

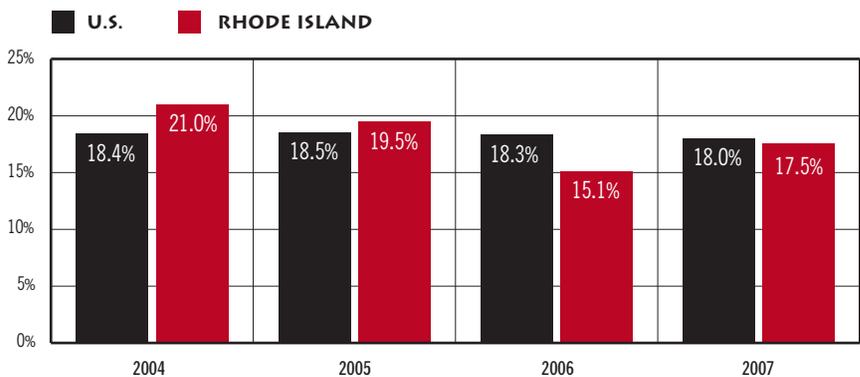
Issue Brief

CHILD POVERTY IN RHODE ISLAND: A STATISTICAL PROFILE

Children most at risk of not achieving their full potential are children who live in poverty. Children in poverty, especially those in poverty for extended periods of time, are more likely to have health and behavioral problems, experience difficulty in school, become teen parents, earn less as adults and be unemployed more frequently. While almost half (49%) of all poor children in Rhode Island are White, children of color and children of immigrants are more likely to grow up poor. Poor children are also more likely than their higher-income peers to live in families with single parents, parents with low educational attainment, and parents who work part-time, are unemployed or who earn low wages.

Addressing child poverty in Rhode Island requires a multi-faceted approach including strategies that attract high-wage jobs, improve the education levels of the local workforce and provide access to job training, literacy programs and English language acquisition programs. Access to affordable, high-quality child care and health care can help to mitigate the negative effects of poverty on children.

CHILDREN IN POVERTY, U.S. AND RHODE ISLAND, 2004-2007



◆ According to the 2007 American Community Survey, 17.5% (40,468) Rhode Island children under the age of 18 lived below the federal poverty threshold. This is a significant decrease from 2004 when 21.0% (50,390) of Rhode Island children were living below the federal poverty threshold.

◆ In the U.S., the child poverty rate remained relatively constant between 2004 and 2007.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey 2004-2007, Table B17001.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS: RHODE ISLAND CHILDHOOD POVERTY

Q. How many children are there in Rhode Island, and of that total number, how many are living in poverty?

A. According to the 2007 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 231,579 children under the age of 18 with known poverty status in Rhode Island. Of these, 17.5% (40,468) lived below the federal poverty threshold.⁶

Q. How does Rhode Island's child poverty rate compare to the child poverty rate in the nation and in New England?

A. Rhode Island's childhood poverty rate of 17.5% ranks 20th in the nation (1st is best and 50th is worst). Rhode Island has the highest child poverty rate of the six New England states.⁷

Q. Are young children more likely to be poor?

A. Both nationally, and in Rhode Island, young children from birth through age five are more likely to be poor. In 2007, 21% (15,339) of Rhode Island children under age 6 lived below the poverty threshold, same as the national rate of 21%.⁸ Research shows that increased exposure to poverty negatively impacts children's emotional and intellectual development.⁹

Q. What is extreme poverty and how many Rhode Island children are considered extremely poor?

A. Families with incomes below 50% of the federal poverty threshold are considered to be living in extreme poverty. Of the 40,468 children living below the poverty threshold in Rhode Island, 44% lived in extreme poverty. In total, 8% (17,697) of all children in Rhode Island lived in extreme poverty.¹⁰

Q. What is the federal poverty threshold and how is it measured?

A. The official federal poverty threshold in 2007 for a family of three with two children was \$16,705, while the poverty threshold for a family of four with two children was \$21,027. The extreme poverty level in 2007 was family income below \$8,353 for a family of three with two children and \$10,514 for a family of four with two children.¹¹ The official poverty threshold was set by the federal government in 1963, and was based on the cost of a minimum diet for a family of four. The cost of food was multiplied by three,

since at that time about one-third of the after-tax expenditures of families was spent on food. The poverty threshold is adjusted annually according to the increase in the Consumer Price Index.¹²

Q. Do Rhode Island's poor children live in the urban areas or throughout the state?

A. According to the 2000 Census, three-quarters (75%) of Rhode Island's poor children lived in one of the six core cities, those cities with a child poverty rate of 15% or more. In 2000, Providence had the third highest child poverty rate (41%) in the country among cities with a population of 100,000 or more. (Hartford, CT was first, Brownsville, TX was second and New Orleans, LA was tied with Providence for 3rd poorest.)¹³

Q. What is the racial and ethnic breakdown of Rhode Island's poor children?

A. Nearly half (49%) of Rhode Island's poor children are white, yet Hispanic, Black and Asian children are much more likely to be living in poverty. In Rhode Island, 42% of Hispanic children, 29% of Asian children and 26% of Black children lived in poverty, compared to 12% of White children.¹⁴

Q. Do most poor children live in single-parent families?

A. Family structure continues to be strongly related to whether or not children grow up in poor households. Children in single-parent families are seven times more likely than children in two-parent families to be living in poverty. In 2007, almost three-quarters (72%) of Rhode Island's poor children lived in single female-headed households; 5% lived in single male-headed households and 22% lived in two-parent families.¹⁵

Q. Does a parent having less than a high school diploma increase the risk that children will grow up poor?

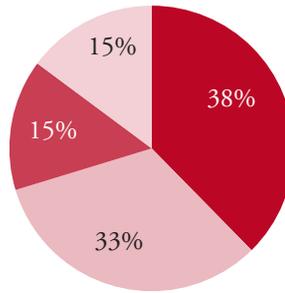
A. Poverty results from low wages and/or lack of stable employment. The educational attainment of the parent(s) is an important factor. In Rhode Island, families with less than a high school diploma are more than three times as likely to be poor as those with a high school degree or above.¹⁶

RHODE ISLAND'S POOR CHILDREN, 2007

BY AGE

- 38% ■ Ages 5 and younger
- 33% ■ Ages 6 to 11
- 15% ■ Ages 12 to 14
- 15% ■ Ages 15 to 17

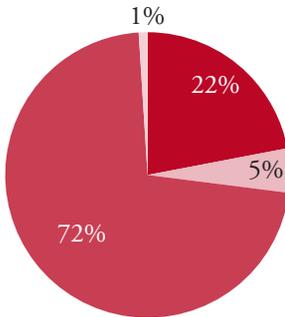
n = 40,468



BY FAMILY STRUCTURE

- 22% ■ Married-couple family
- 5% ■ Male householder only
- 72% ■ Female householder only
- 1% ■ Not in related family households

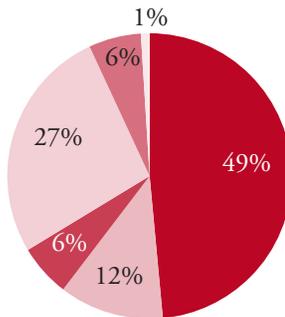
n = 40,468



BY RACE*

- 49% ■ White
- 12% ■ Black
- 6% ■ Asian
- 27% ■ Some other race
- 6% ■ Two or more races
- 1% ■ Other

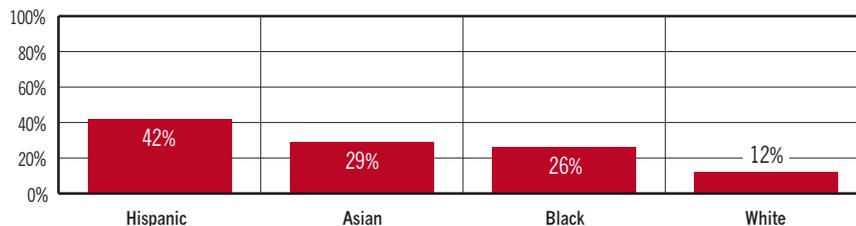
n = 40,468



*Hispanic children may be included in any race category. Of Rhode Island's poor children, 43% are Hispanic.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2007. Note that percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

CHILDREN IN POVERTY BY RACE AND ETHNICITY, RHODE ISLAND, 2007



In Rhode Island in 2007, 42% of Hispanic children, 29% of Asian children and 26% of Black children lived in poverty, compared to 12% of White children.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2007.

RHODE ISLAND CHILDREN LIVING BELOW POVERTY, 2000

| CITY/TOWN | % OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18 IN POVERTY |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Barrington | 2.7% |
| Bristol | 10.0% |
| Burrillville | 6.0% |
| Central Falls* | 40.9% |
| Charlestown | 4.7% |
| Coventry | 5.9% |
| Cranston | 9.1% |
| Cumberland | 3.1% |
| East Greenwich | 4.1% |
| East Providence | 10.8% |
| Exeter | 7.5% |
| Foster | 2.9% |
| Glocester | 6.7% |
| Hopkinton | 5.9% |
| Jamestown | 1.4% |
| Johnston | 9.0% |
| Lincoln | 6.5% |
| Little Compton | 1.0% |
| Middletown | 6.2% |
| Narragansett | 8.6% |
| New Shoreham | 10.2% |
| Newport* | 24.4% |
| North Kingstown | 9.7% |
| North Providence | 10.1% |
| North Smithfield | 3.0% |
| Pawtucket* | 25.3% |
| Portsmouth | 2.8% |
| Providence* | 40.5% |
| Richmond | 4.2% |
| Scituate | 4.3% |
| Smithfield | 3.9% |
| South Kingstown | 5.3% |
| Tiverton | 2.8% |
| Warren | 8.4% |
| Warwick | 6.7% |
| West Greenwich | 2.7% |
| West Warwick* | 18.1% |
| Westerly | 10.0% |
| Woonsocket* | 31.8% |
| Core Cities* | 33.9% |
| Remainder of State | 6.8% |
| Rhode Island | 16.9% |

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000. Most city and town data are currently only available from the 2000 Decennial Census.

* Core cities are those with 15% or more of children living in poverty.

As of 2007, 17.5% (40,468) of children in Rhode Island were living below the federal poverty threshold.

FAMILY INCOME LEVELS BASED ON THE FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES

The federal poverty threshold, as outlined above, is used by the Census Bureau to calculate all official poverty population statistics. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) uses a slightly different measure, called the Poverty Guidelines. The Federal Poverty Guidelines are a simplified version of the federal poverty thresholds and are used for administrative purposes, such as determining financial eligibility for certain federal programs. In 2008 the poverty guidelines were \$17,600 for a family of three. Many government assistance programs for low-income people now use income eligibility limits that are above the federal poverty guidelines to help families meet their basic needs. For example, families of three earning \$22,880 per year (130% of the federal poverty guidelines) qualify for the Food Stamp Program, families of three earning up to \$31,680 qualify for child care subsidies, and families of three earning up to \$44,000 qualify for RIte Care. These figures are adjusted upward for larger families.

| 2008 FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES | ANNUAL INCOME FAMILY OF THREE | ANNUAL INCOME FAMILY OF FOUR |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 50% | \$ 8,800 | \$10,600 |
| 100% | \$17,600 | \$21,200 |
| 130% | \$22,880 | \$27,560 |
| 185% | \$32,560 | \$39,220 |
| 200% | \$35,200 | \$42,400 |
| 225% | \$39,600 | \$47,700 |
| 250% | \$44,000 | \$53,000 |

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2008). *2008 Federal Poverty Guidelines*. Federal Register, 73(15), 3971-3972.

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- ¹³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a children's policy organization that provides information on child well-being, stimulates dialogue on children's issues, and promotes accountability and action.

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