

Children of Incarcerated Parents

DEFINITION

Children of incarcerated parents is the number of children reported by parents serving sentences at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections as of September 30, 2008 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 1.7 million children in the U.S. have a parent incarcerated in state or federal prison, and a quarter of minor children with a parent in prison are under age five.¹ Having an incarcerated parent can negatively impact the quality of a young child's attachment to their parent, which can lead to anxiety, withdrawal, hyper-vigilance, and depression.²

As a result of parental incarceration, children may face disruptions in their homes, temporary caregivers or placements in foster care, financial hardship and an increased risk of child abuse and neglect.³ Compared to other children, children of incarcerated parents are at greater risk for poor academic achievement, impaired emotional and behavioral development, depression, criminal behavior and incarceration.^{4,5,6}

Nationally, most children of incarcerated parents live with their other

parent (84%), a grandparent (15%), or other relatives (6%).⁷ Grandparents and other relative caregivers often experience significant economic hardship. They may not receive the support or services that they need or are entitled to 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

Children who are involved with the child welfare system and have parents who have been involved with the criminal justice system are 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

In Rhode Island in 2008, two-thirds of incarcerated parents with a known in-state residence identified one of the core cities as their last place of residence. The rate of children of incarcerated parents in the core cities (20.7 per 1,000 children) is nearly four times the rate in the remainder of the state (5.5 per 1,000 children).¹⁰



Parents at the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institutions, 2008

	INMATES SURVEYED*	# REPORTING CHILDREN	% REPORTING CHILDREN	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED
Awaiting Trial	545	385	71%	881
Serving a Sentence	2,449	1,618	66%	3,474
Total Inmates	2,994	2,003	67%	4,355

Source: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2008. *Does not include inmates who were missing responses to the question on number of children.

- ◆ Of the 2,994 inmates awaiting trial or serving a sentence who were surveyed as of September 30, 2008 and answered the question on number of children, 2,003 inmates reported having 4,355 children. The median length of sentence of inmates who reported having children was three and a half years for males and one year for females.¹¹
- ◆ Of the 2,003 Rhode Island parents incarcerated in 2008, including those awaiting trial, 47% were White, 30% were Black, 21% were Hispanic, and 1% were Native American, Asian or another race.¹²
- ◆ Of the 119 sentenced mothers, 48% were serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense, 25% for a drug offense, 20% had committed a violent offense, 5% were serving sentences for breaking and entering, and 1% for sex-related offenses. Of the 1,499 sentenced fathers, 39% were serving sentences for violent offenses, 21% for drug offenses, 16% for nonviolent offenses, 14% for sex-related offenses, and 9% for breaking and entering.¹³
- ◆ For most incarcerated parents, a supportive family, education and training, stable housing, employment assistance, medical assistance, and substance abuse treatment contribute to the well-being of their children and a successful transition to the community upon re-entry.¹⁴
- ◆ Maintaining positive and healthy familial bonds between children and their incarcerated parents is crucial to the children's emotional well-being because it can reduce the negative effects children experience as a result of the parent's absence. Preservation of this bond can also have positive effects on the rehabilitation of incarcerated parents.¹⁵

Children of Incarcerated Parents

Table 25.

Children of Incarcerated Parents, Rhode Island, September 30, 2008

CITY/TOWN	# OF INCARCERATED PARENTS	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED*	2000 TOTAL POPULATION UNDER AGE 18	RATE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	4	10	4,745	2.1
Bristol	9	25	4,399	5.7
Burrillville	11	21	4,043	5.2
Central Falls	55	113	5,531	20.4
Charlestown	7	10	1,712	5.8
Coventry	20	39	8,389	4.6
Cranston	70	139	17,098	8.1
Cumberland	14	32	7,690	4.2
East Greenwich	11	32	3,564	9.0
East Providence	36	77	10,546	7.3
Exeter	4	10	1,589	6.3
Foster	3	4	1,105	3.6
Glocester	3	3	2,664	1.1
Hopkinton	6	17	2,011	8.5
Jamestown	2	5	1,238	4.0
Johnston	27	60	5,906	10.2
Lincoln	5	9	5,157	1.7
Little Compton	0	0	780	0.0
Middletown	6	8	4,328	1.8
Narragansett	10	20	2,833	7.1
New Shoreham	2	4	185	21.6
Newport	40	89	5,199	17.1
North Kingstown	10	24	6,848	3.5
North Providence	22	41	5,936	6.9
North Smithfield	4	6	2,379	2.5
Pawtucket	105	205	18,151	11.3
Portsmouth	1	3	4,329	0.7
Providence	530	1,187	45,277	26.2
Richmond	4	6	2,014	3.0
Scituate	5	9	2,635	3.4
Smithfield	7	11	4,019	2.7
South Kingstown	14	30	6,284	4.8
Tiverton	3	4	3,367	1.2
Warren	8	18	2,454	7.3
Warwick	66	121	18,780	6.4
West Greenwich	2	4	1,444	2.8
West Warwick	43	82	6,632	12.4
Westerly	21	48	5,406	8.9
Woonsocket	88	227	11,155	20.3
Unknown Residence	255	537	NA	NA
Out-of-State Residence**	85	184	NA	NA
Core Cities	861	1,903	91,945	20.7
Remainder of State	417	850	155,877	5.5
Rhode Island	1,278	2,753	247,822	11.1

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, 2008. Offenders who were on Home Confinement and the awaiting trial population are excluded from this table.

*Data on the 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.

**Data on 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 not included in the Rhode Island, core cities or remainder of state rates.

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

References

- ¹⁷ Glaze, L. E. & Maruschak, L. M. (2008). *Incarcerated parents and their children*. (Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 222984). 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.
- ⁵ Krisberg, B. A. & Temin, C. E. (October 2001). *The plight of children whose parents are in prison*. NCCD Focus. Oakland, CA: National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

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