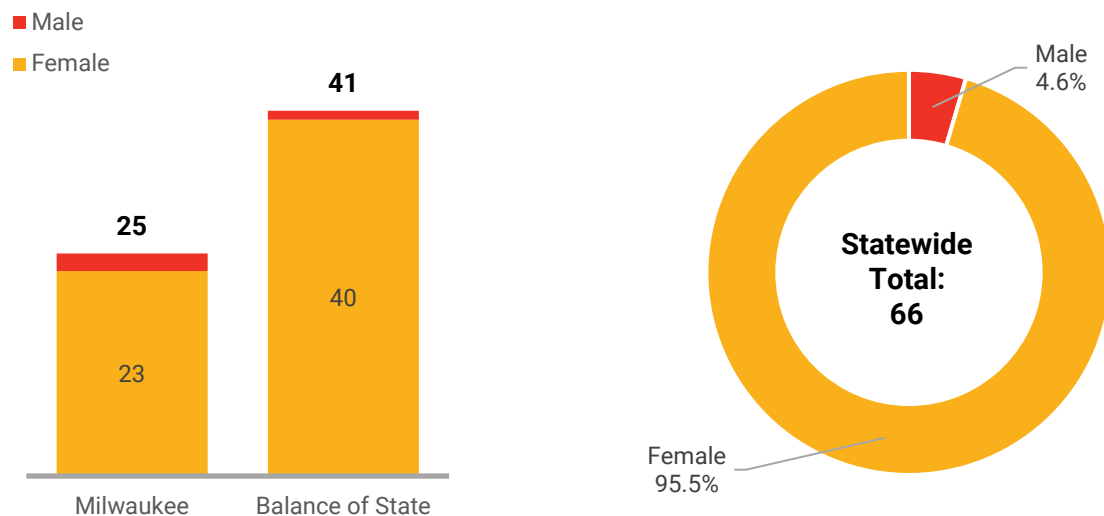
*An individual youth may appear in the chart above more than once if multiple allegations were made when they were different ages during the time period.

Primary Race of Children with Substantiated Allegations of Child Sex in 2023

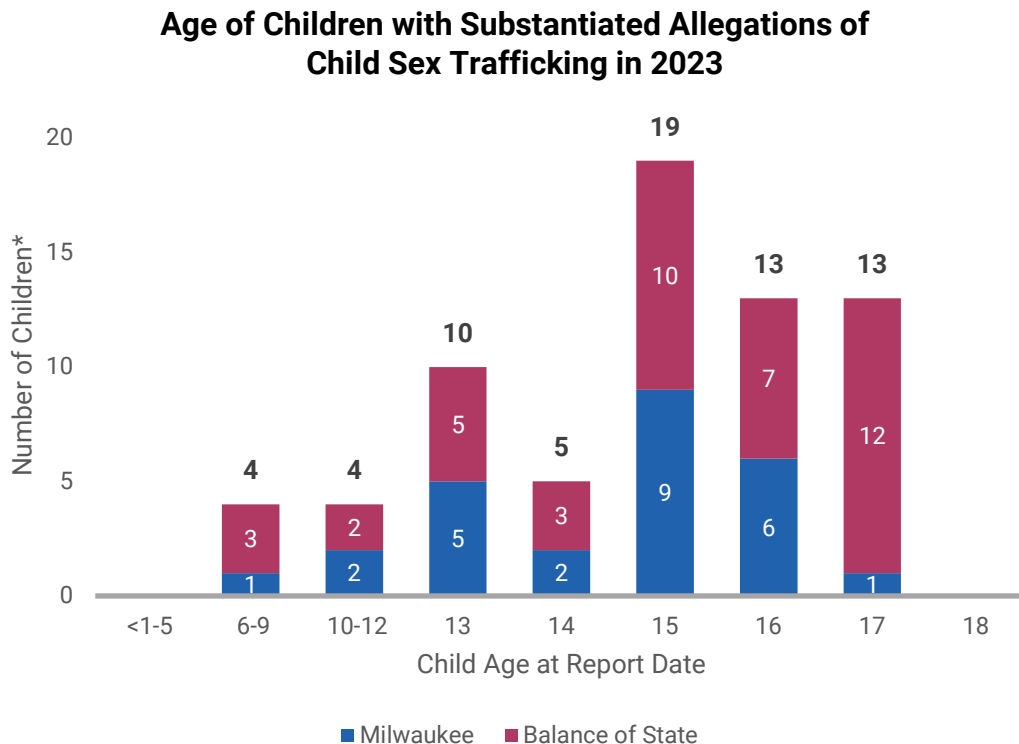


In 2023, across Wisconsin, 50 percent of substantiated allegations of sex trafficking involved a child identified as White, 47.0 percent involved a child identified as Black/African-American, 1.5 percent involved a child identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native, and 1.5 percent involved a child whose race was unable to be determined or not documented. The percentage of cases in which ethnicity was not documented was too high to accurately calculate the percentage of allegations involving a child identified as Hispanic.

Gender of Children with Substantiated Allegations of Child Sex Trafficking in 2023



In 2023, 95.5 percent of substantiated allegations statewide involved a child identified as female and 4.6 percent of substantiated allegations involved a child identified as male.



In 2023, youth between the ages of 14-17 continue to represent a majority of substantiated allegations. Youth over the age 13 represent a large portion of children across Wisconsin with a substantiated allegation of child sex trafficking.

*An individual youth may appear in the chart above more than once if multiple allegations were made when they were different ages during the time period.

DCF Efforts to Address Child Sex Trafficking

In DCF's child welfare transformation work, the department is working to strengthen all Wisconsin families to support their children, because children belong with their families. This means transforming Wisconsin's approach by keeping more families and children together and moving away from a focus on foster care and other out-of-home placements. This transformation is critically important in both preventing and addressing child sex trafficking. Young people who have been involved in the child protective services and youth justice systems are at higher risk of sex trafficking. DCF also seeks to continue to fund community-based services for young people who have experienced trafficking.

DCF currently funds services within Youth Services Regions to provide case coordination and referral services, support groups, case management, multidisciplinary team staffing, training services to counties and communities, as well as tools and guides to assist county agencies and community-based services with the identification and support of youth who have experienced sex trafficking. For a list of current DCF funded Anti-Human Trafficking Grants, visit the [Bureau of Youth Services Grant Programs site](#). Furthermore, Anti-Human Trafficking funds have been made available to increase training and service capacity within DCF funded [Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs](#) and [Independent Living Transition Resource Agencies](#).

In 2020, DCF released a documentary film titled '[It Happens Here](#)' that gives voices to Wisconsin residents who have been directly impacted by sex trafficking. This film can be used in educational settings, particularly with youth, to help spread awareness and prevent further sex trafficking cases from occurring. DCF has partnered with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to train school staff and prevention educators on facilitating use of this film in educational settings. Additionally, DPI has created a school-based facilitation guide to assist teachers with facilitating this film and responding to student questions and possible disclosures. The film also can be used in community awareness events as there is also a public facing facilitation guide that can be accessed on the [DCF website](#).

DCF continues to partner with other state agencies and partners to support anti-human trafficking efforts. It is important to note that DCF is just one entity in a broader set of people, organizations, and state agencies with a central role in this work. The Departments of Justice, Public Instruction, Health Services, physical and mental health providers, Tribes, counties, other service providers, and members of the public are all important stakeholders in combatting child sex trafficking in Wisconsin.

Individuals wanting to know about DCF's efforts on the topic of trafficking should visit <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ys/aht>.

Appendix A: 2022 Allegations – Race, Gender, Age at Report

Table 1: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Primary Race January 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022				
Primary Race	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Primary Race
White	22	138	160	57.3%
Black/ African American	58	30	88	31.5%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0	8	8	2.9%
Asian	4	5	9	3.2%
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0	2	2	0.7%
Unable to Determine	2	10	12	4.3%
Total	86	193	279	100.0%

Table 2: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Gender January 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022				
Gender	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Gender
Female	72	155	227	81.4%
Male	13	35	48	17.2%
Unknown	1	3	4	1.4%
Total	86	193	279	100.0%

Table 3: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Age at Report January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022				
Age in Years	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Age
<1-5	4	17	21	7.4%
6-9	7	30	37	13.1%
10-12	12	29	41	14.5%
13	8	13	21	7.4%
14	14	21	35	12.4%
15	17	26	43	15.2%
16	14	32	46	16.3%
17	13	21	34	12.0%
Unknown	1	4	5	1.8%
Total	90	195	283*	100.0%
*An individual youth may appear in the chart above more than once if multiple allegations were made when they were different ages during the time period.				

Appendix B: 2022 Substantiated Allegations – Race, Gender, Age at Report

Table 4: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Substantiated Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Primary Race January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022				
Primary Race	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Primary Race
White	2	52	54	65.9%
Black/ African American	15	9	24	29.3%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0	2	2	2.4%
Asian	0	0	0	0.0%
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0	1	1	1.2%
Unable to Determine	0	1	1	1.2%
Total	17	65	82	100.0%

Table 5: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Substantiated Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Gender January 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022				
Gender	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Gender
Female	17	52	69	84.1%
Male	0	11	11	13.4%
Unknown	0	2	2	2.4%
Total	17	65	82	100.0%

Table 6: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Substantiated Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Age at Report				
January 1, 2022 - December 31, 2022				
Age in Years	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Age
<1-5	0	3	3	3.7%
6-9	0	10	10	12.2%
10-12	2	10	12	14.6%
13	2	3	5	6.1%
14	5	11	16	19.5%
15	5	9	14	17.1%
16	5	9	14	17.1%
17	0	8	8	9.8%
Unknown	0	0	0	0.0%
Total	19	63	82*	100.0%
*An individual youth may appear in the chart above more than once if multiple allegations were made when they were different ages during the time period.				

Appendix C: 2023 Allegations – Race, Gender, Age at Report

Table 7: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Primary Race				
January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023				
Primary Race	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Primary Race
White	16	146	162	53.3%
Black/ African American	73	32	105	34.5%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0	18	18	5.9%
Asian	2	2	4	1.3%
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0.0%
Unable to Determine	3	12	15	4.9%
Total	94	210	304	100.0%

Table 8: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Gender				
January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023				
Gender	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Gender
Female	85	176	261	85.9%
Male	9	30	39	12.8%
Unknown	0	4	4	1.3%
Total	94	210	304	100.0%

Table 9: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Age at Report January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023				
Age in Years	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Age
<1-5	5	18	23	7.4%
6-9	8	31	39	12.6%
10-12	10	37	47	15.2%
13	12	17	29	9.4%
14	14	32	46	14.8%
15	20	28	48	15.5%
16	16	22	38	12.3%
17	11	25	36	11.6%
Unknown	1	3	4	1.3%
Total	97	213	310*	100.0%
*An individual youth may appear in the chart above more than once if multiple allegations were made when they were different ages during the time period.				

Appendix D: 2023 Substantiated Allegations – Race, Gender, Age at Report

Table 10: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Substantiated Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Primary Race January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023				
Primary Race	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Primary Race
White	4	29	33	50.0%
Black/ African American	20	11	31	47.0%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0	1	1	1.5%
Asian	0	0	0	0.0%
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0.0%
Unable to Determine	1	0	1	1.5%
Total	25	41	66	100.0%

Table 11: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Substantiated Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Gender January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023				
Gender	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Gender
Female	23	40	63	95.5%
Male	2	1	3	4.5%
Unknown	0	0	0	0.0%
Total	25	41	66	100.0%

Table 12: Wisconsin Child Sex Trafficking Substantiated Allegations, by Milwaukee and Balance of State, by Age at Report

January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023

Age in Years	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Total in Wisconsin	Total Percentage by Age
<1-5	0	0	0	0.0%
6-9	1	3	4	5.9%
10-12	2	2	4	5.9%
13	5	5	10	14.7%
14	2	3	5	7.4%
15	9	10	19	27.9%
16	6	7	13	19.1%
17	1	12	13	19.1%
Unknown	0	0	0	0.0%
Total	26	42	68*	100.0%

*An individual youth may appear in the chart above more than once if multiple allegations were made when they were different ages during the time period.



The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Safety and Permanence at (608) 266-8787. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.