

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 in 2006. 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

Millions of children are at risk of being exposed to domestic violence each year.¹ National surveys indicate that 80% to 90% of children in homes where there is domestic violence are aware of the abuse.² In Rhode Island in 2006, police reports indicate that children were present in 25% of domestic violence incidents resulting in arrests.³

Children are exposed to domestic violence in several ways. They may witness or hear violent events, become directly involved by trying to intervene, or experience the aftermath of violence by seeing their parent's emotional and physical injuries or damage done to their homes.⁴ Children who are exposed to domestic violence are much more likely to be victims of child abuse and neglect than those who are not. Child maltreatment and domestic violence

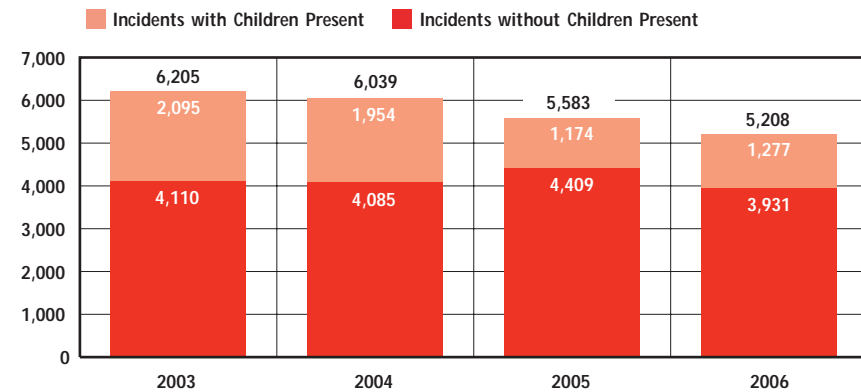
occur in an estimated 30% to 60% of families where there is some form of family violence. It is more likely that children are abused in families in which the violence against the mother is more frequent.⁵

Exposure to violence in the home can affect brain development and impairs cognitive, academic and social functioning. Children who witness domestic violence are more likely to be aggressive and to have behavioral problems. They are more prone to depression, anxiety, fear, phobias, sleep disruption, low self-esteem and concentration and memory problems.^{6,7,8}

Effective interventions for children who have witnessed domestic violence depend on collaborative working relationships among child protective services caseworkers and community organizations, including domestic violence agencies, police departments, physical and mental health care providers, early childhood programs and schools, and faith groups.⁹

Witnessing inter-parental violence increases the likelihood that individuals will perpetrate (particularly men) or be the victims of violence during dating and marriage.¹⁰ Men and women who grow up in violent homes are at increased risk for depression, other trauma-related symptoms, and for using and abusing alcohol and other drugs.^{11,12}

Domestic Violence Incidents Resulting in Arrest, Rhode Island, 2003-2006



Source: Rhode Island Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit, 2003-2006. Includes domestic violence reports resulting in an arrest from local police and Rhode Island State Police. Data for 2006 are provisional.

◆ **Between 2003 and 2006 the total number of domestic violence incidents resulting in an arrest decreased from 6,205 to 5,208. The percentage of such incidents with children present also declined from 34% in 2003 to 25% in 2006.**¹³

◆ **Rhode Island police officers use special reporting forms to document children's exposure to violence. The attending officer may check any combination of three boxes: "Were children present during the incident?" "Did children witness the incident?" "Did children hear the incident?"**¹⁴

◆ **Rhode Island's statewide network of six shelters and advocacy programs provides services to victims of domestic violence, including shelter, advocacy, counseling and education. During 2007, 317 women and 361 children spent a total of 20,123 bed nights in a domestic violence shelter. Rhode Island's domestic violence agencies provided services including therapy, individual counseling, expressive arts therapy and child care to 704 children. The shelters also conduct school-based domestic violence prevention programs.**¹⁵

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Table 26.

Domestic Violence Incidents Resulting in Arrest with Children Present, Rhode Island, 2006

CITY/TOWN	TOTAL # OF REPORTS	TOTAL # WITH CHILDREN PRESENT	% WITH CHILDREN PRESENT
Barrington	33	10	30%
Bristol	104	24	23%
Burrillville	37	13	35%
Central Falls	203	61	30%
Charlestown	40	3	8%
Coventry	181	66	36%
Cranston	338	83	25%
Cumberland	119	15	13%
East Greenwich	37	8	22%
East Providence	217	62	29%
Exeter*	NA	NA	NA
Foster	13	2	15%
Glocester	24	0	0%
Hopkinton	43	2	5%
Jamestown	12	2	17%
Johnston	82	7	9%
Lincoln	61	11	18%
Little Compton	7	1	14%
Middletown	87	33	38%
Narragansett	88	13	15%
New Shoreham	5	2	40%
Newport	169	23	14%
North Kingstown	127	30	24%
North Providence	164	31	19%
North Smithfield	37	6	16%
Pawtucket	454	90	20%
Portsmouth	77	19	25%
Providence	838	226	27%
Richmond	19	11	58%
Scituate	21	6	29%
Smithfield	75	23	31%
South Kingstown	73	32	44%
Tiverton	82	7	9%
Warren	80	26	33%
Warwick	341	99	29%
West Greenwich	13	0	0%
West Warwick	320	68	21%
Westerly	106	42	40%
Woonsocket	380	98	26%
Rhode Island State Police	101	22	22%
Core Cities	2,364	566	24%
Remainder of State	2,743	689	25%
Rhode Island	5,208	1,277	25%

Children and Domestic Violence in Rhode Island

◆ In 2006, police officers reported that children saw their parent being abused in 1,230 incidents resulting in arrest, and heard their parent being abused in 1,341 incidents resulting in arrest. These incidents were not mutually exclusive.¹⁶

◆ In 2006, children were present in 246 of the 2,017 (12%) incidents reported by police officers that did not result in an arrest.¹⁷

◆ The data under-represent the number of domestic violence incidents in which children were present, regardless of whether an arrest was made, because police reports are not fully completed in all cases.¹⁸

◆ The data under-represent domestic violence incidents in Rhode Island because many cases of domestic violence are never reported to police. In the U.S. between 1998 and 2002, it is estimated that 59% of family violence incidents were reported to police.¹⁹

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, 2006 and December 31, 2006. Data for 2006 are provisional.

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.

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

References

- ^{1,9} Bragg, H.L. (2003). *Child protection in families experiencing domestic violence*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children's Bureau, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect.
- ^{2,5,11} Children's Defense Fund. (2002). *Domestic violence and its impact on children* (Fact Sheet). Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund.
- ^{3,14,16,17,18} Rhode Island Supreme Court Domestic Violence Training and Monitoring Unit. Based on data from Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault/Child Molestation Reporting Forms received from Rhode Island law enforcement between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2006.
- ⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2007). *Child witness to domestic violence*. Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau.
- ⁶ In harm's way: *Aiding children exposed to trauma*. (2005). Denver, CO: Grantmakers in Health.
- ⁷ Edleson, J., Mbilinyi, L. & Shetty, S. (2003). *Parenting in the context of domestic violence*. San Francisco, CA: Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts.

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