

Children of Incarcerated Parents

DEFINITION

Children of incarcerated parents is the number of children reported by a parent serving a sentence at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections as of September 30, 2007 per 1,000 children under age 18. The data are reported by the place of the parent's last residence before entering prison.

SIGNIFICANCE

Approximately 1.5 million children in the U.S. have a parent incarcerated in state or federal prison, and almost one-quarter (22%) of minor children with a parent in prison are under age 5.¹ Having an incarcerated parent often negatively impacts the quality of a young child's attachment to their parent, which can lead to anxiety, withdrawal, and depression.²

As a result of parental incarceration, many children experience disruption in their homes, a series of temporary caregivers or placements in foster care, financial hardship and lack of contact with their parents.³ Compared to other children, children of incarcerated parents are at greater risk for poor academic achievement, impaired emotional, behavioral and psychological development, depression, criminal behavior and incarceration.^{4,5,6}

Children of incarcerated parents remain a hidden population with little attention paid to their needs. The

children's care arrangements are often handled informally by family members, so they rarely come to the attention of child welfare agencies or other support systems.⁷ Relative caregivers often experience significant economic hardship. Relative caregivers may not receive the support or services that they need because they do not know that they are eligible, they wish to avoid the stigma attached to receiving assistance, they have been erroneously denied benefits or because they do not wish to expose their family to scrutiny by public agencies.⁸

Research shows that children who are involved with the child welfare system and have parents who are involved with the criminal justice system are some of the most complex cases child welfare agencies encounter. These children are generally exposed to more risk factors than other children, including parental substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence and extreme poverty.^{9,10}

In Rhode Island in 2007, more than two-thirds (68%) of incarcerated parents with a known in-state residence identified one of the core cities as their last city of residence. The rate of children of incarcerated parents in the core cities (23.3 per 1,000 children) is nearly 4 times the rate in the remainder of the state (6.0 per 1,000 children).¹¹



Parents at the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institutions, 2007

	INMATES SURVEYED	# REPORTING CHILDREN	% REPORTING CHILDREN	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED
Awaiting Trial	536	373	70%	816
Serving a Sentence	2,545	1,678	66%	3,704
Total Inmates	3,081	2,051	67%	4,520

Source: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 2007. **Does not include inmates who were missing responses to the question on number of children.*

◆ **Of the 3,081 inmates awaiting trial or serving a sentence who were surveyed as of September 30, 2007 and answered the question on number of children, 2,051 reported having 4,520 children. The median length of sentence of inmates who reported having children was three years for males and one year for females.¹²**

◆ **Of the 2,051 Rhode Island parents incarcerated in 2007, including those awaiting trial, 49% were White, 29% were Black, 31% were Hispanic, and 1% were American Indian, Asian or another race.¹³**

◆ **In Rhode Island, fathers are more likely to be in prison for violent crimes than mothers, who are more likely to be in prison for non-violent offenses. Of the 132 sentenced mothers, 49% were serving sentences for nonviolent offenses, 23% for a violent offenses, 22% for drug offenses, 5% for breaking and entering, and 1% for sex-related offenses. Of the 1,546 sentenced fathers, 38% were serving sentences for violent offenses, 21% for drug offenses, 18% for nonviolent offenses, 14% for sex-related offenses, and 9% for breaking and entering.¹⁴**

◆ **A successful transition to the community upon reentry should include education and training, stable housing, employment, medical assistance, and substance abuse treatment.^{15,16}**

◆ **Maintaining positive and healthy familial bonds between children and their incarcerated parents is crucial to the children's emotional well-being. Preservation of this bond can also have positive effects on the rehabilitation of incarcerated parents.¹⁷**

Children of Incarcerated Parents

Table 25.

Children of Incarcerated Parents, Rhode Island, September 30, 2007

CITY/TOWN	# OF INCARCERATED PARENTS	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED*	2000 TOTAL POPULATION UNDER AGE 18	RATE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	2	8	4,745	1.7
Bristol	11	31	4,399	7.0
Burrillville	7	12	4,043	3.0
Central Falls	58	131	5,531	23.7
Charlestown	9	16	1,712	9.3
Coventry	17	31	8,389	3.7
Cranston	70	150	17,098	8.8
Cumberland	10	18	7,690	2.3
East Greenwich	7	22	3,564	6.2
East Providence	49	112	10,546	10.6
Exeter	4	8	1,589	5.0
Foster	5	8	1,105	7.2
Glocester	6	10	2,664	3.8
Hopkinton	7	12	2,011	6.0
Jamestown	3	5	1,238	4.0
Johnston	25	58	5,906	9.8
Lincoln	4	9	5,157	1.7
Little Compton	0	0	780	0.0
Middletown	10	13	4,328	3.0
Narragansett	13	41	2,833	14.5
New Shoreham	1	3	185	16.2
Newport	40	88	5,199	16.9
North Kingstown	10	24	6,848	3.5
North Providence	32	69	5,936	11.6
North Smithfield	4	7	2,379	2.9
Pawtucket	125	265	18,151	14.6
Portsmouth	5	8	4,329	1.8
Providence	561	1,300	45,277	28.7
Richmond	4	6	2,014	3.0
Scituate	6	10	2,635	3.8
Smithfield	6	10	4,019	2.5
South Kingstown	16	31	6,284	4.9
Tiverton	3	4	3,367	1.2
Warren	6	9	2,454	3.7
Warwick	70	139	18,780	7.4
West Greenwich	2	4	1,444	2.8
West Warwick	52	101	6,632	15.2
Westerly	17	40	5,406	7.4
Woonsocket	110	259	11,155	23.2
Unknown Residence	203	434	NA	NA
Out-of-State Residence**	88	198	NA	NA
Core Cities	946	2,144	91,945	23.3
Remainder of State	441	928	155,877	6.0
Rhode Island	1,387	3,072	247,822	12.4

Note to Table

Due to a change in methodology, *Children of Incarcerated Parents* in this Factbook cannot be compared to Factbooks prior to 2007. Previous Factbooks reported data as of December 31st. The data are now reported as of September 30th. The *Children of Incarcerated Parents* rate is based upon the sentenced population only. Prior to the 2006 Factbook, the rate was based on both the sentenced and awaiting trial populations.

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2007. Offenders who were on Home Confinement and the awaiting trial population are excluded from this analysis.

*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.

** "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 excluded from this analysis.

The denominator is the total population of children under age 21 according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census.

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

References

- ¹⁷ Mumola, C. J. (2000). *Incarcerated parents and their children*. (Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 182335). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.
- ² Parke, R. D. & Clarke-Stewart, K. A. (2001). *Effects of parental incarceration on young children*. Working paper from the 2002 "From Prison to Home" conference. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Urban Institute.
- ³⁴ Travis, J., McBride, E. C. & Solomon, A. (2005). *Families left behind: The hidden costs of incarceration and reentry*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, Justice Policy Center.

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