

Homeless Children

DEFINITION

Homeless children is the number of Rhode Island children under 13 years old who received emergency housing services at emergency homeless shelters and domestic violence shelters between July 1, 2002 and June 30, 2003.

SIGNIFICANCE

Poverty, low wages, lack of affordable housing and domestic violence are factors in family homelessness.^{1,2,3} With a large percentage of family income going toward rent, any interruption in income or unexpected expense can place families at risk of homelessness.⁴ The shortage of affordable apartments and the dwindling availability of subsidized housing have caused many Rhode Island families to double-up, resulting in overcrowded and unstable living conditions. Almost half of families (43%) with children in the Rhode Island shelter system had been doubled up with family members or friends just before moving to the shelter.⁵

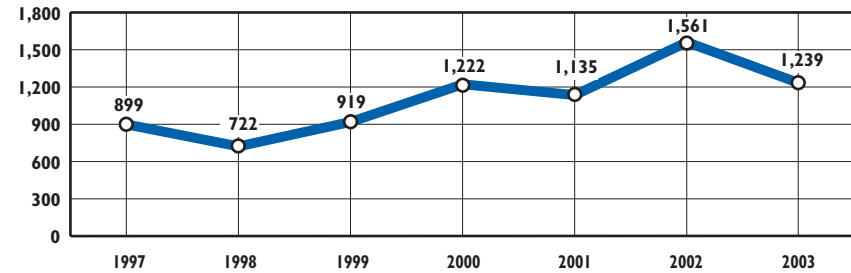
Homeless children are more likely to get sick; develop mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression; have academic problems, including high rates of school mobility and higher rates of learning disabilities diagnoses; and be victims of violence and exhibit delinquent and aggressive behavior than children who are not

homeless.^{6,7} Homeless children also go hungry at twice the rate of other children and are likely to experience illnesses such as stomach problems, ear infections, and asthma at higher rates.⁸ Infants, toddlers and preschoolers who are homeless develop more slowly and may develop emotional problems serious enough to require professional care.⁹

In 2003 in Rhode Island, families represent 40% of the population receiving emergency shelter.¹⁰ More than two out of three families (68%) entering the emergency shelter system in Rhode Island were headed by a single parent, and 91% of families with children had income below \$15,000 per year.¹¹

Between July 1, 2002 and June 30, 2003, 1,450 children under age 18 received shelter from Rhode Island's emergency shelter system.¹² Nearly half, 697 (48%) were age 5 or under, 542 (37%) were ages 6 to 12, and 211 (15%) were ages 13 to 17.¹³ Youth between the ages of 13 and 17 are only admitted into the emergency shelter system if accompanied by a parent or other adult.

Children Under Age 13 Living in Shelters, Rhode Island, 1997 – 2003



Source: Rhode Island Emergency Shelter Information Project 1997 – 2003. Providence, RI: Emergency Food and Shelter Board.

- ◆ In Rhode Island, 1,239 children under age 13 received emergency housing in a homeless shelter or a domestic violence shelter.¹⁴
- ◆ While fewer children are staying in shelters, the number of families seeking emergency shelter has increased 6% from 2002.¹⁵
- ◆ The average length of stay in shelters in 2003 was 46 nights, an increase from 34 nights in 2002.¹⁶

Homeless Children and Domestic Violence

- ◆ Nationally, approximately half of all women and children experiencing homelessness are fleeing domestic violence. Lack of affordable housing and long waiting lists for assisted housing mean that when many women consider leaving an abusive relationship they must choose between staying with their abuser and ending up homeless.¹⁷
- ◆ Among female-headed families seeking emergency shelter in Rhode Island in 2003, the most common reasons for needing shelter were domestic violence (40%) and housing costs (23%).¹⁸
- ◆ In 2003, approximately 873 children received services from Rhode Island's six domestic violence shelters. A total of 377 children spent time in a domestic violence shelter during the same year.¹⁹