

Children Witnessing Domestic Violence

DEFINITION

Children witnessing domestic violence is the percentage of reported domestic violence incidents resulting in an arrest in which children under age 18 were present in the home. The data are based on police reports of domestic violence. Domestic violence is the use of physical force, or threat of force, against a current or former partner in an intimate relationship, resulting in fear and emotional and/or physical suffering.

SIGNIFICANCE

An estimated 10 million U.S. children are exposed to domestic violence each year. Rates of partner violence are higher among couples with children than those without children.¹² In Rhode Island in 2016 (the most recent year for which complete data are available), police reports indicate that children were present at 27% of domestic violence incidents resulting in arrests.³

Children can be exposed to domestic violence in a number of ways. They may witness it directly (by seeing and/or hearing violent incidents), have their lives disrupted by moving or being separated from a parent, and/or may be used by the abusive parent to manipulate or gain control over the victim. Children who are exposed to domestic violence are also more likely to be victims of child abuse and neglect than those who are not.^{4,5} Children may also lose a parent to

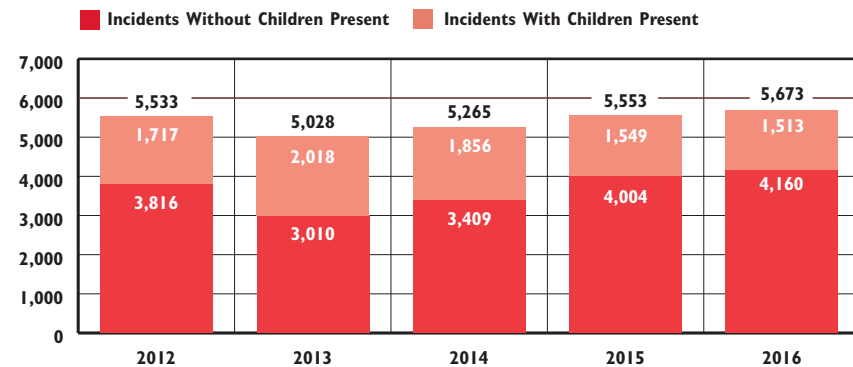
domestic homicide.^{6,7}

Exposure to domestic violence is distressing to children and can lead to mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety, in childhood and later in life. Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to experience physical, emotional, health, and learning challenges throughout their childhood and adulthood. They are more likely to have concentration and memory problems, and to have difficulty with school performance than children who have not witnessed domestic violence.^{8,9,10}

While many children who have witnessed domestic violence show resilience, exposure to violence may impair a child's capacity for partnering and parenting later in life. There is a strong association between witnessing domestic violence as a child and becoming a perpetrator of domestic violence as an adult.^{11,12}

Children are also sometimes injured or killed in domestic violence especially when their parent is planning to leave an abusive relationship. This includes biological children as well as step- and adopted children who live in the household because they are the children of the victimized partner.¹³ It is, therefore, important to put supports in place to ensure the safety of all children living in households experiencing domestic violence.

Domestic Violence Incidents Resulting in Arrest, Rhode Island, 2012-2016



Source: Rhode Island Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit, 2012-2016. Includes domestic violence reports resulting in an arrest by local police and Rhode Island State Police.

◆ In Rhode Island in 2016, there were 5,673 domestic violence incidents that resulted in arrests, up 2% from 5,553 incidents in 2015. Children were reported present in 27% (1,513) of incidents in 2016.¹⁴ Rhode Island police officers document children's exposure to violence on reporting forms by noting the number and ages of minor children living in the home, how many were present during the incident, how many saw the incident and how many heard it.¹⁵

◆ In Rhode Island in 2016, police reported that children saw the domestic violence incident in 1,125 arrests and children heard the incident in 1,254 arrests. These incidents were not mutually exclusive, and more than one child may have witnessed each incident.¹⁶

◆ Rhode Island's statewide network of five domestic violence shelters and advocacy programs provides emergency and support services to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, and stalking.¹⁷ During 2018, the network provided services to 8,514 individuals, including 556 children (down from 8,758 and 604, respectively, in 2017). In 2018, 151 children and 235 adults spent a total of 21,376 nights in domestic violence shelters. During 2018, 71 children and 62 adults lived in domestic violence transitional housing (longer-term private apartments for victims of domestic violence) for a total of 29,679 nights.¹⁸

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Table 31. Children Present During Domestic Violence Incidents Resulting in Arrests, Rhode Island, 2016

| CITY/TOWN | TOTAL # OF REPORTS | TOTAL # OF INCIDENTS WITH CHILDREN PRESENT | % WITH CHILDREN PRESENT |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Barrington | 25 | 9 | 36% |
| Bristol | 92 | 21 | 23% |
| Burrillville | 51 | 12 | 24% |
| Central Falls | 195 | 50 | 26% |
| Charlestown | 30 | 8 | 27% |
| Coventry | 174 | 51 | 29% |
| Cranston | 372 | 105 | 28% |
| Cumberland | 101 | 24 | 24% |
| East Greenwich | 43 | 11 | 26% |
| East Providence | 258 | 59 | 23% |
| Exeter* | NA | NA | NA |
| Foster | 24 | 9 | 38% |
| Glocester | 19 | 3 | 16% |
| Hopkinton | 49 | 15 | 31% |
| Jamestown | 8 | 2 | 25% |
| Johnston | 108 | 28 | 26% |
| Lincoln | 65 | 25 | 38% |
| Little Compton | 5 | 2 | 40% |
| Middletown | 101 | 28 | 28% |
| Narragansett | 65 | 18 | 28% |
| New Shoreham | 3 | 1 | 33% |
| Newport | 195 | 34 | 17% |
| North Kingstown | 87 | 30 | 34% |
| North Providence | 164 | 38 | 23% |
| North Smithfield | 50 | 11 | 22% |
| Pawtucket | 861 | 267 | 31% |
| Portsmouth | 122 | 21 | 17% |
| Providence | 878 | 258 | 29% |
| Richmond | 23 | 6 | 26% |
| Scituate | 12 | 4 | 33% |
| Smithfield | 50 | 12 | 24% |
| South Kingstown | 89 | 28 | 31% |
| Tiverton | 69 | 16 | 23% |
| Warren | 68 | 17 | 25% |
| Warwick | 252 | 57 | 23% |
| West Greenwich | 22 | 5 | 23% |
| West Warwick | 248 | 69 | 28% |
| Westerly | 145 | 38 | 26% |
| Woonsocket | 461 | 106 | 23% |
| Rhode Island State Police | 89 | 15 | 17% |
| Four Core Cities | 2,395 | 681 | 28% |
| Remainder of State | 3,189 | 817 | 26% |
| Rhode Island | 5,673 | 1,513 | 27% |

Support for Children Witnessing Domestic Violence

◆ With the help of caring adults, children who have witnessed domestic violence can develop resilience and thrive. Effective therapeutic interventions often focus on supporting parents, and can include increasing parenting skills, assisting parents in addressing mental health issues, and supporting parents' efforts to live in safe environments. Other strategies include connecting children to adult mentors, identifying and nurturing areas of strength, and encouraging children to contribute to their families or communities in a positive way.¹⁹

Domestic Homicide and Guns

◆ When firearms are present in a domestic violence situation, women are five times more likely to die.²⁰ Between 2006-2015, forty-two percent of Rhode Island women killed by intimate partners were shot to death.²¹

◆ In 2018, "red flag" legislation passed that authorizes the Supreme Court to issue "extreme risk protection orders" requiring the surrender of all firearms from persons determined to be capable of causing personal injury.²²

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

The number of domestic violence incident reports in which an arrest was made and the number of incidents in which children were present are based on the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault/Child Molestation Reporting Forms sent by Rhode Island law enforcement to the Rhode Island Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2016.

The data are only the incidents during which an arrest was made in which children were present, and do not represent the total number of children who experienced domestic violence in their homes. More than one child may have been present at an incident.

*Reports of domestic violence in Exeter are included in the Rhode Island State Police numbers. Rhode Island State Police numbers are included in the Rhode Island state totals.

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

References

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