

Youth Violence

DEFINITION

Youth violence is the number of arrests of youth under age 18 in Rhode Island for assault/violent and weapons offenses and the percentage of middle and high school students who worry about 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, and or offenders, which 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 efforts require 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, improving school connectedness, 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}

The interaction of individual, family, and community factors can often put youth at risk for involvement in youth violence. Living in neighborhoods with a high concentration 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 lawbreaking 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, 19% of high school students reported being bullied on school property during the previous year, 13% did not go to school due to safety concerns, and 9% 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 2023 in Rhode Island, there were 603 juvenile arrests for assault/violent offenses and 133 juvenile arrests for weapons offenses.¹¹ In 2024, violent crimes made up 2% (101) of the 4,052 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 and has remained the leading cause of death among children in this age group.^{19,20} In Rhode Island between 2019 and 2023, there were 131 emergency department visits, 23 hospitalizations, and 11 deaths of children and youth ages one to 19 attributed to firearms.²¹

Table 23.

Youth Violence, Rhode Island

CITY/TOWN	COMMUNITY CONTEXT		VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS, 2024		JUVENILE ARRESTS FOR VIOLENCE, 2023		
	TOTAL VIOLENT CRIME OFFENSES (ALL AGES) 2023	TOTAL POPULATION AGES 11-17 2020	% 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
Barrington	19	2,191	6%	3%	3	0	3
Bristol	50	1,290	15%	14%	1	0	1
Burrillville	52	1,467	13%	*	9	0	9
Central Falls	173	2,662	24%	23%	20	4	24
Charlestown	16	566	15%	14%	0	0	0
Coventry	161	2,944	17%	17%	34	6	40
Cranston	301	6,786	13%	17%	34	14	48
Cumberland	74	3,185	11%	14%	9	2	11
East Greenwich	26	1,661	8%	10%	1	0	1
East Providence	198	3,229	22%	20%	16	2	18
Exeter	NA	518	18%	17%	NA	NA	NA
Foster	5	382	13%	15%	0	0	0
Glocester	37	857	13%	15%	4	0	4
Hopkinton	22	696	15%	14%	5	0	5
Jamestown	10	420	NA	2%	0	0	0
Johnston	136	2,173	21%	23%	9	4	13
Lincoln	118	1,987	19%	14%	28	4	32
Little Compton	4	283	NA	5%	0	0	0
Middletown	53	1,426	10%	20%	7	0	7
Narragansett	34	876	7%	11%	5	0	5
New Shoreham	0	82	0%	0%	0	0	0
Newport	204	1,410	17%	40%	23	1	24
North Kingstown	84	2,506	8%	10%	18	2	20
North Providence	182	2,422	20%	14%	13	2	15
North Smithfield	46	1,018	6%	10%	5	0	5
Pawtucket	623	6,682	28%	28%	71	8	79
Portsmouth	41	1,605	9%	10%	11	0	11
Providence	782	17,093	18%	26%	46	21	67
Richmond	24	703	15%	14%	4	2	6
Scituate	24	869	8%	11%	2	2	4
Smithfield	75	1,544	14%	16%	19	1	20
South Kingstown	73	2,055	6%	10%	7	0	7
Tiverton	84	1,199	19%	13%	9	1	10
Warren	82	796	15%	14%	7	4	11
Warwick	363	5,721	27%	23%	52	6	58
West Greenwich	9	550	18%	17%	2	1	3
West Warwick	228	2,220	16%	31%	35	1	36
Westerly	122	1,762	15%	16%	11	3	14
Woonsocket	522	3,716	28%	25%	57	39	96
State Police/Other	299	NA	NA	NA	26	3	29
Four Core Cities	2,100	30,153	21%	26%	194	72	266
Remainder of State	2,957	59,399	14%	16%	383	58	441
Rhode Island	5,356	89,552	16%	19%	603	133	736

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, 2023. NA indicates that the data are not available. Brown University, 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 2023-2024 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. *Represents districts who had fewer than 10 students respond to the survey. Rhode Island total and remainder of state include charter schools, state operated schools, and collaboratives.

Juvenile arrests for violent crime and weapons offenses data are from Rhode Island Department of Public Safety, Unified Crime Reporting/National Incident Based Reporting, 2023. 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.

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