

Child Neglect and Abuse

DEFINITION

Child neglect and abuse is the total unduplicated number of victims of child neglect and abuse per 1,000 children. Child neglect includes emotional, educational, physical, and medical neglect, as well as a failure to provide for basic needs. Child abuse includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

SIGNIFICANCE

Children need love, affection, and nurturing from their parents and caregivers for healthy physical and emotional development. Experiencing child neglect or abuse can have lifelong consequences for a child's health, well-being, and relationships with others. Parents and caregivers are at increased risk for maltreating children if they are overwhelmed by multiple risk factors such as poverty, substance abuse, intergenerational trauma, isolation, or unstable housing.¹ Children who have been maltreated often face long-term consequences including chronic health and psychological problems. They are at increased risk for delinquency, substance use disorders, mental health problems, teen pregnancy, and impaired cognition.^{2,3} Responding to reports of child neglect and abuse and ensuring child safety are important functions of child protection systems. Focusing on prevention is equally critical and more cost-effective. In Rhode Island, if an investigation does not reveal

maltreatment but family stressors and risk factors are identified, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) refers families to community-based support services to reduce the risk of future involvement with DCYF. When maltreatment has occurred, a determination may be made that it is safe for the children to remain at home with support services provided to their family.⁴ In both cases, DCYF makes referrals to regional Family Care Community Partnership (FCCP) agencies that work with families to identify services and resources, including natural supports (persons and resources that families can access independent from formal services).⁵

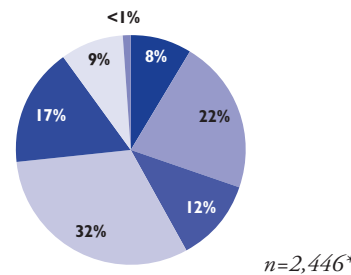
In 2023, 2,192 calls were made to the family referral line (1-888-RI-FAMILY), where families can call to access services previously available only through DCYF involvement. In 2023, over half of the calls (61%) resulted in a service referral or general information response.⁶

In 2023 in Rhode Island, there were 1,659 indicated investigations of child neglect and abuse involving 2,302 children. The rate of child neglect and abuse per 1,000 children under age 18 was substantially greater in the four core cities (15.0 victims per 1,000 children) than in the remainder of the state (8.8 victims per 1,000 children). Forty-two percent of the victims of child neglect and abuse were young children ages five and under and almost one-third (30%) were ages three and younger.⁷

Child Neglect and Abuse, Rhode Island, 2023

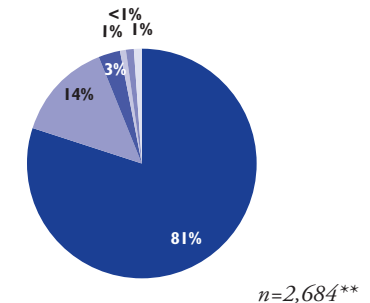
By Age of Victim*

8% (191)	■ Under Age 1
22% (537)	■ Ages 1 to 3
12% (289)	■ Ages 4 to 5
32% (782)	■ Ages 6 to 11
17% (417)	■ Ages 12 to 15
9% (225)	■ Ages 16 and Older
<1% (5)	■ Unknown



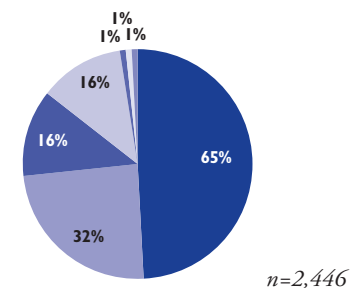
By Type of Neglect/Abuse**

81% (2,178)	■ Neglect
14% (364)	■ Physical Abuse
3% (87)	■ Sexual Abuse
1% (17)	■ Medical Neglect
<1% (8)	■ Emotional Abuse
1% (30)	■ Other



By Race/Ethnicity of Victim***

65% (1,589)	■ White
32% (784)	■ Hispanic***
16% (402)	■ Two or More Races
16% (390)	■ Black
1% (23)	■ Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
1% (21)	■ American Indian/Alaska Native
1% (21)	■ Unknown



Source: Rhode Island DCYF, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), 2023. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Notes on Pie Charts

*These data reflect an unduplicated count of child victims which includes out-of-state child victims. The number of victims is higher than the number of indicated investigations. One indicated investigation can involve more than one child victim.

**This number is greater than the unduplicated count of child victims because children often experience more than one maltreatment event and/or more than one type of abuse. Within each type of abuse, the number of child victims is unduplicated.

***Hispanic children may be included in any race category.

DCYF Child Protective Services (CPS) Hotline Calls for Reports of Neglect and/or Abuse, Investigations, * and Indicated Investigations, Rhode Island, 2014-2023

YEAR	TOTAL # UNDUPLICATED CHILD MALTREATMENT REPORTS	% AND # OF REPORTS WITH COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS	# OF INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS
2014	14,735	51% (7,573)	2,413
2015	14,402	45% (6,470)	2,227
2016	14,942	40% (5,935)	2,074
2017	15,945	42% (6,628)	2,404
2018	21,837	38% (8,296)	2,430
2019	19,401	37% (7,240)	2,249
2020	16,195	35% (5,661)	1,861
2021	14,876	34% (4,978)	1,704
2022	14,417	33% (4,742)	1,749
2023	15,670	30% (4,752)	1,700

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RIC HIST, 2014-2023.

*One investigation can be generated by multiple hotline calls. Investigations can result in a finding of indicated, unfounded, or unable to complete (as when essential party cannot be found).

★ From 2018 to 2023 in Rhode Island, the number of unduplicated child maltreatment reports decreased by 28%, the number of completed investigations decreased by 43%, and the number of indicated investigations decreased by 30%. In 2023, 36% of the 4,752 completed investigations were indicated investigations in which there is a “preponderance of evidence” that a child has been abused and/or neglected. Targeted, ongoing prevention efforts by DCYF focused on ways to help families before a CPS call is warranted is likely the reason for declines in reporting in recent years. Although the number of reports increased slightly from 2022, the number of indicated investigations has steadily decreased.^{8,9,10}

★ Of the 15,670 maltreatment reports in 2023, 64% (10,060) were classified as “information/ referrals”.¹¹ Information/referrals are reports made to the CPS Hotline that contain a concern about the well-being of a child but do not meet the criteria for an investigation. Criteria for investigation include that the victim is a minor, the alleged perpetrator is responsible for the child’s welfare, there is reasonable cause to believe that neglect or abuse exist, and there is a specific incident or pattern of incidents suggesting that harm can be identified. In 2019, DCYF began using a standardized screening tool to determine whether Hotline reports that do not meet the criteria for investigation should be referred for family assessment, which may lead to the development of a safety plan with the family, including referral and delivery of other services.¹²

Emergency Department Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths Due to Child Neglect and/or Abuse, Rhode Island, 2018-2022

YEAR	# OF EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS*	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS*	# OF DEATHS**
2018	110	25	–
2019	85	38	–
2020	100	98	–
2021	82	106	–
2022	104	102	–
TOTAL	481	369	<5

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, 2018-2022.

*The number of Emergency Department visits and the number of hospitalizations include both suspected and confirmed assessments of child neglect and abuse.

**Due to a change in data source, data for child deaths due to child neglect and/or abuse are only comparable with Factbooks since 2013.

**Data contain small numbers. Counts from 1-4 are suppressed as <5. Rates should not be calculated from counts <5. Dashes (-) represent suppressed numbers.

★ Between 2018 and 2022, there were 481 emergency department visits, 369 hospitalizations, and <5 deaths of Rhode Island children under age 18 due to child neglect and/or abuse.¹³ Nationally in 2022, 76% of child maltreatment deaths involved neglect and 42% involved physical abuse. Because a victim may have suffered more than one type of maltreatment, these categories are not mutually exclusive.¹⁴

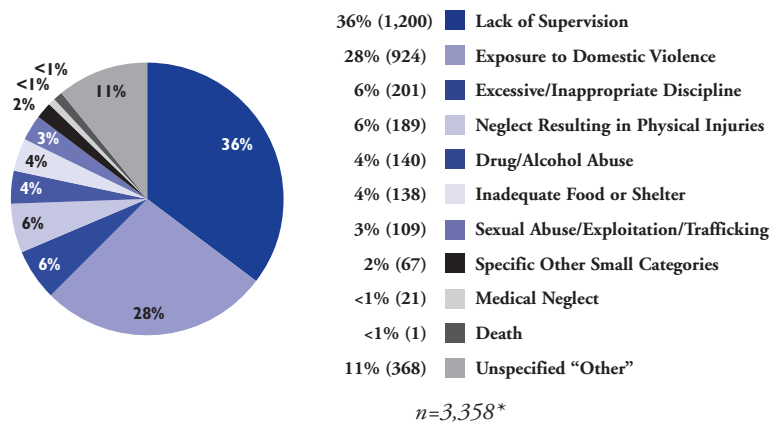
Child Neglect and Abuse in Rhode Island Communities

★ Many parents at risk of child neglect and abuse are struggling with a combination of social and economic issues including financial stress, community violence, and/or trauma. These families can benefit from programs that enhance economic resources and concrete supports including Earned Income and Child Tax Credits, high quality affordable child care, health care, safe and stable housing, as well as social supports, and knowledge of child development. Increased access to economic resources and concrete supports significantly lower the risk of child maltreatment.^{15,16}

★ In Rhode Island in 2023, 95% (2,383) of child neglect and abuse cases were perpetrated by parents of the victim.¹⁷ Rhode Island had 11.0 child victims of neglect and abuse per 1,000 children. Woonsocket (20.9 victims per 1,000 children), had the highest rate of child victims of neglect and abuse in the state.¹⁸

Child Neglect and Abuse

Indicated Allegations of Child Neglect, by Nature of Neglect, Rhode Island, 2023



Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RIC HIST, 2023.

*The total refers to indicated allegations of neglect. Some children were victims of neglect more than once. Multiple allegations may be involved in each indicated investigation.

★ Of the 3,358 indicated allegations (confirmed claims) of neglect of children under age 18 in Rhode Island in 2023, 36% involved lack of supervision. This highlights the importance of access to high-quality, affordable child care, preschool, and after-school programs.¹⁹

★ The second largest category of neglect (28%) is “exposure to domestic violence.” These are instances where the neglect is related to the child witnessing domestic violence in the home.²⁰

★ The “specific other small categories” include educational neglect (35), abandonment (8), inappropriate restraint (7), tying/close confinement (6), emotional abuse (5), emotional neglect (4), poisoning/noxious substances (1), and failure to thrive (1).²¹

Child Sexual Abuse, by Gender and Age of Victim, Rhode Island, 2023

★ In Rhode Island in 2023, there were 109 indicated allegations (confirmed claims) of child sexual abuse and five of these cases, were reported as school-based sexual molestation/intercourse. Some children were victims of sexual abuse more than once. There were 100 (92%) female victims and 9 (8%) male victims with confirmed allegations. Thirty-eight percent of all victims were under age 12.²²

★ In the majority of child sexual abuse cases, the perpetrator is a relative or person known to the victim. Sexual abuse by a stranger is less likely.²³

Early Intervention & Infants and Toddlers Involved with the Child Welfare System

★ Because maltreated infants and toddlers are at increased risk for developmental delays, federal law requires states to screen and/or refer infants and toddlers who have experienced neglect or abuse to Early Intervention (EI) for eligibility determination and services. A national study found that over 35% of infants and toddlers involved in child welfare investigations had delays or disabilities that would make them eligible for EI, but only 13% were receiving services.²⁴

★ Rhode Island specifically allows infants and toddlers who have experienced trauma, neglect, or abuse to be determined eligible for EI through “informed clinical opinion – family circumstances” even if the child does not have a measurable developmental delay or disability.²⁵

★ In Rhode Island in State Fiscal Year 2023, there were 675 children under age three who were victims of child neglect or abuse or involved with an indicated case. Of these, 149 (22%) were referred directly to EI for evaluation, 501 (74%) were referred to First Connections for a developmental screening, 12 (2%) were already referred or enrolled in EI, and 13 (2%) were not referred. Of the 178 infants and toddlers referred to EI for evaluation by DCYF or by First Connections, 134 (75%) were determined eligible for EI. Of the 675 children, there were 372 (55%) who did not receive a developmental screening or an evaluation even after referral. Of all 675 victims, 20% were determined eligible for EI.²⁶

Table 30.

Indicated Investigations of Child Neglect and Abuse, Rhode Island, 2023

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18	# OF INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS OF CHILD NEGLECT/ABUSE	INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS PER 1,000 CHILDREN	# OF VICTIMS OF CHILD NEGLECT/ABUSE	VICTIMS OF CHILD NEGLECT/ABUSE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	4,489	10	2.2	14	3.1
Bristol	2,887	21	7.3	29	10.0
Burrillville	3,229	20	6.2	33	10.2
Central Falls	6,411	72	11.2	113	17.6
Charlestown	1,161	3	2.6	12	10.3
Coventry	6,655	40	6.0	65	9.8
Cranston	15,744	106	6.7	131	8.3
Cumberland	7,550	24	3.2	26	3.4
East Greenwich	3,465	9	2.6	8	2.3
East Providence	7,886	39	4.9	81	10.3
Exeter	1,175	1	0.9	14	11.9
Foster	790	6	7.6	5	6.3
Glocester	1,896	12	6.3	8	4.2
Hopkinton	1,613	10	6.2	12	7.4
Jamestown	871	3	3.4	3	3.4
Johnston	5,119	29	5.7	39	7.6
Lincoln	4,640	32	6.9	46	9.9
Little Compton	568	0	0.0	0	0.0
Middletown	3,487	16	4.6	14	4.0
Narragansett	1,651	15	9.1	11	6.7
New Shoreham	189	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newport	3,660	36	9.8	69	18.9
North Kingstown	5,496	26	4.7	42	7.6
North Providence	5,802	68	11.7	85	14.7
North Smithfield	2,274	19	8.4	24	10.6
Pawtucket	16,455	190	11.5	241	14.6
Portsmouth	3,444	16	4.6	29	8.4
Providence	41,021	408	9.9	547	13.3
Richmond	1,627	6	3.7	7	4.3
Scituate	1,866	11	5.9	16	8.6
Smithfield	3,411	16	4.7	18	5.3
South Kingstown	4,339	24	5.5	53	12.2
Tiverton	2,723	15	5.5	14	5.1
Warren	1,826	20	11.0	21	11.5
Warwick	14,034	76	5.4	117	8.3
West Greenwich	1,251	1	0.8	1	0.8
West Warwick	5,787	80	13.8	101	17.5
Westerly	3,826	33	8.6	55	14.4
Woonsocket	9,467	143	15.1	198	20.9
Unknown Residence	NA	10	NA	1	NA
Out of State	NA	32	NA	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	73,354	813	11.1	1,099	15.0
Remainder of State	136,431	846	6.2	1,203	8.8
Rhode Island	209,785	1,659	7.9	2,302	11.0

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Data are from the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), Calendar Year 2023. These data include child victims living out-of-state and in unknown residences.

Victims of child neglect/abuse are unduplicated counts of victims with substantiated allegations of child neglect and/or abuse. More than one victim can be involved in an investigation.

An indicated investigation is an investigated report of child neglect and/or abuse for which a preponderance of evidence exists that child neglect and/or abuse occurred. An indicated investigation can involve more than one child and multiple allegations.

The denominator is the number of children under age 18 according to the U.S. Census 2020 and the numerator is an unduplicated count of child victims.

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

References

- ^{1,15} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2023). *2023/2024 prevention resource guide*. Washington, DC: Children's Bureau
- ² Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). *Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.
- ³ Strathearn L., Giannotti M., Mills R., et al. (2020). Long-term cognitive, psychological, and health outcomes associated with child abuse and neglect. *Pediatrics, 146*(4).
- ⁴ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (n.d.) The Family Services Unit. Retrieved from www.dcyf.ri.gov
- ^{5,10} Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (n.d.). *Program: Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs)*. Retrieved from www.dcyf.ri.gov
- ^{6,7,8,11,17,18,19,20,21,22} Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), 2014-2023.

(continued on page 186)