

Child Neglect and Abuse

DEFINITION

Child neglect and abuse is the total unduplicated number of victims of child neglect and abuse per 1,000 children. Child neglect includes emotional, educational, physical, and medical neglect, as well as a failure to provide for basic needs. Child abuse includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

SIGNIFICANCE

Children need love, affection, and nurturing from their parents and caregivers for healthy physical and emotional development. Experiencing child neglect or abuse can have lifelong consequences for a child's health, well-being, and relationships with others. Parents and caregivers are at increased risk for maltreating children if they are overwhelmed by multiple risk factors such as poverty, substance abuse, intergenerational trauma, isolation, or unstable housing.¹ Children who have been maltreated often face long-term consequences including chronic health and psychological problems. They are at increased risk for delinquency, substance use disorders, mental health problems, teen pregnancy, and impaired cognition.^{2,3} Responding to reports of child neglect and abuse and ensuring child safety are important functions of child protection systems. Focusing on prevention is equally critical and more cost-effective. In Rhode Island, if an investigation does not reveal

maltreatment but family stressors and risk factors are identified, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) refers families to community-based support services to reduce the risk of future involvement with DCYF. When maltreatment has occurred, a determination may be made that it is safe for the children to remain at home with support services provided to their family.⁴ In both cases, DCYF makes referrals to regional Family Care Community Partnership (FCCP) agencies that work with families to identify services and resources, including natural supports (persons and resources that families can access independent from formal services).⁵ In 2020, DCYF established a referral line (1-888-RI-FAMILY) through the Support and Response Unit (SRU) that families in the community can call to access home and community-based services previously available only through DCYF involvement.⁶

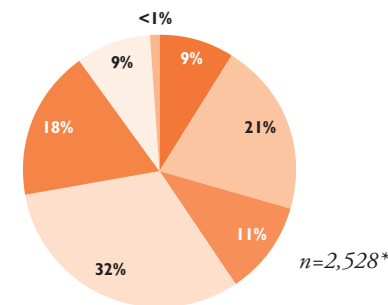
In 2022 in Rhode Island, there were 1,700 indicated investigations of child neglect and abuse involving 2,395 children. The rate of child neglect and abuse per 1,000 children under age 18 was almost twice as high in the four core cities (16.2 victims per 1,000 children) as in the remainder of the state (8.8 victims per 1,000 children). Forty-one percent of the victims of child neglect and abuse were young children ages five and under and almost one-third (30%) were ages three and younger.⁷



Child Neglect and Abuse, Rhode Island, 2022

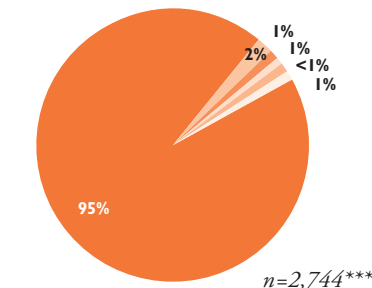
By Age of Victim*

9% (221)	Under Age 1
21% (535)	Ages 1 to 3
11% (282)	Ages 4 to 5
32% (797)	Ages 6 to 11
18% (464)	Ages 12 to 15
9% (224)	Ages 16 and Older
<1% (5)	Unknown



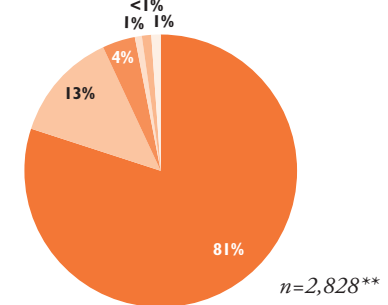
By Relationship of Perpetrator to Victims***

95% (2,604)	Parents
2% (55)	Relatives/Household Members
1% (21)	Residential Facility Staff
1% (19)	Foster Parents
<1% (7)	Child Care Providers
1% (38)	Other or Unknown



By Type of Neglect/Abuse**

81% (2,280)	Neglect
13% (368)	Physical Abuse
4% (112)	Sexual Abuse
1% (25)	Medical Neglect
<1% (13)	Emotional Abuse
1% (30)	Other



Notes on Pie Charts

*These data reflect an unduplicated count of child victims which includes out-of-state child victims. The number of victims is higher than the number of indicated investigations. One indicated investigation can involve more than one child victim.

**This number is greater than the unduplicated count of child victims because children often experience more than one maltreatment event and/or more than one type of abuse. Within each type of abuse, the number of child victims is unduplicated.

***Perpetrators can abuse more than one child and can abuse a child more than once. This number is a duplicated count of perpetrators based on the number of neglect and abuse incidents. Under Rhode Island law, Child Protective Services can only investigate alleged perpetrators who are legally defined as caretakers to the victim(s), except in situations of child sexual abuse by another child.

Source: Rhode Island DCYF, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), 2022. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



DCYF Child Protective Services (CPS) Hotline Calls for Reports of Neglect and/or Abuse, Investigations, * and Indicated Investigations, Rhode Island, 2013-2022

YEAR	TOTAL # UNDUPLICATED CHILD MALTREATMENT REPORTS	% AND # OF REPORTS WITH COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS	# OF INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS
2013	13,905	50% (6,975)	2,294
2014	14,735	51% (7,573)	2,413
2015	14,402	45% (6,470)	2,227
2016	14,942	40% (5,935)	2,074
2017	15,945	42% (6,628)	2,404
2018	21,837	38% (8,296)	2,430
2019	19,401	37% (7,240)	2,249
2020	16,195	35% (5,661)	1,861
2021	14,876	34% (4,978)	1,704
2022	14,417	33% (4,742)	1,749

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RIC HIST, 2013-2022.

*One investigation can be generated by multiple hotline calls. Investigations can result in a finding of indicated, unfounded, or unable to complete (as when essential party cannot be found).

◆ From 2018 to 2022 in Rhode Island, the number of unduplicated child maltreatment reports decreased by 34%, the number of completed investigations decreased by 43%, and the number of indicated investigations decreased by 28%. In 2022, 37% of the 4,742 completed investigations were indicated investigations in which there is a “preponderance of evidence” that a child has been abused and/or neglected. The sharp decrease in reporting at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic can be attributed to when school buildings were closed, however more recent declines are likely due to targeted, ongoing prevention efforts by DCYF focused on helping families before a CPS call is warranted.^{8,9,10}

◆ Of the 14,417 maltreatment reports in 2022, 60% (8,692) were classified as “information/referrals”.¹¹ Information/referrals are reports made to the CPS Hotline that contain a concern about the well-being of a child but do not meet the criteria for an investigation. Criteria for investigation include that the victim is a minor, the alleged perpetrator is responsible for the child’s welfare, there is reasonable cause to believe that neglect or abuse exist, and there is a specific incident or pattern of incidents suggesting that harm can be identified. In 2019, DCYF began using a standardized screening tool to determine whether Hotline reports that do not meet the criteria for investigation should be referred for family assessment, which may lead to the development of a safety plan with the family, including referral and delivery of other services.¹²



Emergency Department Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths Due to Child Neglect and/or Abuse, Rhode Island, 2017-2021

YEAR	# OF EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS*	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS*	# OF DEATHS**
2017	126	24	<5
2018	110	25	0
2019	85	38	<5
2020	100	98	<5
2021	76	105	0
TOTAL	497	290	<5

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, 2017-2021.

Note: Effective October 1, 2015, the International Classification of Disease (ICD) codes changed from the 9th classification to the 10th classification, which may impact comparability across the years.

*The number of Emergency Department visits and the number of hospitalizations include both suspected and confirmed assessments of child neglect and abuse.

**Due to a change in data source, data for child deaths due to child neglect and/or abuse are only comparable with Factbooks since 2013.

**Data contain small numbers. Counts from 1-4 are suppressed as <5. Rates should not be calculated from counts <5.

◆ Between 2017 and 2021, there were 497 emergency department visits, 290 hospitalizations, and <5 deaths of Rhode Island children under age 18 due to child neglect and/or abuse.¹³ Nationally in 2021, 78% of child maltreatment deaths involved neglect and 43% involved physical abuse (because a victim may have suffered more than one type of maltreatment, these categories are not mutually exclusive).¹⁴



Child Neglect and Abuse in Rhode Island Communities

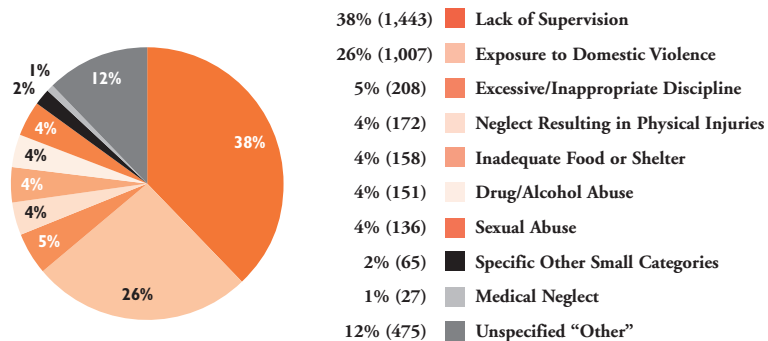
◆ Many parents at risk of child neglect and abuse may lack experience with and knowledge of essential parenting skills and are struggling with a combination of social and economic issues. These families can benefit from programs that enhance social supports, parental resilience, and knowledge of parenting and child development.¹⁵ Providing access to economic resources, housing, health care, child care, early childhood learning programs, and evidence-based home visiting programs to families can prevent the occurrence and recurrence of child neglect and abuse.^{16,17}

◆ In 2022, Rhode Island had 11.4 child victims of neglect and abuse per 1,000 children. Woonsocket (28.5 victims per 1,000 children) had the highest rate of child victims of neglect and abuse in the state.¹⁸

Child Neglect and Abuse



Indicated Allegations of Child Neglect, by Nature of Neglect, Rhode Island, 2022



n=3,842*

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RIC HIST, 2022.

*The total refers to indicated allegations of neglect. Some children were victims of neglect more than once. Multiple allegations may be involved in each indicated investigation.

- ◆ Of the 3,842 indicated allegations (confirmed claims) of neglect of children under age 18 in Rhode Island in 2022, 38% involved lack of supervision. This highlights the importance of access to high-quality, affordable child care, preschool, and after-school programs.¹⁹
- ◆ The second largest category of neglect (26%) is “exposure to domestic violence.” These are instances where the neglect is related to the child witnessing domestic violence in the home.²⁰
- ◆ The “specific other small categories” include educational neglect (22), emotional abuse (9), emotional neglect (8), inappropriate restraint (8), tying/close confinement (7), abandonment (4), corporal punishment (4), and failure to thrive (3).²¹



Child Sexual Abuse, by Gender and Age of Victim, Rhode Island, 2022

◆ In Rhode Island in 2022, there were 136 indicated allegations (confirmed claims) of child sexual abuse and seven of these cases, were reported as school-based sexual molestation/exploitation. Some children were victims of sexual abuse more than once. There were 117 (86%) female victims and 19 (14%) male victims with confirmed allegations. Thirty-two percent of the female victims were under age 12, while 37% of the male victims were under age 12.²²

◆ In the majority of child sexual abuse cases, the perpetrator is a relative or person known to the victim. Sexual abuse by a stranger is less likely.²³



Early Intervention & Infants and Toddlers Involved with the Child Welfare System

- ◆ Because maltreated infants and toddlers are highly likely to have a developmental delay, federal law requires states to screen and/or refer infants and toddlers who have experienced neglect or abuse to Early Intervention (EI) for eligibility determination and services.²⁴ Rhode Island specifically allows infants and toddlers who have experienced trauma, neglect, or abuse to be determined eligible for EI through “informed clinical opinion – family circumstances” even if the child does not have a measurable developmental delay or disability.²⁵
- ◆ In Rhode Island in State Fiscal Year 2022, there were 679 children under age three who were victims of child neglect or abuse or involved with an indicated case. Of these, 179 (26%) were referred directly to EI for evaluation, 453 (67%) were instead referred to First Connections for a developmental screening, 31 (5%) were already referred or enrolled in EI, and 16 (2%) were not referred. Of the 245 infants and toddlers referred to EI for evaluation by DCYF or by First Connections, 140 (57%) were determined eligible for EI. Of the 679 children, there were 356 (52%) who did not receive a developmental screening or an evaluation even after referral. Of all 679 victims, 21% were determined eligible for EI.²⁶

Table 31.

Indicated Investigations of Child Neglect and Abuse, Rhode Island, 2022

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18	# OF INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS OF CHILD NEGLECT/ABUSE	INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS PER 1,000 CHILDREN	# OF VICTIMS OF CHILD NEGLECT/ABUSE	VICTIMS OF CHILD NEGLECT/ABUSE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	4,489	6	1.3	10	2.2
Bristol	2,887	22	7.6	30	10.4
Burrillville	3,229	26	8.1	36	11.1
Central Falls	6,411	71	11.1	114	17.8
Charlestown	1,161	9	7.8	17	14.6
Coventry	6,655	43	6.5	78	11.7
Cranston	15,744	98	6.2	136	8.6
Cumberland	7,550	31	4.1	52	6.9
East Greenwich	3,465	7	2.0	7	2.0
East Providence	7,886	52	6.6	74	9.4
Exeter	1,175	6	5.1	14	11.9
Foster	790	3	3.8	7	8.9
Glocester	1,896	12	6.3	12	6.3
Hopkinton	1,613	9	5.6	8	5.0
Jamestown	871	2	2.3	3	3.4
Johnston	5,119	26	5.1	31	6.1
Lincoln	4,640	31	6.7	47	10.1
Little Compton	568	2	3.5	4	7.0
Middletown	3,487	15	4.3	11	3.2
Narragansett	1,651	15	9.1	20	12.1
New Shoreham	189	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newport	3,660	35	9.6	47	12.8
North Kingstown	5,496	27	4.9	21	3.8
North Providence	5,802	60	10.3	82	14.1
North Smithfield	2,274	8	3.5	16	7.0
Pawtucket	16,455	170	10.3	243	14.8
Portsmouth	3,444	12	3.5	13	3.8
Providence	41,021	377	9.2	563	13.7
Richmond	1,627	7	4.3	18	11.1
Scituate	1,866	10	5.4	15	8.0
Smithfield	3,411	11	3.2	26	7.6
South Kingstown	4,339	28	6.5	21	4.8
Tiverton	2,723	26	9.5	35	12.9
Warren	1,826	19	10.4	23	12.6
Warwick	14,034	93	6.6	120	8.6
West Greenwich	1,251	3	2.4	2	1.6
West Warwick	5,787	78	13.5	111	19.2
Westerly	3,826	52	13.6	58	15.2
Woonsocket	9,467	198	20.9	270	28.5
Unknown Residence	NA	11	NA	0	NA
Out of State	NA	39	NA	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	73,354	816	11.1	1,190	16.2
Remainder of State	136,431	884	6.5	1,205	8.8
Rhode Island	209,785	1,700	8.1	2,395	11.4

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Data are from the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), Calendar Year 2022. These data include child victims living out-of-state and in unknown residences.

Victims of child neglect/abuse are unduplicated counts of victims with substantiated allegations of child neglect and/or abuse. More than one victim can be involved in an investigation.

An indicated investigation is an investigated report of child neglect and/or abuse for which a preponderance of evidence exists that child neglect and/or abuse occurred. An indicated investigation can involve more than one child and multiple allegations.

Data cannot be compared to Factbooks prior to 2009. The denominator is the number of children under age 18 according to the U.S. Census 2020 and the numerator is an unduplicated count of child victims. Previous Factbooks used children under age 21 as the denominator and the indicated investigations as the numerator to calculate the rate of indicated investigations per 1,000 children.

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

References

- ^{1,15,16} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2019). *Strong & thriving families: 2019/2020 prevention resource guide*. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from www.childwelfare.gov
- ² Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2019). *Long-term consequences of child abuse and neglect*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau.
- ³ Strathearn L., Giannotti M., Mills R., et al. (2020). Long-term cognitive, psychological, and health outcomes associated with child abuse and neglect. *Pediatrics*, 146(4).
- ⁴ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (n.d.) The Family Services Unit. Retrieved February 6, 2023, from www.dcyf.ri.gov
- ^{5,10} Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (n.d.). *Program: Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs)*. Retrieved February 7, 2023, from www.dcyf.ri.gov

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