

Children in Single-Parent Families

DEFINITION

Children in single-parent families is the percentage of children under age 18 who live in families headed by a person – male or female – without a spouse present in the home. These numbers include “own children,” defined as never-married children under age 18 who are related to the family head by birth, marriage, or adoption.

SIGNIFICANCE

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, there were 192,879 children living with one or more parents in Rhode Island between 2011 and 2015. Of these, 36% (69,593) were living with an unmarried parent, up from 33% of children between 2006 and 2010.^{1,2}

Children living in single-parent families are more likely to live in poverty than children living in two-parent families. Single-parent families have only one potential wage earner, compared with the two potential wage earners in two-parent families.^{3,4}

Between 2011 and 2015, 77% of children living in poverty in Rhode Island were living in single-parent families. Children in single-parent families in Rhode Island were five times more likely to be living in poverty than those in married-couple families. Between 2011 and 2015 in Rhode Island, 41% of children in single-parent

households lived in poverty, compared to 7% of children in married-couple households.⁵

The financial hardship and time constraints experienced by many single parents explain some of the differences in well-being between the children in single-parent households and those in two-parent households.^{6,7} Regardless of parents’ race and level of educational attainment, children who reside in single-parent households (whether due to divorce or the parents never having been married) are at an increased risk for low academic achievement and low levels of social and emotional well-being.^{8,9} Compared to children in married families, children in single-parent families are more likely to lack health insurance coverage, drop out of school, disconnect from the labor force, and become teen parents.^{10,11} Regardless of whether children grow up with one or two parents, parenting quality is an important predictor of children’s well-being.¹²

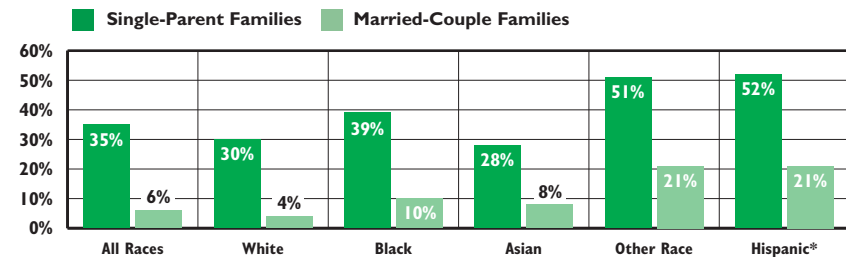
Single-Parent Families		
	2005	2015
RI	33%	40%
US	32%	35%
National Rank*		43rd
New England Rank**		6th

*1st is best; 50th is worst

**1st is best; 6th is worst

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org

Families With Children Under Age 18 and Income Below the Poverty Threshold by Race & Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2011-2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015. Tables B17010, B17010A, B17010B, B17010D, B17010F, B17010I. *Hispanics may be in any race category.

◆ **Hispanic single-parent families in Rhode Island are more than one and a half times as likely as White single-parent families to live in poverty. Hispanic, Other race, and Black married-couple families are more likely than White and Asian married-couple families in Rhode Island to live in poverty.**¹³

Family Structure and Child Well-Being

◆ **Family structure influences children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development. Children born to and raised in married-parent families have higher rates of economic, social, and psychological stability compared to children in single-parent families. Children living in single-parent households are more likely to face educational challenges and are more likely to live in poverty than children in married-couple families.**^{14,15}

◆ **Children in the U.S. live in a variety of family structures. Among those who live with at least one of their biological parents, 59% live in ‘simple families’ with only biological parent(s) and full sibling(s), and 41% live in ‘complex families’ with single parents, stepparents, stepsiblings, and/or half siblings. Family structure varies by education, with one in two children whose parents have a high school diploma or less education and about one in five children with a college-educated parent living in ‘complex’ families.**¹⁶

◆ **After increasing for several decades, the proportion of births to unmarried families in the U.S. has leveled off at just over 40%.¹⁷ Babies born to cohabiting couples comprise nearly 60% of nonmarital births and 25% of all births in the U.S., and account for nearly the entire increase in nonmarital births.**¹⁸

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Table 2.

Children's Living Arrangements, Rhode Island, 2010

CITY/TOWN	CHILDREN LIVING IN HOUSEHOLDS	CHILDREN WHO ARE A HOUSEHOLDER OR SPOUSE		CHILDREN LIVING WITH NON-RELATIVES		CHILDREN LIVING WITH OTHER RELATIVES		CHILDREN LIVING IN MARRIED-COUPLE FAMILIES		CHILDREN LIVING WITH GRANDPARENTS		CHILDREN LIVING IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Barrington	4,597	2	<1%	31	1%	15	0%	3,871	84%	85	2%	593	13%
Bristol	3,621	1	<1%	37	1%	51	1%	2,564	71%	225	6%	743	21%
Burrillville	3,548	0	0%	110	3%	26	1%	2,353	66%	232	7%	827	23%
Central Falls	5,634	3	<1%	90	2%	209	4%	2,159	38%	429	8%	2,744	49%
Charlestown	1,506	0	0%	15	1%	20	1%	1,059	70%	106	7%	306	20%
Coventry	7,762	2	<1%	148	2%	72	1%	5,343	69%	549	7%	1,648	21%
Cranston	16,262	5	<1%	226	1%	324	2%	10,462	64%	1,027	6%	4,218	26%
Cumberland	7,535	0	0%	97	1%	53	1%	5,651	75%	334	4%	1,400	19%
East Greenwich	3,436	0	0%	21	1%	13	0%	2,889	84%	71	2%	442	13%
East Providence	9,100	2	<1%	127	1%	154	2%	5,329	59%	675	7%	2,813	31%
Exeter	1,300	0	0%	23	2%	16	1%	996	77%	82	6%	183	14%
Foster	986	0	0%	24	2%	10	1%	741	75%	69	7%	142	14%
Glocester	2,098	0	0%	39	2%	26	1%	1,581	75%	137	7%	315	15%
Hopkinton	1,845	0	0%	46	2%	24	1%	1,327	72%	113	6%	335	18%
Jamestown	1,043	0	0%	3	0%	5	0%	799	77%	49	5%	187	18%
Johnston	5,473	2	<1%	90	2%	114	2%	3,591	66%	380	7%	1,296	24%
Lincoln	4,743	3	<1%	61	1%	52	1%	3,270	69%	211	4%	1,146	24%
Little Compton	654	0	0%	5	1%	1	0%	528	81%	42	6%	78	12%
Middletown	3,634	3	<1%	45	1%	38	1%	2,606	72%	166	5%	776	21%
Narragansett	2,240	2	<1%	35	2%	25	1%	1,533	68%	105	5%	540	24%
New Shoreham	163	0	0%	1	1%	1	1%	111	68%	4	2%	46	28%
Newport	4,060	2	<1%	66	2%	56	1%	2,034	50%	204	5%	1,698	42%
North Kingstown	6,322	1	<1%	57	1%	49	1%	4,639	73%	247	4%	1,329	21%
North Providence	5,481	0	0%	81	1%	131	2%	3,266	60%	378	7%	1,625	30%
North Smithfield	2,456	0	0%	40	2%	13	1%	1,831	75%	96	4%	476	19%
Pawtucket	16,550	17	<1%	239	1%	460	3%	7,488	45%	1,228	7%	7,118	43%
Portsmouth	3,940	2	<1%	47	1%	24	1%	2,977	76%	172	4%	718	18%
Providence	41,497	41	<1%	632	2%	1,663	4%	16,931	41%	3,094	7%	19,136	46%
Richmond	1,836	0	0%	32	2%	16	1%	1,437	78%	104	6%	247	13%
Scituate	2,272	0	0%	24	1%	22	1%	1,731	76%	139	6%	356	16%
Smithfield	3,615	2	<1%	46	1%	29	1%	2,802	78%	164	5%	572	16%
South Kingstown	5,364	0	0%	81	2%	31	1%	3,951	74%	248	5%	1,053	20%
Tiverton	2,998	1	<1%	41	1%	20	1%	2,109	70%	162	5%	665	22%
Warren	1,935	4	<1%	42	2%	19	1%	1,124	58%	136	7%	610	32%
Warwick	15,795	3	<1%	308	2%	223	1%	10,476	66%	1,109	7%	3,676	23%
West Greenwich	1,468	2	<1%	22	1%	13	1%	1,131	77%	79	5%	221	15%
West Warwick	5,746	1	<1%	151	3%	121	2%	3,118	54%	365	6%	1,990	35%
Westerly	4,787	4	<1%	82	2%	83	2%	3,012	63%	269	6%	1,337	28%
Woonsocket	9,842	10	<1%	203	2%	176	2%	4,237	43%	683	7%	4,533	46%
Four Core Cities	73,523	71	<1%	1,164	2%	2,508	3%	30,815	42%	5,434	7%	33,531	46%
Remainder of State	149,621	44	<1%	2,304	2%	1,890	1%	102,242	68%	8,534	6%	34,607	23%
Rhode Island	223,144	115	<1%	3,468	2%	4,398	2%	133,057	60%	13,968	6%	68,138	31%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010.

The denominator is the number of children under age 18 living in family households according to Census 2010. A family household is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as consisting of a householder and one or more people living together in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage or adoption – it may include others not related to the householder.

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

References

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015. Table B09002.
- ² U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2010. Table B09002.
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- ^{4,7} *Family structure*. (2015). Washington, DC: Child Trends.
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- ^{8,10} Blackwell, D. L. (2010). Family structure and children's health in the United States: Findings from the National Health Interview Survey, 2001-2007. *Vital and Health Statistics*, 10(246). Hyattsville, MD: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- ⁹ Barajas, M. S. (2011). Academic achievement of children in single parent homes: A critical review. *The Hilltop Review*, 5(1), 13-21.
- ¹¹ Mather, M. (2010). *U.S. children in single-mother families*. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau.
- ¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2015. Tables B17010A, B17010B, B17010D, B17010F, B17010I.
- ¹⁴ The National Conference on State Legislators. (2012). *Child poverty rates and family structure*. Retrieved December 16, 2016, from www.ncsl.org

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