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.1,2 In Rhode Island in 2013, police reports indicate that children were present at 40% 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 or hearing violent incidents in their homes or families), have their lives disrupted by moving or being separated from a parent, and/or may be used by the batterer to manipulate or gain control over the victim.4 Children who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to be victims of child abuse and neglect than those who are not.5

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.6 Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to experience physical, emotional, health and learning challenges. They are more prone to have concentration and memory problems, and to have difficulty with school performance than children who do not witness domestic violence.7,8

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.9 There is a strong association between witnessing domestic violence as a child and becoming a perpetrator of domestic violence as an adult.10

Incidents of domestic violence are historically under-reported. Nationally, it is estimated that 41% of family violence incidents are not reported to police.11 Similarly, Rhode Island data may under-represent the number of domestic violence incidents witnessed by children because not all incidents are reported and children may be unwilling to admit that they witnessed the incident.12

In Rhode Island in 2013, there were 5,028 domestic violence incidents that resulted in arrests, down 9% from 5,533 incidents in 2012. Children were reported present in 40% (2,018) of incidents in 2013.13 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.14

Rhode Island police reported that children saw the domestic violence incident in 1,091 arrests and children heard the incident in 1,193 arrests during 2013. These incidents were not mutually exclusive and more than one child may have witnessed the incident.15

Rhode Island’s statewide network of six domestic violence shelters and advocacy programs provides services to victims, including shelter, transitional housing, advocacy, individual and group counseling, and education.16 During 2014, the network provided services to 8,876 individuals, including 466 children. In 2014, 275 children and 273 adults spent a total of 21,644 nights in domestic violence shelters. Fifty-three children and 44 adults lived in domestic violence transitional housing (longer-term private apartments for victims of domestic violence) during 2014.17

Source: Rhode Island Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit, 2009-2013. Includes domestic violence reports resulting from an arrest by local police and Rhode Island State Police.
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.18

◆ Rhode Island children often witness domestic violence before or during custody and visitation exchanges.19 Rhode Island is not among the 24 states with legislation that requires Family Court to provide for the safety of a child and non-offending parent during visitation with an abusive parent.20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY/TOWN</th>
<th>TOTAL # OF REPORTS</th>
<th>TOTAL # OF INCIDENTS WITH CHILDREN PRESENT</th>
<th>% WITH CHILDREN PRESENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barrington</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burrillville</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Falls</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlestown</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coventry</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranston</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Greenwich</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Providence</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exeter*</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glocester</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopkinton</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamestown</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnston</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Compton</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middletown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narragansett</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Shoreham</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Kingstown</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>31</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Providence</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Smithfield</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pawtucket</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portsmouth</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scituate</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithfield</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Kingstown</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiverton</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warwick</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Greenwich</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Warwick</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westerly</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woonsocket</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island State Police</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Core Cities</td>
<td>1,984</td>
<td>852</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remainder of State</td>
<td>3,044</td>
<td>1,166</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>5,028</td>
<td>2,018</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 30. Children Present During Domestic Violence Incidents Resulting in Arrests, Rhode Island, 2013

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, 2013 and December 31, 2013.

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

3,12,13,15 Rhode Island Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit. Based on data from Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault/Child Molestation Reporting Forms, 2009-2013.
References

References for Youth Referred to Family Court


8 Rhode Island General Laws, Sections 14-1-32.1, 14-1-32.4, 14-1-33, 14-1-51, 14-1-67.


11 Rhode Island General Laws, Sections 14-1-32.1, 14-1-32.4, 14-1-33, 14-1-51, 14-1-67.

12 Rhode Island General Laws, Sections 14-1-5; 14-1-7; 14-1-27.

13 Rhode Island General Laws, Sections 14-1-32.4, 14-1-33, 14-1-51, 14-1-67.


16 Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Training School for Youth, 2014.

17 Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Training School, Alternative Education Program, 2014.


19 Rhode Island General Laws, Sections 14-1-11 and 14-1-27.


References for Children Witnessing Domestic Violence


26 Rhode Island Department of Corrections, October 1, 2014.


References for Children of Incarcerated Parents


References


Rhode Island Department of Health. 2009-2013. Data on child deaths are from vital records and data on emergency department visits and hospitalizations are from the Center for Health Data and Analysis, Hospital Discharge Database.


Rhode Island Department of Health, 2009-2013. Data on child deaths are from vital records and data on emergency department visits and hospitalizations are from the Center for Health Data and Analysis, Hospital Discharge Database.


Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children’s Information System (RICHIST), December 31, 2012 and December 31, 2014.

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References for Children in Out-of-Home Placement


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References for Permanency for Children in DCYF Care


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References for Child Abuse and Neglect


Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Child Protective Services, 2015.

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children’s Information System (RICHIST), 2005-2014.


Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children’s Information System (RICHIST), December 31, 2012 and December 31, 2014.

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References for Permanency for Children in DCYF Care


