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## Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to release new publication *Child Neglect and Abuse in Rhode Island: Prevention and Support for Children and Families*

*In 2021, 81% (2,281) of child neglect and abuse cases in Rhode Island were classified as neglect, highlighting the importance of providing resources and supports to families who are overwhelmed by poverty, trauma, and other risk factors to prevent neglect and abuse.*

**Providence, RI (March 28, 2022):** Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its newest publication, *Child Neglect and Abuse in Rhode Island: Prevention and Support for Children and Families*, on Tuesday, March 29, 2022, from 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. virtually via Zoom. Featured speakers will include **Elizabeth Burke Bryant**, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and **Kevin Colman**, Senior Director, Global Philanthropy and Social Impact at Hasbro Children’s Fund. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst **Kelsey Bala, MPH** will share findings from the *Issue Brief*.

Reflections will be shared from the following panel: **Kevin Aucoin**, Acting Director of DCYF; **Jennifer Griffith**, Child Advocate at the Office of the Child Advocate; **Brenda Alejo**, Director of Child and Family Services at Parent Support Network; **Katie Gonzalez**, Healing Mother & Baby Manager and Certified Peer Recovery Specialist-Community Health at Parent Support Network; and **Dr. Mary Archibald**, SAO Social Worker/Truancy Officer at Providence Public Schools.

### **Child Neglect and Abuse: The Consequences and How to Prevent Them**

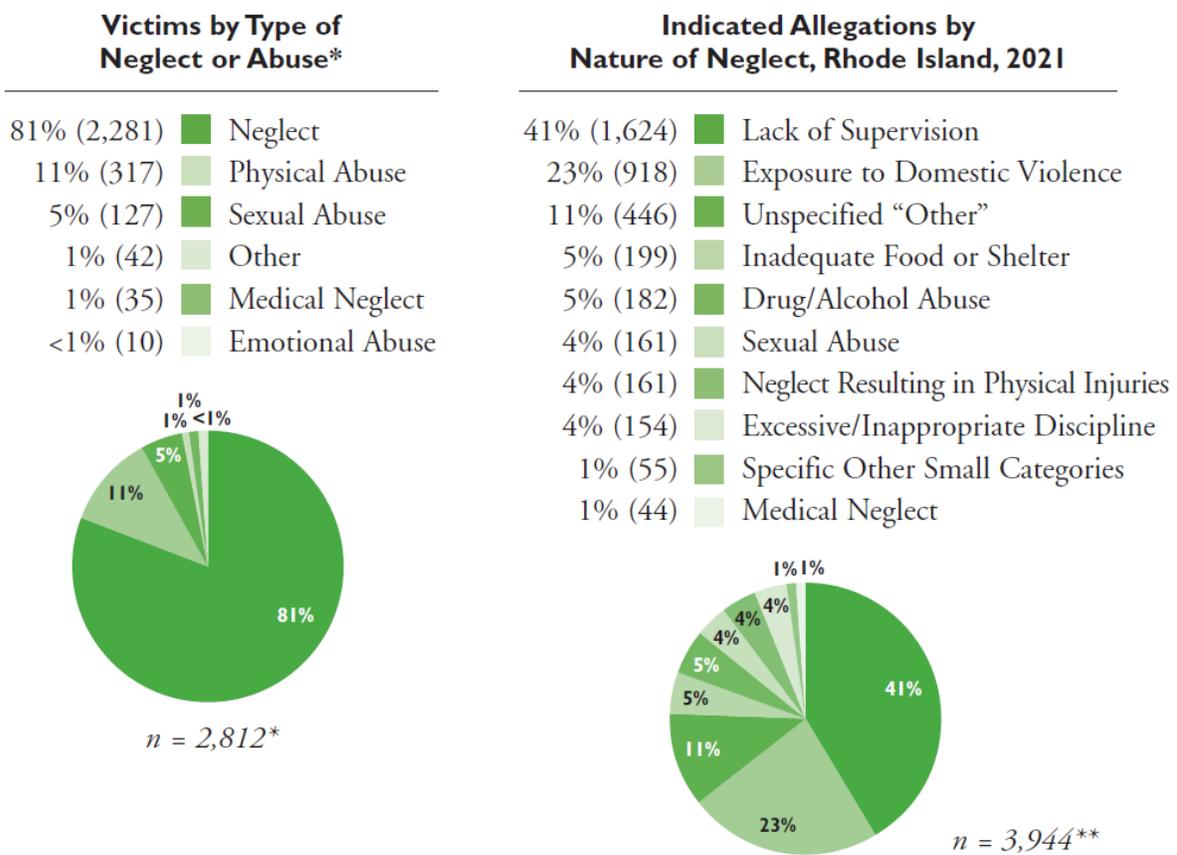
Children need love, affection, and nurturing from their parents and caregivers for healthy physical and emotional development from birth through adolescence. However, parents and caregivers may have difficulty providing this support and may be at increased risk of maltreating their children if they are overwhelmed by multiple risk factors such as poverty, substance abuse, intergenerational trauma, isolation, or unstable housing.

Experiencing child neglect or abuse can have lifelong consequences for a child’s health, well-being, and their relationships with others. They are at increased risk for delinquency, substance abuse, mental health problems, teen pregnancy, and impaired cognition. It is therefore imperative that we provide the necessary resources and supports to families who are living in poverty or under other stressors, to prevent child neglect and abuse and the negative consequences to children, families, and communities.

“All children deserve to have their basic needs met in normal times and in times of crisis,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “The devastating effects of the pandemic fell on the shoulders of our most vulnerable children and families. We saw increases in emergency department visits and hospitalizations due to child neglect and abuse. Now more than ever, we need to ensure that we provide the funding to support the community-based providers that provide the mental health services, prevention services, and Early Intervention services children need to be safe and supported.”

From 2019 to 2020, the number of emergency department visits due to child neglect and/or abuse increased from 88 to 102, and during that same period, the number of hospitalizations increased from 40 to 98.

### Child Neglect and Abuse, Rhode Island, 2021



- **In 2021, 81% (2,281) of child neglect and abuse cases in Rhode Island were classified as neglect.** Of the 3,944 indicated allegations (confirmed claims) of neglect of children under age 18, 41% involved lack of supervision and 23% involved exposure to domestic violence.
- This highlights the importance of access to high-quality, affordable child care, preschool, and after-school programs as well as domestic violence prevention.

## **Children at Greatest Risk of Child Neglect and Abuse**

- In 2021 in Rhode Island, there were 1,655 indicated investigations of child neglect and abuse involving 2,520 children. The rate of child neglect and abuse per 1,000 children under age 18 was almost twice as high in the four core cities of Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket (16.5 victims per 1,000 children), where the **child poverty** rate is the highest, as in the remainder of the state (8.7 victims per 1,000 children).
- Nationally and in Rhode Island, **very young children** are more likely to experience neglect and abuse than older children. Child neglect and abuse that occurs during the first three years often disrupts the development of trusting, secure relationships, and infants and young children who have been maltreated need special attention and services to get on track for positive development. In 2021, almost half (43%) of the victims of child neglect and abuse were young children ages five and younger and one-third (32%) were ages three and younger.
- Nationally, Black and Native American children are involved in the child welfare system at much higher rates than white children. Latino and certain Asian groups are also overrepresented. This disproportionality exists at multiple decision points in the child welfare system from reports of suspected neglect/abuse to removal to placement types to achieving permanency.
  - While we do not know the exact causes of this disproportionality, **structural racism** (e.g., policies that have resulted in higher poverty, housing segregation, or lower wealth in Communities of Color), **institutional racism** (e.g., policies within child welfare that disproportionately place children of one racial group into specific placement types), and **racial bias and discrimination** (e.g., lack of understanding of different cultural practices or implicit beliefs held by workers about different racial or ethnic groups) all contribute to worse outcomes for Children of Color involved with the child welfare system.

"For many years, neglect and abuse cases have been predominantly instances of neglect," said Kelsey Bala, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "This *Issue Brief* highlights the fact that neglect often occurs because of lack of equitable access to social and economic services and supports. We must act with urgency to provide the resources and supports that Rhode Island families need, so we can prevent child neglect and abuse and the negative consequences to children, families, and communities."

## **Recommendations**

"The *Issue Brief* provides excellent data and information that supports the importance of prevention," said Kevin Aucoin, Acting Director of the RI Department of Children, Youth & Families. "The recommendations provide a blueprint on how we can support the healthy physical and emotional development of our children."

The *Issue Brief* provides the following key recommendations to prevent child neglect and abuse and to support children and families involved in the child welfare system:

- Prevent and reduce child neglect and abuse by expanding the use of **evidence-based and trauma-informed programming** for young children and families at risk of becoming involved with the child welfare system.
- **Implement Rhode Island's Families First plan** which focuses on prevention and allows child welfare funds to be used to support the mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and in-home parenting skill training needed to prevent child neglect and abuse.
- **Fund peer mentors** who can provide families at risk of child welfare involvement due to family stressors with information, emotional support, and help connecting to needed services.
- **Ensure the community-based system of care that keeps children out of DCYF care has adequate funding** to support children and their families who are at-risk of entering the child welfare system and who have entered the child welfare system (e.g., FCCPs).
- **Address the workforce crisis** that has caused staffing shortages at community-based agencies that provide prevention and other critical services by raising rates that have not kept pace with the cost of providing services.
- **Ensure that there is a full, continuous, seamless behavioral health system** for children and their parents.
- **Provide outreach to pregnant and parenting mothers who use substances** to offer treatment and prevent newborns' substance exposure and child neglect and abuse.
- **Ensure that screening for substance use among pregnant mothers is universal and equitable.**
- **Fund evidence-based family home visiting programs**, which research shows help to prevent and reduce child maltreatment and can reduce child fatalities from neglect and abuse.
- **Increase Medicaid rates for Early intervention and First Connections** so programs can recruit and retain skilled staff and families have timely access to these services for their infants and toddlers.
- **Implement a specialized social-emotional screening and evaluation tool** to be used when assessing the mental health needs of infants and young children involved in a substantiated case of neglect or abuse.
- **Ensure that high-quality early care and education is accessible and affordable** to all families who need it.
- **Improve Rhode Island's paid family leave program** by increasing the wage replacement rate and extending the number of weeks to 12.
- **Increase the supply of affordable housing.**
- **Recognize and address the interconnectedness of domestic violence, child neglect and abuse, and community violence and take steps to prevent violence** in all these forms by reducing social isolation and providing needed economic and community supports.
- **Address the implicit racial bias and discrimination, as well as the institutional and structural racism** that contribute to the over-representation of Children of Color in the child welfare system.
- **Regularly analyze data disaggregated by race and ethnicity** at all decision points in the child welfare system to identify any points where disproportionality exists or is introduced and disseminate the data broadly.

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*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children with a core focus on equity.*