



Western Australia's Reportable Conduct Scheme: A review of systems to protect children

Additional analysis of alleged victims and subjects of allegations

April 2025

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1. Introduction

The Ombudsman's report, *Western Australia's Reportable Conduct Scheme: A review of systems to protect children*, included analysis of 889 notifications of reportable allegations from the first 18 months of operation of Western Australia's Reportable Conduct Scheme (**the Scheme**).

This analysis of notifications of reportable allegations included:

- comparisons by sectors and types of conduct; and
- a detailed examination of alleged victims and the circumstances of allegations from the education, early childhood education and care and out-of-home care sectors.

Further analysis of the characteristics of the alleged victims and subjects of allegations was undertaken and is presented in this document.

2. Alleged victims of reportable allegations

2.1. Gender of alleged victim

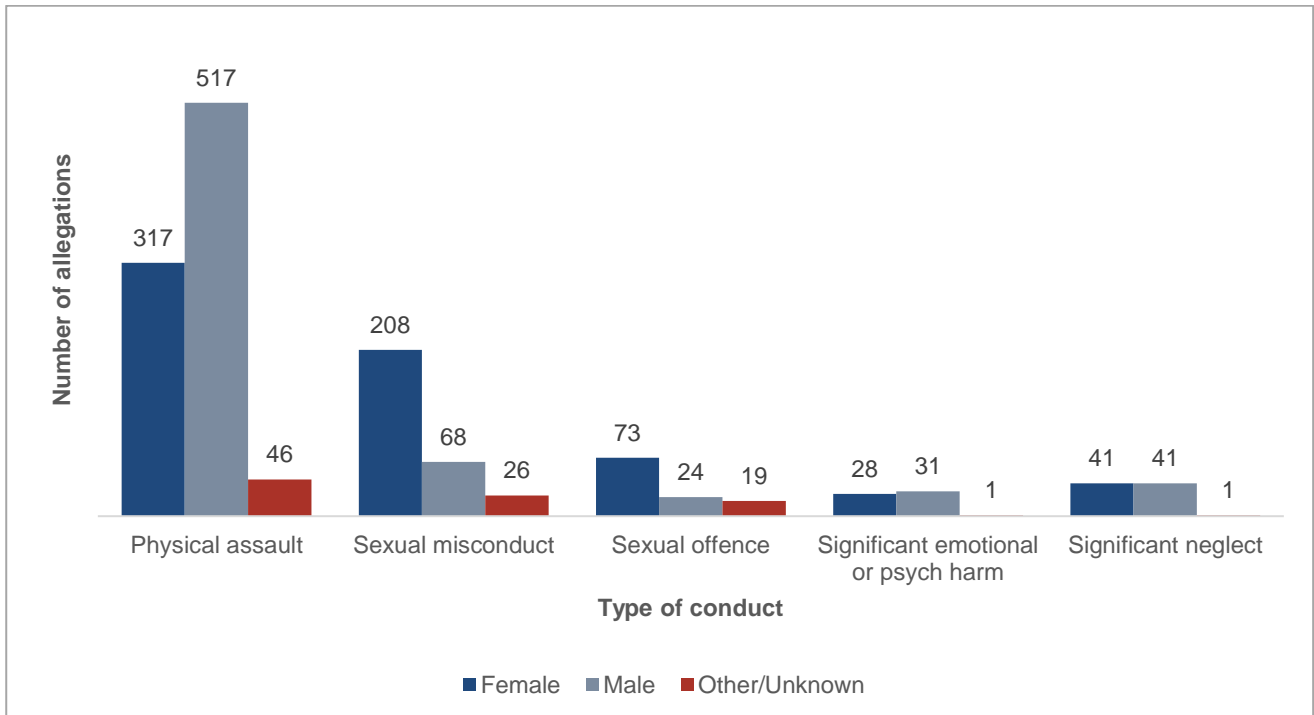
Allegations notified to the Ombudsman between 1 January 2023 and 30 June 2024 (**the reporting period**) were similarly likely to involve a male alleged victim (47.3%) compared to a female alleged victim (46.3%). The remaining allegations (6.5%) involved an unknown gender.¹

As shown in Figure 1, alleged victims of physical assault were more likely to be male. Out of 880 physical assault allegations, 517 (59%) involved a male alleged victim. Conversely, 69 per cent of sexual misconduct allegations and 63 per cent of sexual offence allegations involved a female alleged victim.

No clear gender differences were observed for allegations of significant neglect and significant emotional and psychological harm.

¹ Unique victims were unable to be identified from the data. Accordingly, data and analyses on victims relates to an analysis of allegations rather than unique victims.

Figure 1: Number of allegations, by type of conduct and gender of alleged victim, January 2023 to June 2024



Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

2.2. Age of alleged victim

As set out in Table 1 below, the most commonly occurring age group of alleged victims was 10 to 14 years, comprising 33.4 per cent of allegations.

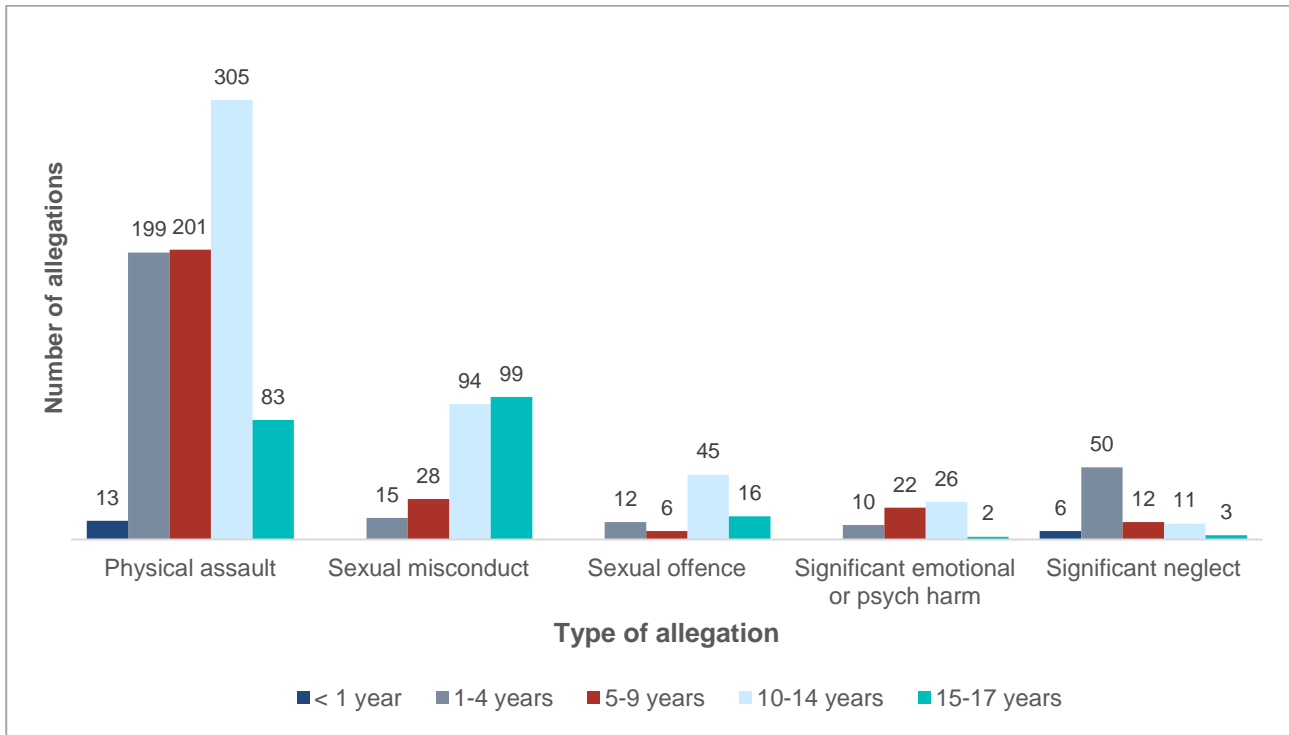
Table 1: Number of allegations by age group of alleged victim, January 2023 to June 2024

Age	Number of allegations	% of allegations
< 1 years	19	1.3%
1 – 4 years	286	19.8%
5 – 9 years	269	18.7%
10 – 14 years	481	33.4%
15 – 17 years	203	14.1%
Unknown	183	12.7%
Total	1,441	100%

Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

Different patterns and trends in the age of alleged victims were evident depending on the type of conduct, as set out in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Number of allegations, by type of conduct and age of alleged victim, January 2023 to June 2024



Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

Physical assault allegations were by far the most common type of conduct for nearly all ages of alleged victims and most frequently involved children aged 10 to 14 years. In comparison, sexual misconduct allegations more frequently involved alleged victims over 10 years of age and was the most common type of conduct for alleged victims aged 15 to 17 years.

Allegations of significant neglect most commonly involved children 1 to 4 years of age. These allegations were primarily from the early childhood education and care sector.

2.3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander alleged victims

The Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status of alleged victims was unknown or not recorded for 829 of the 1,441 allegations (57.5%). These data limitations arise from the Act not requiring victim demographic information to be provided in the notification to the Ombudsman.²

Notwithstanding these data limitations, 217 allegations (15.1%) involved an alleged victim identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. As Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children comprise 7.3 per cent of the total population of children in Western Australia, these results are indicative of an over-representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children among alleged victims of reportable conduct.³

² Demographic questions have been included in the Ombudsman's online notification form to support the assessment of risk and identification of vulnerable groups. This notification form was not used by all organisations during the reporting period.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, June 2021 (August 2023), Table 7.5 Estimated resident Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, non-indigenous and total populations, Western Australia, single year of age (to 65 and over) - 30 June 2021.

3. Subjects of allegations

3.1. Gender of subjects of allegations

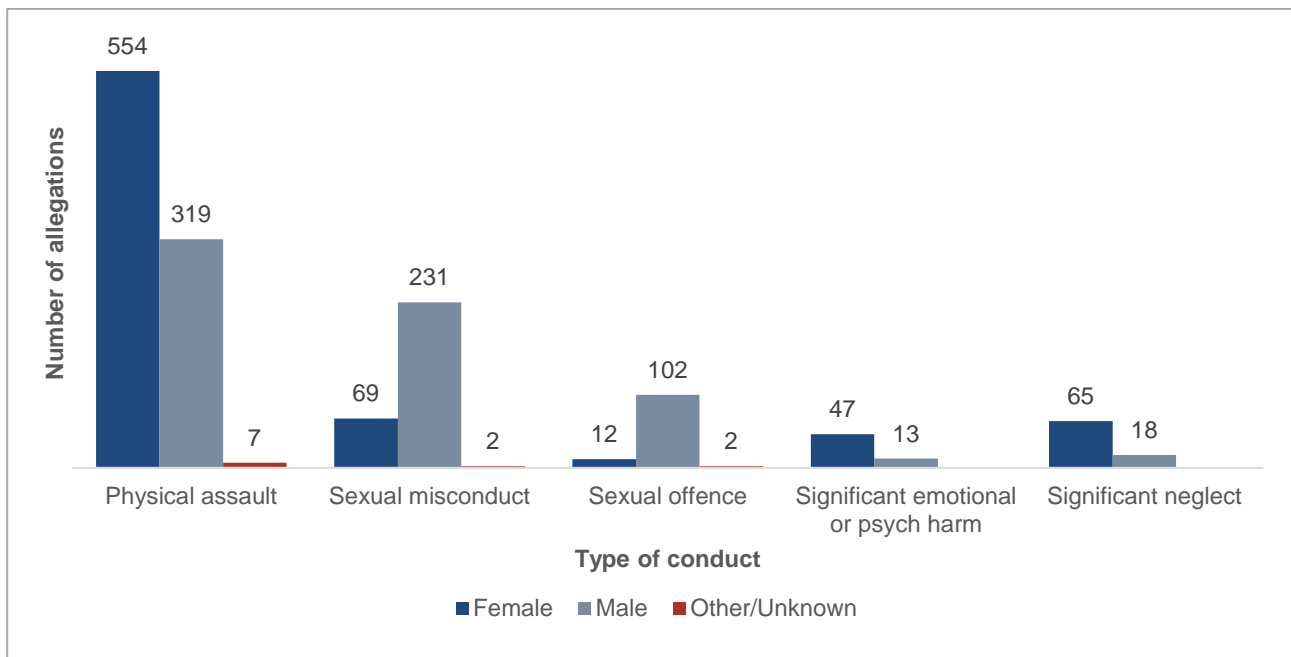
During the reporting period, 796 unique individuals were the subject of an allegation notified to the Ombudsman. Most individuals (93.1%) were the subject of a single notification to the Ombudsman, with 7 per cent of individuals the subject of 2 – 3 notifications to the Ombudsman.

Of the 796 unique subjects of allegations, 435 were female (55%) while 361 (45%) were male. The higher proportion of female subjects of allegations is not unexpected given the overrepresentation of female employees in sectors covered by the Scheme.⁴

The most common gender of the subject of allegation differed depending on the type of conduct, as set out in Figure 3.

Physical assault was the most common type of alleged conduct for both male and female subjects of allegations. However, female subjects of allegations were more commonly involved in allegations of physical assault, neglect and significant emotional or psychological harm while male subjects of allegations were more commonly involved in allegations of a sexual nature.

Figure 3: Number of allegations, by type of conduct and gender of subject of allegation, January 2023 to June 2024



Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

⁴ For example, 78% of the teacher workforce in Western Australia are female. See Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *ATWD Key Metrics Dashboard*, <<https://www.aitsl.edu.au/research/australian-teacher-workforce-data/key-metrics-dashboard>> Accessed 6 February 2025.

3.2. Type of employment of subjects of allegations

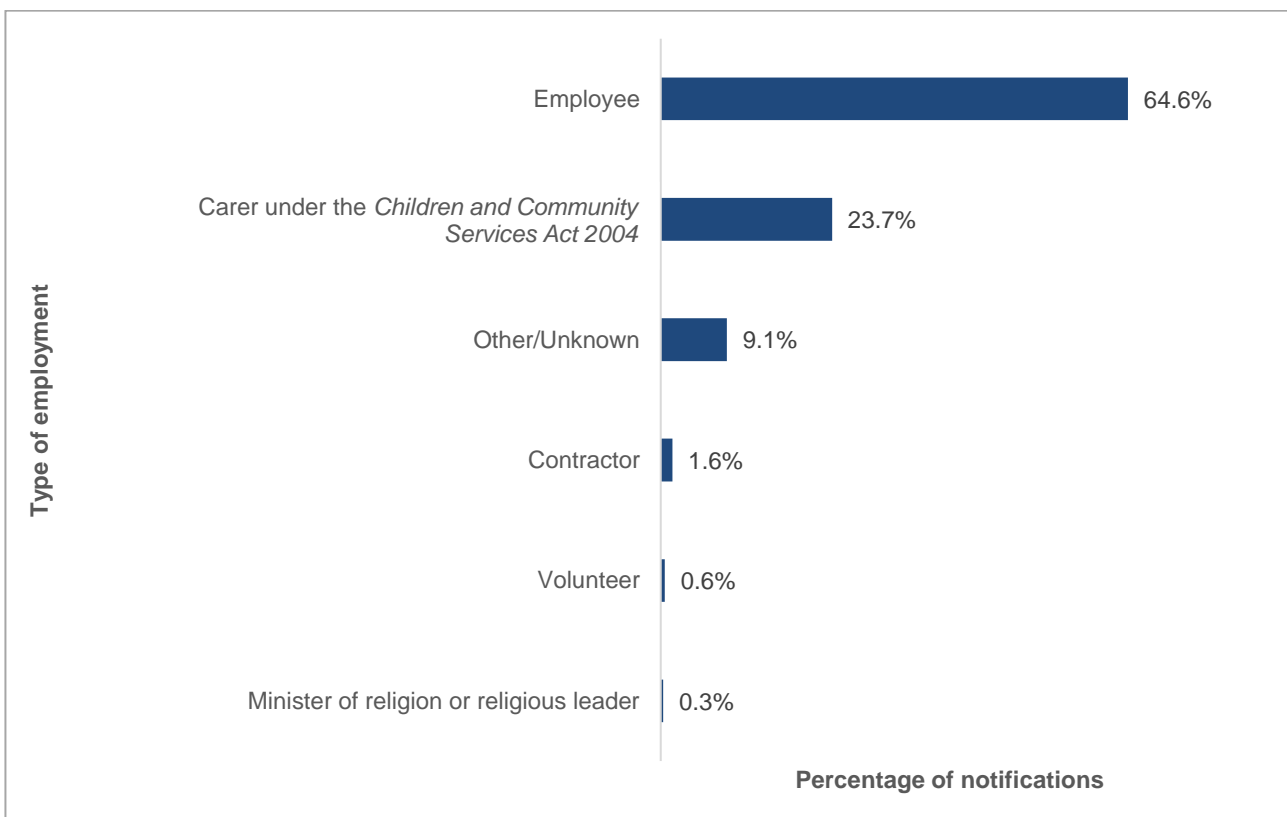
The definition of 'employee' is broadly defined under the Scheme to include employees, contractors, volunteers, authorised carers under the *Children and Community Services Act 2004 (CCS Act)*, ministers of religion and religious leaders. This is consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission, which noted:

...reportable conduct schemes should require the reporting of conduct by any individual engaged by an institution to provide services to children, whether or not they are a paid employee.⁵

The type of employment for the subject of allegation for each notification received during the reporting period is set out in Figure 4.

The subject of allegation was an employee of the organisation in nearly two-thirds (64.6%) of notifications. The next most common employment status under the Scheme were carers under the *Children and Community Services Act 2004* (23.7% of notifications), with contractors, volunteers and religious leaders infrequently the subject of notifications to the Ombudsman during the reporting period.

Figure 4: Proportion of notifications, by employment type, January 2023 to June 2024



Source: Ombudsman Western Australia

⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Final Report: Volume 7, Improving institutional responding and reporting*, 2017, p. 20.