

# 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 jail or state or federal prison at least once.<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 challenges (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 1,725 parents incarcerated in Rhode Island on September 30, 2017 (including those awaiting trial), 94%

(1,621) were fathers and 6% (104) 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. These children often represent complex cases for child welfare agencies, involving balancing parental rights with the safety and well-being of the child.<sup>9</sup>

Programs and policies targeted at the unique needs of incarcerated pregnant women and mothers can improve outcomes for them and their families. 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>10,11</sup>

Of the 1,725 parents incarcerated in Rhode Island on September 30, 2017 (including those awaiting trial), 41% were White, 30% were Black, 26% were Hispanic, and 3% were of another race. Sixty-two percent of incarcerated parents with a known in-state residence identified one of the four core cities as their last place of residence.<sup>12</sup>

## Parents at the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI), September 30, 2017

	INMATES SURVEYED*	# REPORTING CHILDREN	% REPORTING CHILDREN	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED
Awaiting Trial	624	381	61%	875
Serving a Sentence	2,265	1,344	59%	3,262
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,889</b>	<b>1,725</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>4,137</b>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2017. \*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. Includes inmates who were already sentenced and inmates who were awaiting trial.

- ◆ Of the 2,889 inmates awaiting trial or serving a sentence at the ACI on September 30, 2017 who answered the question on number of children, 1,725 inmates reported having 4,137 children. Twenty-seven percent of sentenced mothers and 15% of sentenced fathers had sentences that were six months or less.<sup>13</sup>
- ◆ Of the 77 sentenced mothers on September 30, 2017, 45% were serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense, 35% for a violent offense, 13% for a drug-related offense, 4% for breaking and entering, and 3% for a sex-related offense. Of the 1,267 sentenced fathers, 47% were serving sentences for a violent offense, 18% for a nonviolent offense, 15% for a drug-related offense, 12% for a sex-related offense, and 6% for breaking and entering.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Thirty-seven percent of incarcerated parents awaiting trial or serving a sentence on September 30, 2017 had less than a high school diploma, 49% had a high school diploma or a GED, and 13% had at least some college education.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ A supportive family, access to education, job training, stable housing, employment assistance, medical and mental health services, and substance abuse treatment are critical to parents' successful transition to the community after incarceration and also to support the well-being of their children.<sup>16,17</sup>
- ◆ Families of parents with a criminal record can experience significant challenges even if the parent has never been incarcerated. A parent's criminal record is often an obstacle to securing employment, participating in education and training programs, accessing housing supports, and obtaining public assistance.<sup>18</sup>

# Children of Incarcerated Parents

Table 29.

## Children of Incarcerated Parents, Rhode Island, September 30, 2017

CITY/TOWN	# OF INCARCERATED PARENTS	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED*	2010 TOTAL POPULATION UNDER AGE 18	RATE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	1	1	4,597	0.2
Bristol	4	12	3,623	3.3
Burrillville	14	30	3,576	8.4
Central Falls	48	122	5,644	21.6
Charlestown	4	5	1,506	3.3
Coventry	17	34	7,770	4.4
Cranston	76	163	16,414	9.9
Cumberland	16	43	7,535	5.7
East Greenwich	8	18	3,436	5.2
East Providence	29	71	9,177	7.7
Exeter	3	5	1,334	3.7
Foster	4	9	986	9.1
Glocester	4	7	2,098	3.3
Hopkinton	5	8	1,845	4.3
Jamestown	2	4	1,043	3.8
Johnston	20	42	5,480	7.7
Lincoln	2	3	4,751	0.6
Little Compton	0	0	654	0.0
Middletown	9	15	3,652	4.1
Narragansett	5	9	2,269	4.0
New Shoreham	0	0	163	0.0
Newport	26	76	4,083	18.6
North Kingstown	9	25	6,322	4.0
North Providence	36	81	5,514	14.7
North Smithfield	3	3	2,456	1.2
Pawtucket	144	318	16,575	19.2
Portsmouth	0	0	3,996	0.0
Providence	432	983	41,634	23.6
Richmond	4	10	1,849	5.4
Scituate	3	6	2,272	2.6
Smithfield	6	8	3,625	2.2
South Kingstown	14	30	5,416	5.5
Tiverton	7	17	2,998	5.7
Warren	5	11	1,940	5.7
Warwick	54	96	15,825	6.1
West Greenwich	2	4	1,477	2.7
West Warwick	47	306	5,746	53.3
Westerly	10	21	4,787	4.4
Woonsocket	101	253	9,888	25.6
Unknown Residence	110	265	NA	NA
Out-of-State Residence**	60	148	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	725	1,676	73,741	22.7
Remainder of State	449	1,173	150,215	7.8
Rhode Island	1,174	2,849	223,956	12.7

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2017. Offenders who were on Home Confinement and the awaiting trial population are excluded from this table.

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010.

Since the 2007 Factbook, data are reported as of September 30, with the exception of the 2015 Factbook, in which 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> Murphey, D. & Cooper, P. M. (2015). *Parents behind bars: What happens to their children?* Retrieved January 15, 2018, 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 January 15, 2018, from [www.cyfc.umcn.edu](http://www.cyfc.umcn.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 January 15, 2018, from [www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)
- <sup>7,12,13,14,15</sup> Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2017.

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