

Youth Violence

DEFINITION

Youth violence is the number of arrests of youth under age 18 in Rhode Island for violent crime 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, physical injury, or death. Violence impacts the well-being of individuals, families, schools, and communities and can generate high social and economic costs.^{1,2}

Effective youth violence prevention aims to stop youth violence from happening in the first place and requires an understanding of the factors that influence violence. Efforts to prevent youth violence should begin in early childhood and address a wide range of individual, family, and community factors. Effective violence prevention strategies include promoting nurturing family environments that support healthy development, providing high-quality early education, strengthening youth's interpersonal, emotional, and

behavioral skills, connecting youth to caring adults in the community, and creating protective environments to reduce youth exposure to violence.^{3,4}

Individual, family, and community factors often interact to put youth at risk for involvement in youth violence. Living in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty and less economic opportunity is a risk factor for becoming involved in youth violence, as is having a history of substance use, association with delinquent peers, poor academic performance, and being a victim of child maltreatment.^{5,6,7} Youth who are victims of violence are at increased risk for physical and mental health problems, academic difficulties, smoking, high-risk sexual behavior, and suicide.⁸

Nationally, 15% of high school students reported being bullied on school property during the previous year, 9% did not go to school due to safety concerns, and 7% reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property during the previous year.⁹

In 2020, less than one in 10 (8%) youth arrests were for a violent crime in the U.S., which represents a 56% decrease of violent crime arrests among youth since 2010.¹⁰ In 2022 in Rhode Island, there were 487 juvenile arrests for assault/violent offenses and 112 juvenile arrests for weapons offense.¹¹ In 2023, violent crimes made up 4% (185) of the 4,696 juvenile offenses referred to Rhode Island Family Court.¹²


Bully Status, by Gender and Grade Level, Rhode Island, 2023

	MIDDLE SCHOOL		HIGH SCHOOL	
	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE
Bullied on School Property	43%	28%	17%	15%
Bullied Electronically	37%	19%	15%	12%
Been in a Physical Fight	10%	19%	7%	12%

Source: 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis.

- ★ **Violence in schools affects individual victims and disrupts the functioning of entire schools and communities.**¹³ In Rhode Island in 2023, 12% of high school students reported not going to school due to safety concerns.¹⁴
- ★ **Bullying adversely affects all children involved, including victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of bullying behaviors. Victims of bullying are at risk of emotional, behavioral, and mental health problems. Victims of chronic bullying are at an increased risk of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts compared to their peers who are not victims of bullying.**¹⁵
- ★ **In 2022, nearly half (46%) of U.S. teens reported being the victim of cyberbullying (bullied or harassed online, on their cellphone, on social media, etc.).¹⁶ In 2023 in Rhode Island, 28% of middle school students (37% of females and 19% of males) and 14% of high school students (15% of females and 12% of males) reported being electronically bullied.¹⁷**


Youth Witnessing Violence and Youth Gun Violence

- ★ **Witnessing violence (like domestic 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.**¹⁸
- ★ **In 2018, for the first time in history, gun violence surpassed motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death for U.S. children and teens ages one to 19.¹⁹ In Rhode Island between 2018 and 2022, there were 147 emergency department visits, 17 hospitalizations, and 11 deaths of children and youth ages one to 19 attributed to firearms.²⁰**

Table 26.

Youth Violence, Rhode Island

CITY/TOWN	COMMUNITY CONTEXT		VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS, 2023		JUVENILE ARRESTS FOR VIOLENCE, 2022		
	TOTAL VIOLENT CRIME OFFENSES (ALL AGES)	TOTAL POPULATION AGES 11-17	% OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WORRY ABOUT VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL	% OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WORRY ABOUT VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL	# TOTAL VIOLENT CRIME OFFENSES	# FOR WEAPONS OFFENSES	TOTAL # FOR VIOLENT CRIME AND WEAPONS OFFENSES
	2022	2020					
Barrington	19	2,191	4%	5%	1	1	2
Bristol	37	1,290	19%	18%	6	0	6
Burrillville	52	1,467	16%	16%	11	0	11
Central Falls	169	2,662	26%	27%	17	9	26
Charlestown	22	566	15%	21%	2	0	2
Coventry	133	2,944	19%	20%	28	3	31
Cranston	216	6,786	13%	15%	18	9	27
Cumberland	83	3,185	12%	17%	13	1	14
East Greenwich	17	1,661	11%	10%	2	1	3
East Providence	141	3,229	16%	15%	9	1	10
Exeter	NA	518	10%	11%	NA	NA	NA
Foster	16	382	16%	10%	0	0	0
Glocester	25	857	16%	10%	5	0	5
Hopkinton	22	696	15%	21%	1	1	2
Jamestown	6	420	NA	2%	0	0	0
Johnston	91	2,173	26%	22%	3	3	6
Lincoln	95	1,987	15%	11%	12	1	13
Little Compton	5	283	NA	13%	0	0	0
Middletown	47	1,426	11%	9%	6	4	10
Narragansett	29	876	7%	7%	4	0	4
New Shoreham	0	82	NA	NA	0	0	0
Newport	176	1,410	16%	27%	24	9	33
North Kingstown	70	2,506	17%	11%	11	0	11
North Providence	136	2,422	23%	12%	11	5	16
North Smithfield	38	1,018	12%	12%	1	1	2
Pawtucket	603	6,682	20%	27%	57	24	81
Portsmouth	56	1,605	11%	10%	9	0	9
Providence	617	17,093	21%	27%	65	14	79
Richmond	20	703	15%	21%	6	0	6
Scituate	20	869	6%	15%	3	0	3
Smithfield	38	1,544	14%	13%	5	0	5
South Kingstown	62	2,055	5%	10%	8	1	9
Tiverton	68	1,199	34%	12%	4	1	5
Warren	67	796	19%	18%	16	6	22
Warwick	276	5,721	17%	24%	24	0	24
West Greenwich	8	550	10%	11%	4	0	4
West Warwick	215	2,220	13%	25%	15	0	15
Westerly	123	1,762	13%	18%	13	1	14
Woonsocket	453	3,716	39%	28%	53	15	68
State Police/Other	183	NA	NA	NA	20	1	21
Four Core Cities	1,842	30,153	24%	27%	192	62	254
Remainder of State	2,429	59,399	13%	15%	275	49	324
Rhode Island	4,454	89,552	16%	19%	487	112	599

Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Total violent crime offense data are from Rhode Island Department of Public Safety, Unified Crime Reporting/National Incident Based Reporting, 2022. NA indicates that the data are not available. Exeter, T.F Green International Airport, and University of Rhode Island arrest numbers are included in the State Police/Other totals. See Methodology section for all offenses included as violent crime offenses.

Total population ages 11 to 17 data are from U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2020, PCT12.

Data on high school and middle school students worrying about violence at school are from the 2022-2023 administration of *SurveyWorks*. Rhode Island Department of Education. Percentages reflect students answering frequently or almost always to the question of “how often do you worry about violence at your school.” *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 can choose to attend high school in North Kingstown or Narragansett. Rhode Island total and remainder of state include charter schools, state operated schools, and UCAP.

Juvenile arrests for violent crime and weapons offenses data are from Rhode Island Department of Public Safety, Unified Crime Reporting/National Incident Based Reporting, 2022. NA indicates that the data are not available. Exeter arrest numbers are included in the State Police/Other totals. See Methodology section for all offenses included as violent crime offenses.

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

References for Youth Violence

^{1,6} Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs. (2021). *Violence prevention: Risk and protective factors*. Retrieved March 29, 2024, from www.youth.gov

^{2,4,5} David-Ferdon, C., Vivolo-Kantor, A. M., Dahlberg, L. L., Marshall, K. J., Rainford, N., & Hall, J. E. (2016). *A comprehensive technical package for the prevention of youth violence and associated risk behaviors*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Last reviewed September 10, 2021.

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