

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 an unmarried person of any gender regardless of whether both parents live in the home but are unmarried or if only one parent lives in the home. These numbers include “own children” defined as never-married, under age 18, and related to the family head by birth, marriage, or adoption.

SIGNIFICANCE

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, there were 190,864 children living with one or more parents in Rhode Island between 2017 and 2021. Of these, 35% (66,397) were living with an unmarried parent, down from 36% of children between 2012 and 2016.^{1,2}

Between 2017 and 2021, 76% of children living in poverty in Rhode Island were living in single-parent families. Children in single-parent families in Rhode Island were five times more likely to be living in poverty than those in married-couple families. Between 2017 and 2021 in Rhode Island, 32% of children in single-parent families lived in poverty, compared to 6% of children in married-couple families.³

Single-parent families led by mothers were more likely to live in poverty than single-parent families led by fathers.⁴ Between 2017 and 2021, the median

family income for married two-parent families (\$116,567) was twice that of male-headed single-parent families (\$56,827) and more than three times that of female-headed single-parent families (\$35,658).⁵

The financial hardship, and associated stress of single parenthood can contribute to differences in the socioeconomic well-being of children in single-parent households compared to those in two-parent households.⁶ Increasing parents’ education levels can make a significant difference in their earning power. Single mothers with associate degrees earn an average of \$152,927 more over their lifetimes than those with high school diplomas, and single mothers with bachelor’s degrees earn \$296,044 more. Increasing the incomes of low-income families with young children under age six by \$3,000 per year can improve long-term outcomes for their children.⁷ Supports like child care assistance, paid family leave, and paid sick time are also vital supports for single parents and their children.⁸

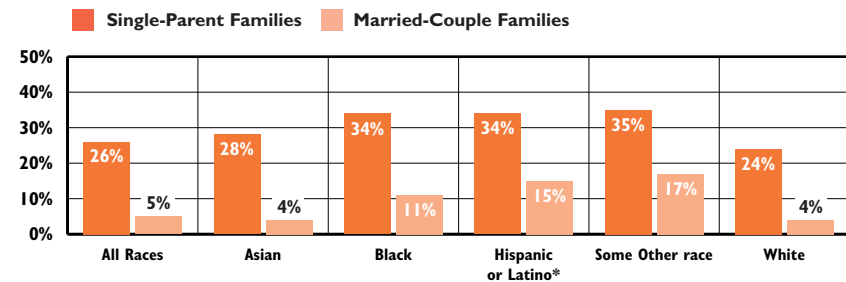
Single-Parent Families		
	2011	2021
RI	38%	37%
US	35%	34%
National Rank*		41st
New England Rank**		6th

*1st is best; 50th is worst

**1st is best; 6th is worst

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, datacenter.kidscount.org

Families With Children Under Age 18 and Income Below the Poverty Threshold, by Race & Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2017-2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021. Tables B17010, B17010A, B17010B, B17010D, B17010F, B17010I. *Hispanic or Latino may be in any race category.

◆ **Hispanic and Black single-parent families in Rhode Island are almost one and a half times as likely as white single-parent families to live in poverty. Hispanic and Black married-couple families are more likely than white and Asian married-couple families in Rhode Island to live in poverty.⁹**

Family Structure and Child Well-Being

◆ **In the United States, one in four parents living with a child is unmarried (25%). This marks a dramatic change from 50 years ago, when fewer than one in 10 parents living with their children was unmarried (7%). At the same time, the profile of unmarried parents has shifted so that now 35% of all unmarried parents are living with a partner.¹⁰**

◆ **Children in the U.S. live in a variety of family structures. Among those who live with at least one of their biological parents, 59% live in families with only biological parent(s) and full sibling(s), and 41% live in families with single parents, stepparents, stepsiblings, and/or half siblings.¹¹**

◆ **After increasing for several decades, the proportion of births to unmarried families in the U.S. has decreased and has been close to 40% since 2009.^{12,13} Babies born to cohabiting couples comprise 25% of all births and 60% of nonmarital births in the U.S., and they account for nearly the entire increase in nonmarital births.¹⁴**

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Table 3.

Children's Living Arrangements, Rhode Island, 2010

CITY/TOWN	CHILDREN LIVING IN HOUSEHOLDS	CHILDREN WHO ARE A HOUSEHOLDER OR SPOUSE		CHILDREN LIVING WITH NON-RELATIVES		CHILDREN LIVING WITH OTHER RELATIVES		CHILDREN LIVING IN MARRIED-COUPLE FAMILIES		CHILDREN LIVING WITH GRANDPARENTS		CHILDREN LIVING IN SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Barrington	4,597	2	<1%	31	1%	15	0%	3,871	84%	85	2%	593	13%
Bristol	3,621	1	<1%	37	1%	51	1%	2,564	71%	225	6%	743	21%
Burrillville	3,548	0	0%	110	3%	26	1%	2,353	66%	232	7%	827	23%
Central Falls	5,634	3	<1%	90	2%	209	4%	2,159	38%	429	8%	2,744	49%
Charlestown	1,506	0	0%	15	1%	20	1%	1,059	70%	106	7%	306	20%
Coventry	7,762	2	<1%	148	2%	72	1%	5,343	69%	549	7%	1,648	21%
Cranston	16,262	5	<1%	226	1%	324	2%	10,462	64%	1,027	6%	4,218	26%
Cumberland	7,535	0	0%	97	1%	53	1%	5,651	75%	334	4%	1,400	19%
East Greenwich	3,436	0	0%	21	1%	13	0%	2,889	84%	71	2%	442	13%
East Providence	9,100	2	<1%	127	1%	154	2%	5,329	59%	675	7%	2,813	31%
Exeter	1,300	0	0%	23	2%	16	1%	996	77%	82	6%	183	14%
Foster	986	0	0%	24	2%	10	1%	741	75%	69	7%	142	14%
Glocester	2,098	0	0%	39	2%	26	1%	1,581	75%	137	7%	315	15%
Hopkinton	1,845	0	0%	46	2%	24	1%	1,327	72%	113	6%	335	18%
Jamestown	1,043	0	0%	3	0%	5	0%	799	77%	49	5%	187	18%
Johnston	5,473	2	<1%	90	2%	114	2%	3,591	66%	380	7%	1,296	24%
Lincoln	4,743	3	<1%	61	1%	52	1%	3,270	69%	211	4%	1,146	24%
Little Compton	654	0	0%	5	1%	1	0%	528	81%	42	6%	78	12%
Middletown	3,634	3	<1%	45	1%	38	1%	2,606	72%	166	5%	776	21%
Narragansett	2,240	2	<1%	35	2%	25	1%	1,533	68%	105	5%	540	24%
New Shoreham	163	0	0%	1	1%	1	1%	111	68%	4	2%	46	28%
Newport	4,060	2	<1%	66	2%	56	1%	2,034	50%	204	5%	1,698	42%
North Kingstown	6,322	1	<1%	57	1%	49	1%	4,639	73%	247	4%	1,329	21%
North Providence	5,481	0	0%	81	1%	131	2%	3,266	60%	378	7%	1,625	30%
North Smithfield	2,456	0	0%	40	2%	13	1%	1,831	75%	96	4%	476	19%
Pawtucket	16,550	17	<1%	239	1%	460	3%	7,488	45%	1,228	7%	7,118	43%
Portsmouth	3,940	2	<1%	47	1%	24	1%	2,977	76%	172	4%	718	18%
Providence	41,497	41	<1%	632	2%	1,663	4%	16,931	41%	3,094	7%	19,136	46%
Richmond	1,836	0	0%	32	2%	16	1%	1,437	78%	104	6%	247	13%
Scituate	2,272	0	0%	24	1%	22	1%	1,731	76%	139	6%	356	16%
Smithfield	3,615	2	<1%	46	1%	29	1%	2,802	78%	164	5%	572	16%
South Kingstown	5,364	0	0%	81	2%	31	1%	3,951	74%	248	5%	1,053	20%
Tiverton	2,998	1	<1%	41	1%	20	1%	2,109	70%	162	5%	665	22%
Warren	1,935	4	<1%	42	2%	19	1%	1,124	58%	136	7%	610	32%
Warwick	15,795	3	<1%	308	2%	223	1%	10,476	66%	1,109	7%	3,676	23%
West Greenwich	1,468	2	<1%	22	1%	13	1%	1,131	77%	79	5%	221	15%
West Warwick	5,746	1	<1%	151	3%	121	2%	3,118	54%	365	6%	1,990	35%
Westerly	4,787	4	<1%	82	2%	83	2%	3,012	63%	269	6%	1,337	28%
Woonsocket	9,842	10	<1%	203	2%	176	2%	4,237	43%	683	7%	4,533	46%
Four Core Cities	73,523	71	<1%	1,164	2%	2,508	3%	30,815	42%	5,434	7%	33,531	46%
Remainder of State	149,621	44	<1%	2,304	2%	1,890	1%	102,242	68%	8,534	6%	34,607	23%
Rhode Island	223,144	115	<1%	3,468	2%	4,398	2%	133,057	60%	13,968	6%	68,138	31%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010.

The denominator is the number of children under age 18 living in family households according to Census 2010. 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 include others not related to the householder.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

References

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