

# Youth Violence

## DEFINITION

*Youth violence* is the number of arrests of youths under age 18 in Rhode Island for assault and weapons offenses and the percentage of high school students who report experiencing violence at school. These two measures of youth violence are used to account for violence that leads to arrest as well as some of the violence experienced by youth that may not come to the attention of the police.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Youth violence refers to a variety of harmful behaviors that youth can experience as victims, witnesses, or offenders and that can cause emotional harm, injury, or death. Violence can impact the well-being of individuals, families, schools, and communities and can generate high social and economic costs.<sup>1,2</sup>

Effective youth violence prevention aims to reduce factors that place youth at risk for violent behavior and promote factors that protect youth at risk for perpetrating violence.<sup>3</sup> Efforts to prevent youth violence should begin in early childhood and continue through adolescence and address a wide range of individual, family, and community factors. Effective violence prevention strategies include strengthening youth's capacity to choose nonviolence, promoting supportive relationships between youth and adults, and

improving economic conditions and safety in communities.<sup>4</sup>

Youth at risk for committing violent acts often live in high-poverty neighborhoods with limited economic opportunities. They are more likely to have histories of substance use, association with delinquent peers, academic failure, poor family functioning, and be victims of child maltreatment.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Youths who are victims of violence are at increased risk for developing physical and mental health problems, having academic difficulties, smoking, engaging in high-risk sexual behavior, and suicide.<sup>8</sup>

Nationally in 2015, 23% of students in grades nine through 12 reported being in a physical fight during the previous year, 20% reported being bullied on school property during the previous year, and 18% reported carrying a weapon during the previous month.<sup>9</sup>

The number of juveniles arrested for violent crimes in the U.S. reached a 33-year low in 2012, with juveniles making up 12% of all serious violent crime arrests. The Rhode Island juvenile arrest rate for serious violent crimes was 128 per 100,000 youth ages 10 to 17, compared to the U.S. rate of 187 per 100,000 youth ages 10 to 17.<sup>10</sup> In 2015 in Rhode Island, there were 469 juvenile arrests for assault offenses and 79 juvenile arrests for weapons offenses.<sup>11</sup> In 2016, violent crimes made up 5% (243) of the 4,964 juvenile offenses referred to Rhode Island Family Court.<sup>12</sup>

## Bully Status by Gender and Grade Level, Rhode Island, 2015

|                            | MIDDLE SCHOOL<br>(EVER) |         | HIGH SCHOOL<br>(CURRENT-PAST MONTH) |        |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|--------|
|                            | MALE                    | FEMALES | MALES                               | FEMALE |
| Bullied on School Property | 32%                     | 45%     | 15%                                 | 16%    |
| Bullied Electronically     | 12%                     | 30%     | 10%                                 | 15%    |
| Been in a Physical Fight*  | 45%                     | 25%     | 11%                                 | 7%     |

Source: *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, 2015, Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Data Analysis. \*Physical fight is defined as occurring anywhere for middle school, but only on school property for high school respondents.

- ◆ Violence in schools affects individual victims and disrupts the functioning of entire schools and communities.<sup>13</sup> In Rhode Island in 2015, 6% of high school students (7% of males and 5% of females) reported not going to school due to safety concerns.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Victims of bullying are at risk of poor academic achievement, absenteeism, and forms of aggression. Both victims and perpetrators of bullying are more likely to contemplate or attempt suicide.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ Witnessing violence can cause emotional, physical, and mental harm, even for children who are not the direct victims of violence. Early, chronic exposure to violence can damage a child's brain development and condition them to react with fear and anxiety to a range of circumstances.<sup>16</sup>
- ◆ Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place online or by digital communication through text messages, instant messengers, social media, and/or other digital applications.<sup>17</sup> In 2015 in Rhode Island, 21% of middle school students (30% of females and 12% of males) and 12% of high school students (15% of females and 10% of males) reported being electronically bullied.<sup>18</sup>

## Gun Violence Among Youth

- ◆ Guns are the leading instrument of fatal violence to teens and are used in 88% of teen homicides and 41% of teen suicides in the U.S.<sup>19</sup> In Rhode Island between 2011 and 2015, there were 117 emergency department visits, 56 hospitalizations, and ten deaths of youth ages 15 to 19 attributed to firearms.<sup>20</sup>

Table 27.

## Youth Violence, Rhode Island

## Youth Violence

| CITY/TOWN          | COMMUNITY CONTEXT                      |                                  | VIOLENCE IN HIGH SCHOOLS, 2014  |  | JUVENILE ARRESTS FOR VIOLENCE, 2015 |                        |  |
|--------------------|--|----------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--|
|                    | VIOLENT CRIME OFFENSES (ALL AGES) 2015 | TOTAL POPULATION AGES 11-17 2010 | % OF STUDENTS SAW ANOTHER STUDENT BRING A WEAPON TO SCHOOL IN PAST YEAR | % OF STUDENTS IN A PHYSICAL FIGHT AT SCHOOL IN PAST YEAR | # FOR ASSAULT OFFENSES              | # FOR WEAPONS OFFENSES | TOTAL # FOR ASSAULT AND WEAPONS OFFENSES |
| Barrington         | 9                                      | 2,186                            | 14%   | 6%   | 4                                   | 1                      | 5  |
| Bristol            | 13                                     | 1,545                            | 12%   | 11%  | 4                                   | 0                      | 4  |
| Burrillville       | 16                                     | 1,526                            | 10%   | 8%   | 2                                   | 0                      | 2  |
| Central Falls      | 150                                    | 2,089                            | 12%   | 11%  | 18                                  | 5                      | 23                                       |
| Charlestown        | 12                                     | 659                              | 23%   | 9%   | 0                                   | 0                      | 0  |
| Coventry           | 33                                     | 3,509                            | 23%   | 8%   | 13                                  | 2                      | 15                                       |
| Cranston           | 114                                    | 6,984                            | 16%   | 10%  | 11                                  | 1                      | 12                                       |
| Cumberland         | 22                                     | 3,271                            | 21%   | 8%   | 5                                   | 0                      | 5  |
| East Greenwich     | 9                                      | 1,671                            | 13%   | 5%   | 1                                   | 0                      | 1  |
| East Providence    | 57                                     | 3,730                            | 18%   | 8%   | 10                                  | 0                      | 10                                       |
| Exeter             | NA                                     | 673                              | 11%   | 7%   | NA                                  | NA                     | NA                                       |
| Foster             | 2                                      | 467                              | 20%   | 10%  | 0                                   | 0                      | 0  |
| Glocester          | 4                                      | 1,000                            | 20%   | 10%  | 1                                   | 1                      | 2  |
| Hopkinton          | 5                                      | 826                              | 23%   | 9%   | 1                                   | 0                      | 1  |
| Jamestown          | 0                                      | 528                              | 14%   | 8%   | 1                                   | 0                      | 1  |
| Johnston           | 41                                     | 2,376                            | 24%   | 11%  | 12                                  | 2                      | 14                                       |
| Lincoln            | 15                                     | 2,189                            | 12%   | 7%   | 6                                   | 1                      | 7  |
| Little Compton     | 2                                      | 284                              | 11%   | 7%   | 0                                   | 0                      | 0  |
| Middletown         | 19                                     | 1,504                            | 12%   | 9%   | 12                                  | 0                      | 12                                       |
| Narragansett       | 2                                      | 1,052                            | 21%   | 6%   | 2                                   | 0                      | 2  |
| New Shoreham       | 2                                      | 64                               | NA  | NA   | 0                                   | 0                      | 0  |
| Newport            | 94                                     | 1,484                            | 24%   | 10%  | 30                                  | 1                      | 31                                       |
| North Kingstown    | 20                                     | 2,917                            | 14%   | 8%   | 8                                   | 2                      | 10                                       |
| North Providence   | 50                                     | 2,303                            | 17%   | 7%   | 24                                  | 3                      | 27                                       |
| North Smithfield   | 7                                      | 1,132                            | 10%   | 6%   | 2                                   | 0                      | 2  |
| Pawtucket          | 293                                    | 6,268                            | 15%   | 10%  | 55                                  | 5                      | 60                                       |
| Portsmouth         | 8                                      | 1,881                            | 11%   | 7%   | 4                                   | 0                      | 4  |
| Providence         | 1,018                                  | 16,024                           | 18%   | 10%  | 166                                 | 42                     | 208                                      |
| Richmond           | 4                                      | 759                              | 23%   | 9%   | 3                                   | 0                      | 3  |
| Scituate           | 3                                      | 1,143                            | 13%   | 8%   | 0                                   | 0                      | 0  |
| Smithfield         | 12                                     | 1,729                            | 10%   | 8%   | 8                                   | 1                      | 9  |
| South Kingstown    | 21                                     | 2,498                            | 16%   | 9%   | 7                                   | 0                      | 7  |
| Tiverton           | 20                                     | 1,318                            | 13%   | 12%  | 4                                   | 1                      | 5  |
| Warren             | 22                                     | 777                              | 12%   | 11%  | 1                                   | 0                      | 1  |
| Warwick            | 66                                     | 6,781                            | 14%   | 10%  | 18                                  | 3                      | 21                                       |
| West Greenwich     | 3                                      | 678                              | 11%   | 7%   | 0                                   | 1                      | 1  |
| West Warwick       | 67                                     | 2,139                            | 13%   | 9%   | 7                                   | 2                      | 9  |
| Westerly           | 18                                     | 2,003                            | 13%   | 7%   | 5                                   | 0                      | 5  |
| Woonsocket         | 235                                    | 3,649                            | 22%   | 12%  | 21                                  | 4                      | 25                                       |
| State Police/Other | NA                                     | NA                               | NA  | NA   | 3                                   | 1                      | 4  |
| Four Core Cities   | 1,696                                  | 28,030                           | NA  | NA   | 260                                 | 56                     | 316                                      |
| Remainder of State | 792                                    | 65,586                           | NA  | NA   | 209                                 | 23                     | 232                                      |
| Rhode Island       | 2,488                                  | 93,616                           | 16%   | 9%   | 469                                 | 79                     | 548                                      |

**Sources of Data for Table/Methodology**

Total violent crime offense data are from U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2015). *Crime in the United States 2015: Rhode Island offenses known to law enforcement*. Retrieved February 28, 2017, from www.fbi.gov

Total population ages 11–17 data are from U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010.

Data on high school students experiencing violence at school are from *SurveyWorks!* student survey, Rhode Island Department of Education, 2014 (the most recent year the survey was administered). Percentages reflect students answering yes to the question of whether “they saw a student with a weapon like a gun, knife, or club at this school” and “they were in a physical fight at school” in the 12 months prior to the survey. *SurveyWorks!* data for communities that belong to regional districts reflect the district’s overall survey results. Students from Little Compton attend high school in Portsmouth and students from Jamestown attend high school in North Kingstown. Due to a change in the *SurveyWorks!* question format, the weapons data in *Violence in High Schools* cannot be compared to previous Factbooks. In earlier years, the *SurveyWorks!* survey asked students if they had brought a weapon to school in the past year; since then, students are asked if they had seen another student with a weapon at school in the past year.

Juvenile arrests for assault and weapons offenses data are from Mongeau, T. & Tocco, G. (2016). *2015 juvenile detention data*. Providence, RI: Rhode Island Department of Public Safety, Grant Administration Office. A complete list of assault and weapons offenses can be found in the Methodology Section of this Factbook.

NA indicates that the data are not available. Exeter arrest numbers are included in the State Police totals.

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

**References for Youth Violence**

<sup>1,6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). *Understanding youth violence: Fact sheet*. Retrieved March 3, 2017, from www.cdc.gov

<sup>2,4,5</sup> David-Ferdon, C. & Simon, T. R. (2014). *Preventing youth violence: Opportunities for action*. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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