

Youth Violence

DEFINITION

Youth violence is the number of arrests of youth under age 18 in Rhode Island for violent crime and weapons offenses and the percentage of high school students who report worrying about violence at school. These two measures of youth violence are used to account for violence that leads to arrest as well as some of the violence experienced by youth that may not come to the attention of the police.

SIGNIFICANCE

Youth violence refers to a variety of harmful behaviors that youth can experience as victims, witnesses, or offenders and that can cause emotional harm, physical injury, or death. Violence impacts the well-being of individuals, families, schools, and communities and can generate high social and economic costs.^{1,2}

Effective youth violence prevention aims to stop youth violence from happening in the first place and requires an understanding of the factors that influence violence. Efforts to prevent youth violence should begin in early childhood and address a wide range of individual, family, and community factors. Effective violence prevention strategies include promoting nurturing family environments that support healthy development, providing high-quality early education, strengthening

youth's interpersonal, emotional, and behavioral skills, connecting youth to caring adults in the community, and creating protective environments to reduce youth exposure to violence.^{3,4}

Individual, family, and community factors often interact to put youth at risk for involvement in youth violence. Living in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty and less economic opportunity is a risk factor for becoming involved in youth violence, as is having a history of substance use, association with delinquent peers, poor academic performance, and being a victim of child maltreatment.^{5,6,7} Youth who are victims of violence are at increased risk for physical and mental health problems, academic difficulties, smoking, high-risk sexual behavior, and suicide.⁸

Nationally, 22% of students in grades nine through 12 reported being in a physical fight during the previous year, 20% reported being bullied on school property during the previous year, and 13% reported carrying a weapon during the previous month.⁹

In 2020, 8% of youth arrests were for a violent crime in the U.S., a 56% decrease of violent crime arrests among youth since 2010.¹⁰ In 2021 in Rhode Island, there were 360 juvenile arrests for violent crime offenses and 79 juvenile arrests for weapons offense.¹¹ In 2022, violent crimes made up 4% (160) of the 3,708 juvenile offenses referred to Rhode Island Family Court.¹²



Bully Status, by Gender and Grade Level, Rhode Island, 2021

	MIDDLE SCHOOL		HIGH SCHOOL	
	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE
Bullied on School Property	40%	26%	13%	8%
Bullied Electronically	37%	21%	14%	10%
Been in a Physical Fight	7%	17%	5%	8%

Source: 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis.

- ◆ Violence in schools affects individual victims and disrupts the functioning of entire schools and communities.¹³ In Rhode Island in 2021, 9% of high school students reported not going to school due to safety concerns.¹⁴
- ◆ Bullying adversely affects all children involved, including victims, perpetrators, and witnesses of bullying behaviors. Victims of bullying are at risk of emotional, behavioral, and mental health problems. Both victims and perpetrators of bullying are more likely to contemplate or attempt suicide.¹⁵
- ◆ In 2022, nearly half (46%) of U.S. teens reported being the victim of cyberbullying (bullied or harassed online, on their cellphone, on social media, etc.).¹⁶ In 2021 in Rhode Island, 29% of middle school students (37% of females and 21% of males) and 12% of high school students (14% of females and 10% of males) reported being electronically bullied.¹⁷



Youth Witnessing Violence and Youth Gun Violence

- ◆ Witnessing violence (like domestic violence) can cause emotional, physical, and mental harm, even for children who are not the direct victims of violence. Early, chronic exposure to violence can damage a child's brain development and condition them to react with fear and anxiety to a range of circumstances.¹⁸
- ◆ In 2018, for the first time in history, gun violence surpassed motor vehicle accidents as the leading cause of death for U.S. children and teens ages 1-19.¹⁹ In Rhode Island between 2017 and 2021, there were 184 emergency department visits, 20 hospitalizations, and 11 deaths of children and youth ages 15 to 19 attributed to firearms.²⁰

Table 27.

Youth Violence, Rhode Island

Youth Violence

CITY/TOWN	COMMUNITY CONTEXT		VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS, 2022		JUVENILE ARRESTS FOR VIOLENCE, 2021		
	TOTAL VIOLENT CRIME OFFENSES (ALL AGES) 2021	TOTAL POPULATION AGES 11-17 2010	% OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WORRY ABOUT VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL	% OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO WORRY ABOUT VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL	# TOTAL VIOLENT CRIME OFFENSES	# FOR WEAPONS OFFENSES	TOTAL # FOR VIOLENT CRIME AND WEAPONS OFFENSES
Barrington	24	2,186	6%	NA	4	0	4
Bristol	43	1,545	22%	13%	0	0	0
Burrillville	38	1,526	14%	18%	1	0	1
Central Falls	144	2,089	23%	29%	5	7	12
Charlestown	17	659	20%	20%	0	0	0
Coventry	109	3,509	14%	16%	18	2	20
Cranston	239	6,984	12%	11%	16	5	21
Cumberland	90	3,271	9%	13%	1	0	1
East Greenwich	27	1,671	7%	8%	2	1	3
East Providence	154	3,730	17%	12%	7	0	7
Exeter	NA	673	6%	7%	NA	NA	NA
Foster	5	467	7%	12%	2	0	2
Glocester	25	1,000	7%	12%	3	3	6
Hopkinton	17	826	20%	20%	0	0	0
Jamestown	4	528	NA	3%	1	0	1
Johnston	108	2,376	16%	18%	4	3	7
Lincoln	88	2,189	9%	9%	10	2	12
Little Compton	9	284	NA	5%	0	0	0
Middletown	52	1,504	16%	7%	7	3	10
Narragansett	35	1,052	7%	8%	4	0	4
New Shoreham	0	64	3%	8%	0	0	0
Newport	177	1,484	17%	32%	17	0	17
North Kingstown	63	2,917	6%	10%	4	2	6
North Providence	104	2,303	17%	9%	2	1	3
North Smithfield	39	1,132	5%	7%	0	0	0
Pawtucket	618	6,268	22%	22%	58	13	71
Portsmouth	76	1,881	5%	10%	16	0	16
Providence	614	16,024	13%	23%	64	11	75
Richmond	20	759	20%	20%	4	0	4
Scituate	10	1,143	8%	22%	0	0	0
Smithfield	41	1,729	14%	10%	6	3	9
South Kingstown	47	2,498	8%	4%	6	1	7
Tiverton	51	1,318	11%	18%	4	1	5
Warren	60	777	22%	13%	4	0	4
Warwick	257	6,781	17%	19%	18	1	19
West Greenwich	9	678	6%	7%	0	0	0
West Warwick	209	2,139	13%	18%	11	0	11
Westerly	123	2,003	10%	14%	8	2	10
Woonsocket	459	3,649	28%	23%	40	13	53
State Police/Other	126	NA	NA	NA	13	5	18
Four Core Cities	1,835	28,030	18%	23%	167	44	211
Remainder of State	2,370	65,586	11%	13%	180	30	210
Rhode Island	4,331	93,616	13%	16%	360	79	439

Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Total violent crime offense data are from Rhode Island Department of Public Safety, Unified Crime Reporting/National Incident Based Reporting, 2021. NA indicates that the data are not available. Exeter, T.F Green International Airport, and University of Rhode Island arrest numbers are included in the State Police/Other totals. See Methodology section for all offenses included as violent crime offenses.

Total population ages 11 to 17 data are from U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010, P2,P4.

Data on high school and middle school students worrying about violence at school are from the 2021-2022 administration of *SurveyWorks!*, Rhode Island Department of Education. Percentages reflect students answering frequently or almost always to the question of “how often do you worry about violence at your school”. *SurveyWorks!* data for communities that belong to regional districts reflect the district’s overall survey results. Students from Little Compton attend high school in Portsmouth, and students from Jamestown can choose to attend high school in North Kingstown or Narragansett. Rhode Island total and remainder of state include charter schools, state operated schools, and UCAP.

Juvenile arrests for violent crime and weapons offenses data are from Rhode Island Department of Public Safety, Unified Crime Reporting/National Incident Based Reporting, 2021. NA indicates that the data are not available. Exeter arrest numbers are included in the State Police/Other totals. See Methodology section for all offenses included as violent crime offenses.

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

References for Youth Violence

- ^{1,6} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). *Risk and protective factors*. Retrieved from cdc.gov
- ^{2,4,5} David-Ferdon, C., Vivolo-Kantor, A. M., Dahlberg, L. L., Marshall, K. J., Rainford, N., & Hall, J. E. (2016). *A comprehensive technical package for the prevention of youth violence and associated risk behaviors*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

(continued on page 184)