

Children in Single-Parent Families

DEFINITION

Children in single-parent families is the percentage of children under age 18 who live in families headed by a person – male or female – without a spouse present in the home. These numbers include "own children," defined as never-married children under age 18 who are related to the family head by birth, marriage, or adoption.

SIGNIFICANCE

According to the American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 211,762 children living with one or more of their parents in Rhode Island between 2006 and 2008. Of these, 32% (67,908) were living with an unmarried parent, an increase from 27% in 2000.^{1,2}

Children living in single-parent families are more likely to live in poverty than children living in two-parent families. Single-parent families have only one potential wage earner, compared with two potential wage earners in a two-parent family.³

Between 2006 and 2008 in Rhode Island, 80% of children living in poverty were living in single-parent families. Children in single-parent families in Rhode Island were eight times more likely to be living in poverty than those in married-couple families. Between 2006 and 2008 in Rhode

Island, 38% of children in single-parent households lived in poverty, compared to 5% of children in married-couple households.⁴

The financial barriers facing many single-parent families explain some of the differences in well-being between the children in single-parent households and those in two-parent households. Children who grow up in single-parent families (whether they were due to divorce or the parents never having been married) are at increased risk for low academic achievement and low levels of social and emotional well-being. As adults, they earn less income and are more likely to have non-marital births, be depressed, have discordant marriages and to get divorced. Parenting quality is a good predictor of children's well-being, regardless of whether they grow up with one or two parents.⁵

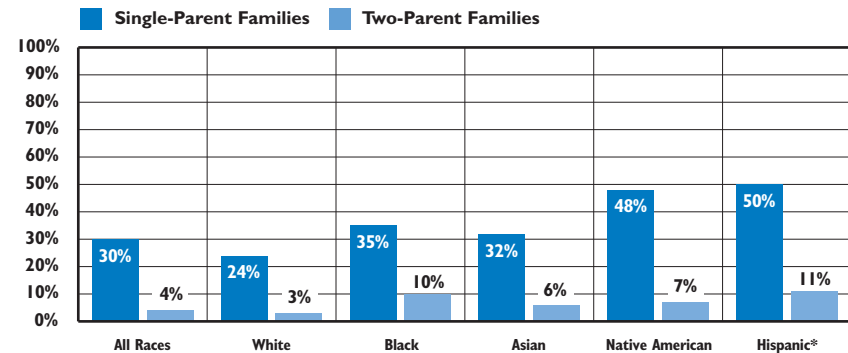
Single-Parent Families		
	2000	2008
RI	32%	34%
US	31%	32%
National Rank*		36th
New England Rank**		6th

*1st is best; 50th is worst

**1st is best; 6th is worst

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center. (n.d.). *Comparisons by topic: Children in single-parent families, 2000 and 2008*. Retrieved November 20, 2009 from www.kidscount.org/datacenter

Families With Children Under Age 18 and Income Below the Poverty Threshold by Race & Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2006-2008



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006-2008. Tables B17010, B17010A, B17010B, B17010I, C17010D and C17010C. *Hispanics may be in any race category.

◆ Hispanic and Native American single-parent families in Rhode Island are about twice as likely as White single-parent families to live in poverty. Asian and Native American married-couple families are about twice as likely and Black and Hispanic married-couple families are more than three times as likely as White married-couple families in Rhode Island to live in poverty.⁶

Economic Well-Being and Family Structure

◆ Economic status during early childhood can have a profound effect on children's health and development. Family structure is strongly correlated with economic well-being. Married-parent families generally have the highest economic status, followed by cohabiting-parent families and then by single-parent families. Divorces and exits from cohabiting relationships are often associated with declines in economic well-being. Entering marriages or cohabiting relationships (especially with the child's biological father) is usually associated with increased economic status.⁷

◆ Additional educational attainment in the first few years after a child's birth can be a pathway to increased economic well-being for some women. Married mothers are the least likely to return to school after a child's birth, followed by cohabiting mothers. Single mothers are the most likely to return to school while their children are young, although divorce or the end of a cohabiting relationship also increases the likelihood that a mother will return to school.⁸

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Table 2.

Children's Living Arrangements, Rhode Island, 2000

CITY/TOWN	ALL CHILDREN LIVING IN FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS	NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18			
		TWO-PARENT FAMILIES		SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES	
		N	%	N	%
Barrington	4,592	4,091	89%	501	11%
Bristol	4,092	3,222	79%	870	21%
Burrillville	3,737	3,077	82%	660	18%
Central Falls	4,977	2,607	52%	2,370	48%
Charlestown	1,586	1,305	82%	281	18%
Coventry	7,807	6,287	81%	1,520	19%
Cranston	15,626	11,817	76%	3,809	24%
Cumberland	7,273	6,049	83%	1,224	17%
East Greenwich	3,476	3,042	88%	434	12%
East Providence	9,682	6,919	71%	2,763	29%
Exeter	1,461	1,248	85%	213	15%
Foster	1,037	914	88%	123	12%
Glocester	2,453	2,082	85%	371	15%
Hopkinton	1,893	1,576	83%	317	17%
Jamestown	1,194	1,018	85%	176	15%
Johnston	5,440	4,303	79%	1,137	21%
Lincoln	4,895	3,930	80%	965	20%
Little Compton	740	627	85%	113	15%
Middletown	4,150	3,363	81%	787	19%
Narragansett	2,641	2,002	76%	639	24%
New Shoreham	171	139	81%	32	19%
Newport	4,835	2,723	56%	2,112	44%
North Kingstown	6,546	5,255	80%	1,291	20%
North Providence	5,411	3,973	73%	1,438	27%
North Smithfield	2,221	1,922	87%	299	13%
Pawtucket	16,525	9,537	58%	6,988	42%
Portsmouth	4,136	3,476	84%	660	16%
Providence	40,267	19,721	49%	20,546	51%
Richmond	1,867	1,590	85%	277	15%
Scituate	2,490	2,179	88%	311	12%
Smithfield	3,800	3,184	84%	616	16%
South Kingstown	5,887	4,789	81%	1,098	19%
Tiverton	3,121	2,598	83%	523	17%
Warren	2,288	1,657	72%	631	28%
Warwick	17,276	13,571	79%	3,705	21%
West Greenwich	1,368	1,198	88%	170	12%
West Warwick	6,084	4,101	67%	1,983	33%
Westerly	5,077	3,759	74%	1,318	26%
Woonsocket	10,269	5,562	54%	4,707	46%
<i>Core Cities</i>	<i>82,957</i>	<i>44,251</i>	<i>53%</i>	<i>38,706</i>	<i>47%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>145,434</i>	<i>116,162</i>	<i>80%</i>	<i>29,272</i>	<i>20%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>228,391</i>	<i>160,413</i>	<i>70%</i>	<i>67,978</i>	<i>30%</i>

Note to Table

The denominator is the number of children under age 18 living in family households according to Census 2000. A family household is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as consisting of a householder and one or more people living together in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage or adoption – it may also include others not related to the householder.

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

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

References

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