

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 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 child's attachment to their parent and can lead to anxiety, withdrawal, hyper-vigilance, and other reactive behaviors.²

As a result of parental incarceration, children may experience 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 also are at greater risk for poor academic achievement, aggressive behavior, and housing instability.^{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 necessary supports or services because they are unaware that they are eligible, they are worried about stigma attached to receiving assistance, they have previously been denied benefits or because they wish to maintain their families' privacy.⁸

Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be involved with the child welfare system.⁹ These cases 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.¹⁰

In Rhode Island in 2009, more than two-thirds (67%) 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 (18.8 per 1,000 children) is nearly four times the rate in the remainder of the state (5.1 per 1,000 children).^{11,12}

Of the 1,774 Rhode Island parents incarcerated on December 31, 2009, including those awaiting trial, 47% were White, 29% were Black, 22% were Hispanic, and 1% were Native American, Asian or another race.¹³

Parents at the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institutions, December 31, 2009

	INMATES SURVEYED*	# REPORTING CHILDREN	% REPORTING CHILDREN	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED
Awaiting Trial	513	368	72%	846
Serving a Sentence	2,138	1,406	66%	3,043
Total Inmates	2,651	1,774	67%	3,889

Source: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, December 31, 2009. *Does not include inmates who were missing responses to the question on number of children, inmates on home confinement or those from another state's jurisdiction.

- ◆ Of the 2,651 inmates awaiting trial or serving a sentence who were surveyed as of December 31, 2009 and answered the question on number of children, 1,774 inmates reported having 3,889 children. The median length of sentence of inmates who reported having children was four years for males and one and a half years for females.¹⁴
- ◆ Of the 83 sentenced mothers on December 31, 2009, 37% were serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense, 30% for a violent offense, 20% for a drug offense, 11% for breaking and entering, and 1% for sex-related offenses. Of the 1,323 sentenced fathers, 42% were serving sentences for violent offenses, 19% for drug offenses, 15% for nonviolent offenses, 15% for sex-related offenses, and 9% for breaking and entering.¹⁵
- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2009, 63% of the incarcerated parents awaiting trial or serving a sentence had less than a high school degree and 8% had less than a ninth-grade education. Thirty percent of the parents awaiting trial or serving a sentence had a high school diploma or a GED and 7% had some college education.¹⁶ Inadequate education, poor housing, unemployment and poor health put parents at risk of incarceration.¹⁷
- ◆ For most incarcerated parents, a supportive family, education, job training, stable housing, employment assistance, medical assistance and substance abuse treatment support the well-being of their children and their successful transition to the community after incarceration.¹⁸
- ◆ Maintaining positive and healthy familial bonds between children and their incarcerated parents is crucial to 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 also can have positive effects on the rehabilitation of incarcerated parents.¹⁹

Children of Incarcerated Parents

Table 28.

Children of Incarcerated Parents, Rhode Island, September 30, 2009

CITY/TOWN	# OF INCARCERATED PARENTS	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED*	2000 TOTAL POPULATION UNDER AGE 18	RATE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	2	6	4,745	1.3
Bristol	13	27	4,399	6.1
Burrillville	6	11	4,043	2.7
Central Falls	48	99	5,531	17.9
Charlestown	5	6	1,712	3.5
Coventry	23	38	8,389	4.5
Cranston	77	148	17,098	8.7
Cumberland	14	28	7,690	3.6
East Greenwich	9	34	3,564	9.5
East Providence	35	93	10,546	8.8
Exeter	3	10	1,589	6.3
Foster	1	1	1,105	0.9
Glocester	4	7	2,664	2.6
Hopkinton	2	8	2,011	4.0
Jamestown	1	2	1,238	1.6
Johnston	17	44	5,906	7.5
Lincoln	2	3	5,157	0.6
Little Compton	0	0	780	0.0
Middletown	3	6	4,328	1.4
Narragansett	7	14	2,833	4.9
New Shoreham	1	3	185	16.2
Newport	26	55	5,199	10.6
North Kingstown	11	27	6,848	3.9
North Providence	25	51	5,936	8.6
North Smithfield	3	7	2,379	2.9
Pawtucket	100	205	18,151	11.3
Portsmouth	3	5	4,329	1.2
Providence	463	1,081	45,277	23.9
Richmond	3	7	2,014	3.5
Scituate	4	5	2,635	1.9
Smithfield	7	13	4,019	3.2
South Kingstown	9	22	6,284	3.5
Tiverton	4	7	3,367	2.1
Warren	6	10	2,454	4.1
Warwick	59	95	18,780	5.1
West Greenwich	4	6	1,444	4.2
West Warwick	48	88	6,632	13.3
Westerly	22	46	5,406	8.5
Woonsocket	84	200	11,155	17.9
Unknown Residence	242	528	NA	NA
Out-of-State Residence**	82	183	NA	NA
Core Cities	769	1,728	91,945	18.8
Remainder of State	385	790	155,877	5.1
Rhode Island	1,154	2,518	247,822	10.2

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, 2009. Offenders who were on home confinement and the awaiting trial population are excluded from this table.

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

*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. (2009). *Parents in prison and their minor children*. (Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 222984). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.
- ² Nesmith, A. & Ruhland, E. (2008). Children of incarcerated parents: Challenges and resiliency in their own words. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30, 1119-1130.
- ³ Phillips, S. D., Dettlaff, A. J. & Baldwin, M. J. (2010). An exploratory study of the range of implications of families' criminal justice system involvement in child welfare cases. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 32, 544-550.

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