

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. have had a parent incarcerated in jail or state or federal prison at some point in their lives.¹ 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, obesity, and depression) and educational challenges (including grade retention, placement in special education, and suspension). Parental incarceration increases children's risk for learning disabilities, ADHD, conduct problems, developmental delays, and speech problems.^{2,3,4,5}

Nationally, most children of incarcerated parents live with their other parent, a grandparent, or other relatives.⁶ Of the 1,693 parents incarcerated in Rhode Island on September 30, 2018 (including those awaiting trial), 93%

(1,568) were fathers and 7% (125) were mothers.⁷ Nationally, nearly half (48%) of incarcerated parents lived with their children one month prior to incarceration.⁸

Children of incarcerated parents are more likely than other children to be involved with the child welfare system. In the U.S., 40% of children in foster care had experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives.⁹ These children often represent complex cases for child welfare agencies, involving balancing parental rights with the safety and well-being of the child.¹⁰

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.^{11,12}

The criminal justice system disproportionately affects people of color, and in the U.S. 24% of Black children and 11% of Hispanic children will experience parental incarceration compared to 4% of White children.¹³ Of the 1,693 parents incarcerated in Rhode Island on September 30, 2018 (including those awaiting trial), 44% were White, 27% were Black, 25% were Hispanic, and 4% were of another race.¹⁴

Parents at the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI), September 30, 2018

	INMATES SURVEYED*	# REPORTING CHILDREN	% REPORTING CHILDREN	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED
Awaiting Trial	664	432	65%	990
Serving a Sentence	2,104	1,261	60%	3,087
TOTAL	2,768	1,693	61%	4,077

Source: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2018. *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 2,768 inmates awaiting trial or serving a sentence at the ACI on September 30, 2018 who answered the question on number of children, 1,693 inmates reported having 4,077 children. Forty percent of sentenced mothers and 16% of sentenced fathers had sentences that were six months or less.¹⁵
- ◆ Of the 83 sentenced mothers on September 30, 2018, 55% were serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense, 30% for a violent offense, 7% for a drug-related offense, 6% for breaking and entering, and 1% for a sex-related offense. Of the 1,178 sentenced fathers, 50% were serving sentences for a violent offense, 19% for a nonviolent offense, 13% for a sex-related offense, 12% for a drug-related offense, and 6% for breaking and entering.¹⁶
- ◆ Thirty-seven percent of incarcerated parents awaiting trial or serving a sentence on September 30, 2018 had less than a high school diploma, 47% had a high school diploma or a GED, and 15% had at least some college education.¹⁷
- ◆ A supportive family, safe and secure housing, assistance obtaining employment, medical and mental health services, and substance abuse treatment are critical to parents' successful transition to the community after incarceration and to support the well-being of their children.^{18,19}
- ◆ Families with parents with a criminal record can experience significant challenges even if the parent has never been incarcerated. A parent's criminal record is often a barrier to housing eligibility, employment opportunities, and access to public benefits. For immigrants, a conviction can lead to deportation.²⁰

Children of Incarcerated Parents

Table 30.

Children of Incarcerated Parents, Rhode Island, September 30, 2018

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	4	9	3,623	2.5
Burrillville	10	24	3,576	6.7
Central Falls	46	113	5,644	20.0
Charlestown	2	2	1,506	1.3
Coventry	22	44	7,770	5.7
Cranston	73	142	16,414	8.7
Cumberland	11	38	7,535	5.0
East Greenwich	5	16	3,436	4.7
East Providence	21	45	9,177	4.9
Exeter	5	12	1,334	9.0
Foster	2	7	986	7.1
Glocester	2	4	2,098	1.9
Hopkinton	5	8	1,845	4.3
Jamestown	2	4	1,043	3.8
Johnston	14	32	5,480	5.8
Lincoln	6	12	4,751	2.5
Little Compton	0	0	654	0.0
Middletown	6	10	3,652	2.7
Narragansett	6	12	2,269	5.3
New Shoreham	0	0	163	0.0
Newport	20	52	4,083	12.7
North Kingstown	13	41	6,322	6.5
North Providence	24	51	5,514	9.2
North Smithfield	4	6	2,456	2.4
Pawtucket	116	269	16,575	16.2
Portsmouth	5	14	3,996	3.5
Providence	403	932	41,634	22.4
Richmond	3	7	1,849	3.8
Scituate	1	2	2,272	0.9
Smithfield	6	8	3,625	2.2
South Kingstown	11	21	5,416	3.9
Tiverton	7	18	2,998	6.0
Warren	8	17	1,940	8.8
Warwick	54	106	15,825	6.7
West Greenwich	1	1	1,477	0.7
West Warwick	48	307	5,746	53.4
Westerly	18	33	4,787	6.9
Woonsocket	95	217	9,888	21.9
Unknown Residence	111	275	NA	NA
Out-of-State Residence**	69	173	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	660	1,531	73,741	20.8
Remainder of State	421	1,108	150,215	7.4
Rhode Island	1,081	2,639	223,956	11.8

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2018. 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

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- ^{3,13} Turney, K. & Goodsell, R. (2018). *Parental incarceration and children's wellbeing*. Retrieved January 11, 2019, from www.futureofchildren.org
- ⁵ 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.
- ^{6,8,10} Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2015). *Child welfare practice with families affected by parental incarceration*. Retrieved January 11, 2019, from www.childwelfare.gov
- ^{7,14,15,16,17} Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2018.

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