

# Children of Incarcerated Parents

## DEFINITION

*Children of incarcerated parents* is the number of children with parents serving sentences at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections per 1,000 children under age 18. The data are reported by the place of the parent's last residence before entering prison and do not include Rhode Island children who have parents incarcerated at other locations.

## SIGNIFICANCE

More than five million children in the U.S. (7% of all U.S. children) have had a parent incarcerated in state or federal prison at one time or another.<sup>1</sup>

Parental incarceration can contribute to children's insecure attachment to their parent, which can lead to poor developmental outcomes. Children of incarcerated parents experience high rates of physical and mental health problems (including asthma, depression, and anxiety) and educational problems (including grade retention, absenteeism, and dropping out). Parental incarceration increases children's risk for learning disabilities, ADHD, conduct problems, developmental delays, and speech problems.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup>

Nationally, most children of incarcerated parents live with their other parent, a grandparent, or other relatives.<sup>6</sup> Of the 1,870 parents incarcerated in Rhode Island on September 30, 2015 (including those awaiting trial), 94%

(1,756) were fathers and 6% (114) were mothers.<sup>7</sup> Nationally, nearly half (48%) of incarcerated parents lived with their children one month prior to incarceration.<sup>8</sup>

Children of incarcerated parents are more likely than other children to be involved with the child welfare system. In the U.S. in 2013, 8% (almost 20,000) of children who entered foster care did so at least in part due to the incarceration of a parent.<sup>9</sup> These children often represent complex cases for child welfare agencies, involving balancing parental rights with the safety and well-being of the child.<sup>10</sup>

Programs and policies targeted at the unique needs of incarcerated pregnant women and mothers can improve outcomes for them and their families.<sup>11</sup> Keeping siblings together, providing family counseling and access to mental health care, mentoring, peer support services, and prison transition supports can alleviate the worst effects of parents' imprisonment on children and improve the family reunification process.<sup>12</sup>

Of the 1,870 parents incarcerated in Rhode Island on September 30, 2015 (including those awaiting trial), 43% were White, 32% were Black, 23% were Hispanic, and 2% were of another race. Sixty-four percent of incarcerated parents with a known in-state residence identified one of the four core cities as their last place of residence.<sup>13</sup>

## Parents at the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI), September 30, 2015

	INMATES SURVEYED*	# REPORTING CHILDREN	% REPORTING CHILDREN	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED
Awaiting Trial	620	394	64%	906
Serving a Sentence	2,548	1,476	58%	3,316
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,168</b>	<b>1,870</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>4,222</b>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2015. \*Does not include inmates who were missing responses to the question on number of children, inmates on home confinement, or those from another state's jurisdiction.

- ◆ Of the 3,168 inmates awaiting trial or serving a sentence at the ACI who were surveyed as of September 30, 2015 and answered the question on number of children, 1,870 inmates reported having 4,222 children. Forty-five percent of sentenced mothers and 14% of sentenced fathers had sentences that were six months or less.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Of the 78 sentenced mothers on September 30, 2015, 59% were serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense, 28% for a violent offense, 5% for a drug-related offense, 5% for breaking and entering, and 3% for a sex offense. Of the 1,398 sentenced fathers, 46% were serving sentences for a violent offense, 20% for a nonviolent offense, 13% for a sex-related offense, 13% for a drug-related offense, and 7% for breaking and entering.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ Forty-one percent of incarcerated parents awaiting trial or serving a sentence at the ACI on September 30, 2015 had less than a high school degree education, 47% had a high school diploma or a GED, and 12% had at least some college education.<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ A supportive family, education, job training, stable housing, employment assistance, health services, and substance abuse treatment are critical to the parents' successful transition to the community after incarceration and also to support the well-being of their children.<sup>17,18</sup>
- ◆ Nationally, nearly half of all children (between 33 and 36.5 million) have at least one parent with some sort of a criminal record. These families can experience significant challenges even if the parent has never been incarcerated. A parent's criminal record is often an obstacle to securing employment, accessing housing supports, and obtaining public assistance.<sup>19</sup>

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Table 28.

## Children of Incarcerated Parents, Rhode Island, September 30, 2015

CITY/TOWN	# OF INCARCERATED PARENTS	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED*	2010 TOTAL POPULATION UNDER AGE 18	RATE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	2	3	4,597	0.7
Bristol	10	24	3,623	6.6
Burrillville	7	19	3,576	5.3
Central Falls	49	102	5,644	18.1
Charlestown	3	6	1,506	4.0
Coventry	28	52	7,770	6.7
Cranston	74	138	16,414	8.4
Cumberland	18	53	7,535	7.0
East Greenwich	5	15	3,436	4.4
East Providence	30	77	9,177	8.4
Exeter	2	3	1,334	2.2
Foster	2	4	986	4.1
Glocester	5	8	2,098	3.8
Hopkinton	3	7	1,845	3.8
Jamestown	1	2	1,043	1.9
Johnston	24	61	5,480	11.1
Lincoln	4	4	4,751	0.8
Little Compton	1	2	654	3.1
Middletown	11	30	3,652	8.2
Narragansett	8	14	2,269	6.2
New Shoreham	0	0	163	0.0
Newport	24	54	4,083	13.2
North Kingstown	10	33	6,322	5.2
North Providence	32	63	5,514	11.4
North Smithfield	2	2	2,456	0.8
Pawtucket	145	334	16,575	20.2
Portsmouth	2	3	3,996	0.8
Providence	521	1,188	41,634	28.5
Richmond	1	3	1,849	1.6
Scituate	1	2	2,272	0.9
Smithfield	6	9	3,625	2.5
South Kingstown	13	27	5,416	5.0
Tiverton	6	15	2,998	5.0
Warren	4	11	1,940	5.7
Warwick	53	95	15,825	6.0
West Greenwich	4	8	1,477	5.4
West Warwick	60	117	5,746	20.4
Westerly	7	17	4,787	3.6
Woonsocket	114	260	9,888	26.3
Unknown Residence	109	260	NA	NA
Out-of-State Residence**	75	191	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	829	1,884	73,741	25.5
Remainder of State	463	981	150,215	6.5
Rhode Island	1,292	2,865	223,956	12.8

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2015. Offenders who were on Home Confinement and the awaiting trial population are excluded from this table.

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010.

In the 2007-2014 Factbooks, data are reported as of September 30, while previous Factbooks reported data as of December 31. In the 2015 Factbook, data were reported as of October 10, 2014.

\*Data on the number of children are self-reported by the incarcerated parents and may include some children over age 18. Nationally and in Rhode Island, much of the existing research has relied upon self-reporting by incarcerated parents or caregivers.

\*\*Data on Out-of-State Residence includes inmates who are under jurisdiction in Rhode Island, but report an out-of-state address. Inmates who were from another state's jurisdiction, but serving time in Rhode Island, are not included in the Rhode Island, four core cities, or remainder of state rates, nor are those with an unknown residence.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

### References

- <sup>14</sup> Murphy, D. & Cooper, P. M. (2015). *Parents behind bars: What happens to their children?* Retrieved December 18, 2015, from [www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)
- <sup>2</sup> Shlafer, R. J., Gerrity, E., Ruhland, E., & Wheeler, M. (2013). *Children with incarcerated parents- Considering children's outcomes in the context of family experiences.* Retrieved December 22, 2015, from [www.cyfc.umn.edu](http://www.cyfc.umn.edu)
- <sup>3</sup> Uggen, C. & McElrath, S. (2014). Parental incarceration: What we know and where we need to go. *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 104(3), 597-604.
- <sup>5</sup> Turney, K. (2014). Stress proliferation across generations? Examining the relationship between parental incarceration and childhood health. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 55(3), 302-319.
- <sup>6,8,9</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2015). *Child welfare practice with families affected by parental incarceration.* Retrieved December 22, 2015, from [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)
- <sup>7,13,14,15,16</sup> Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2015.

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