

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 Census Bureau, there were 243,667 children living in Rhode Island in 2004.¹ Between 2000 and 2004 there was a 23% increase in the percentage of children growing up in single-parent households.^{2,3} In 2004, 34% of children lived with a single parent, compared to 27% in 2000.^{4,5} Fifty-seven percent of children lived with their parents in a married-couple household and the remainder of children lived with relatives (7%), unrelated adults (1%), and less than 1% lived in non-family households.⁶

Children living in single-parent families are at increased risk of living in poverty compared to children living in two-parent families. Single-parent families have only one wage earner, in contrast to two potential wage earners in a two-parent family. Single-parent families do not benefit from the same

economies of scale that two-adult earner households receive for expenses such as rent, utilities and food.⁷

In Rhode Island in 2004, 86% of all poor children lived in single-parent families.⁸

The financial barriers facing many single-parent families explain some of the differences between the well-being of children in single-parent households and those in two-parent households.⁹ Children in single-parent families are at an increased risk for low academic achievement, low levels of cognitive, social and emotional well-being, diminished future earnings, and increased levels of depression and stress. Regardless of family structure, the quality of parenting is one of the best predictors of a child's well-being.¹⁰

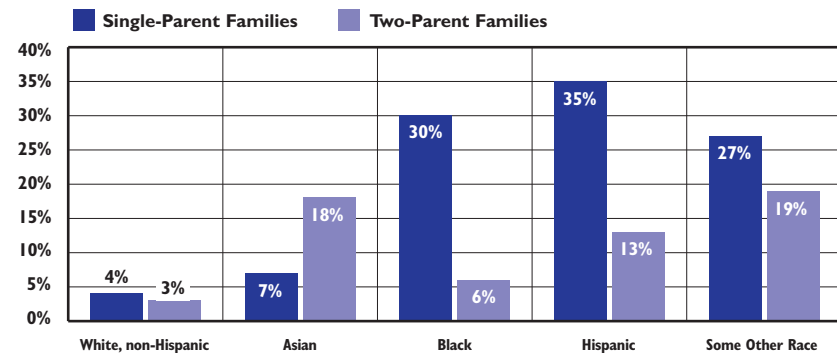
Single-Parent Families		
	2000	2004
RI	27%	34%
US	25%	25%
National Rank*		48th
New England Rank**		6th

*1st is best; 50th is worst

**1st is best; 6th is worst

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 American Community Survey, Table B09003 and U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 American Community Survey, Supplementary Survey Summary, Table PO13.

Families with Income Below the Poverty Threshold, by Race & Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2004



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2004, Tables B17010B, B17010D, B01701E, B17010H, B17010I.

- ◆ In Rhode Island in 2004, single-parent Black and Hispanic families were at least five times more likely than White and Asian families to live below the federal poverty threshold.¹¹
- ◆ The number of caring adults a child lives with is associated with the parental, economic and community resources available to that child's well-being.¹² In 2004 in Rhode Island, 57% of children lived in a married-couple family and 7.5% lived in a household where the head of household had an unmarried partner living in the house.¹³
- ◆ Children who grow up in single-parent households are more likely to have non-marital births, have discordant marriages and higher rates of divorce.¹⁴
- ◆ Findings from a national longitudinal study conducted by Princeton University, *Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing*, confirm that unemployment, poor mental health, substance abuse and violence are prevalent among unmarried parents and may present a barrier to marriage.¹⁵

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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 18 YEARS			
		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 the census. 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. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Census 2000.

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

References

- ^{1,2,4,6} U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2004. Table B09003.
- ^{3,5} U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2000. Table P013.
- ⁷ Thomas, A. & Sawhill, I. (2005). For love and money? The impact of family structure on family income. In S. McLanahan, E. Donahue & R. Haskins (Eds.), *The Future of Children: Vol. 15. Marriage and Child Wellbeing* (No. 2, 57-74). Princeton University.
- ⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2004. Table B17006.
- ^{9,10,12,14} Amato, P. (2005). The impact of family formation change on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation. In S. McLanahan, E. Donahue & R. Haskins (Eds.), *The Future of Children: Vol. 15. Marriage and Child Wellbeing* (No. 2, 75-96). Princeton University.
- ¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2004. Tables B17010B, B17010D, B17010F, B17010H & B17010I.
- ¹³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2004. Table B09008.
- ¹⁵ *Barriers to marriage among fragile families*. (Fragile Families Research Brief, No. 16). (2003). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing and New York, NY: Columbia University, Social Indicators Survey Center.