

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 from birth through adolescence. 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 abuse, mental health problems, teen pregnancy, impaired cognition, and low academic achievement.^{2,3}

Responding to reports of child neglect and abuse and ensuring child safety are important functions of child protection

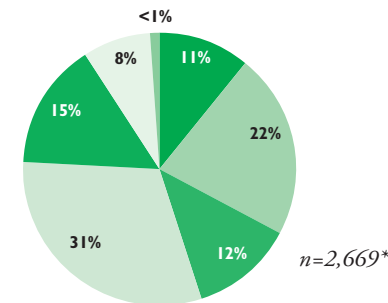
systems. Maintaining the capacity to focus on prevention is equally critical and more cost-effective. In Rhode Island, if an investigation does not reveal maltreatment but family stressors and risk factors are identified, Child Protective Services (CPS) refers families to community-based support services to reduce the risk of future involvement with the Department of Children, Youth and Families (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. In both of these cases, DCYF makes referrals to regional Family Care Community Partnership (FCCP) agencies. They work with the family to identify appropriate services and resources, including natural supports (persons and resources that families can access independent from formal services).⁴

In 2020 in Rhode Island, there were 1,862 indicated investigations of child neglect and abuse involving 2,681 Rhode Island children. The rate of child neglect and abuse per 1,000 children under age 18 was two times higher in the four core cities (18.2 victims per 1,000 children) than in the remainder of the state (8.9 victims per 1,000 children). About half (45%) of the victims of child neglect and abuse in 2020 were young children under age six and one-third (33%) were ages three and younger.⁵

Child Neglect and Abuse, Rhode Island, 2020

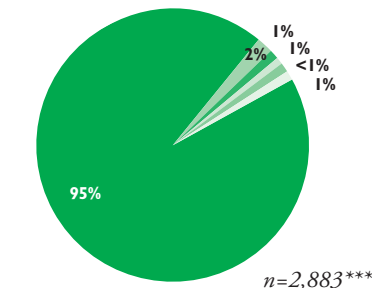
By Age of Victim*

11% (298)	Under Age 1
22% (585)	Ages 1 to 3
12% (315)	Ages 4 to 5
31% (837)	Ages 6 to 11
15% (413)	Ages 12 to 15
8% (219)	Ages 16 and Older
<1% (2)	Unknown



By Relationship of Perpetrator to Victims***

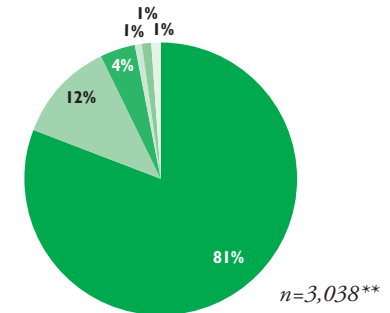
95% (2,730)	Parents
2% (66)	Relatives/Household Members
1% (23)	Foster Parents
1% (20)	Residential Facility Staff
<1% (10)	Child Care Providers
1% (34)	Other or Unknown



Source: Rhode Island DCYF, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST), 2020. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

By Type of Neglect/Abuse**

81% (2,454)	Neglect
12% (377)	Physical Abuse
4% (125)	Sexual Abuse
1% (30)	Medical Neglect
1% (16)	Emotional Abuse
1% (36)	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.



DCYF Child Protective Services (CPS) Hotline Calls for Reports of Neglect and/or Abuse, Investigations,* and Indicated Investigations, Rhode Island, 2010-2020

YEAR	TOTAL # UNDUPLICATED CHILD MALTREATMENT REPORTS	% AND # OF REPORTS WITH COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS	# OF INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS
2010	13,069	53% (6,956)	2,392
2011	13,382	49% (6,520)	2,225
2012	13,540	50% (6,784)	2,266
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

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RIC HIST, 2010-2020.

*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).

◆ Between 2019 and 2020 in Rhode Island, the number of unduplicated child maltreatment reports decreased by 17%, the number of completed investigations decreased by 22%, and the number of indicated investigations decreased by 17%. In 2020, 33% of completed investigations were indicated investigations in which there is a “preponderance of evidence” that a child has been abused and/or neglected.” Some of the 2020 decrease in reports is the result of a sharp decrease in reports at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when school buildings were closed.^{6,7}

◆ Of the 16,195 maltreatment reports in 2020, 55% (8,855) were classified as “information/ referrals”.⁸ 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 February of 2019, the Department began using a standardized screening tool to determine whether Hotline reports that do not meet criteria for investigation should be referred for family assessment. When essential criteria for investigation are not present, the family assessment may lead to the development of a safety plan with the family, including referral and delivery of other services.⁹



Emergency Department Visits, Hospitalizations, and Deaths Due to Child Neglect and/or Abuse, Rhode Island, 2015-2019

YEAR	# OF EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS*	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS*	# OF DEATHS**
2015	94	28	0
2016	79	8	1
2017	107	18	2
2018	102	13	1
2019	72	14	2
TOTAL	454	81	6

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, 2015-2019.

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.

◆ Between 2015 and 2019, there were 454 emergency department visits, 81 hospitalizations, and 6 deaths of Rhode Island children under age 18 due to child neglect and/or abuse.¹⁰ Nationally in 2019, 73% of child maltreatment deaths involved neglect and 44% involved physical abuse (because a victim may have suffered more than one type of maltreatment, these categories are not mutually exclusive).¹¹



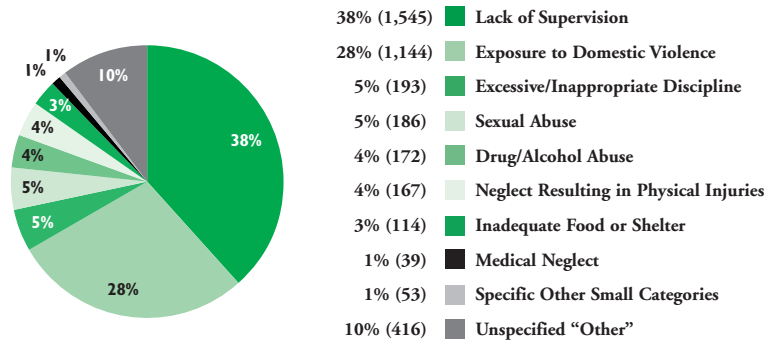
Child Neglect and Abuse in Rhode Island Communities

◆ Many parents at risk of child neglect and abuse lack 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.¹² In addition, providing access to economic resources, housing, health care, child care, early childhood learning programs, and evidence-based home visiting programs to families with multiple risk factors can prevent the occurrence and recurrence of child neglect and abuse.^{13,14}

◆ In 2020, Rhode Island had 12.0 child victims of neglect and abuse per 1,000 children, which is lower than the rate (13.9) in 2019. Woonsocket (27.6 victims per 1,000 children) had the highest rate of child victims of neglect and abuse in the state. Other cities and towns with rates higher than 20 victims per 1,000 children were Central Falls (25.7), Newport (20.1), and West Warwick (25.1).¹⁵

Child Neglect and Abuse

Indicated Allegations of Child Neglect, by Nature of Neglect, Rhode Island, 2020



n=4,029*

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RIC HIST, 2020.

*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 4,029 indicated allegations (confirmed claims) of neglect of children under age 18 in Rhode Island in 2020, 38% involved lack of supervision. This highlights the importance of access to high-quality, affordable child care, preschool, and after-school programs.¹⁶
- ◆ The second largest category of neglect (28%) is “exposure to domestic violence.” These are instances where the neglect is related to the child witnessing domestic violence in the home.¹⁷
- ◆ The “specific other small categories” include: emotional neglect (18), educational neglect (10), abandonment (10), inappropriate restraint (9), corporal punishment (3), and emotional abuse (3).¹⁸

Child Sexual Abuse, by Gender and Age of Victim, Rhode Island, 2020

◆ In Rhode Island in 2020, there were 186 indicated allegations (confirmed claims) of child sexual abuse. Some children were victims of sexual abuse more than once. There were 152 (82%) female victims and 34 (18%) male victims with confirmed allegations. Thirty-eight percent of the female victims were under age 12, while 74% of the male victims were under age 12.¹⁹

◆ 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.²⁰

Services & Supports for Young Children in the Child Welfare System

- ◆ In Rhode Island in State Fiscal Year 2020 (FY 2020), 848 children under age three were victims of child neglect or abuse. The federal *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act* requires states to screen and/or refer infants and toddlers who have experienced neglect or abuse to Early Intervention for eligibility determination and services. In Rhode Island infants and toddlers who have experienced trauma, neglect or abuse are eligible for Early Intervention under “informed clinical opinion - family circumstances” even if the child does not have a measurable developmental delay or diagnosed condition.^{21,22,23}
- ◆ Of the 848 young victims of maltreatment identified in FY 2020, 142 were referred to Early Intervention for an evaluation, 600 were referred to First Connections for a developmental screening, 42 were already enrolled in Early Intervention or had already been screened, and 64 were not referred.²⁴
- ◆ Of the 142 young victims of maltreatment referred directly to Early Intervention for an evaluation, 117 (82%) had an evaluation completed. Of the 600 children referred to First Connections for an initial developmental screening, 254 (42%) received a screening.²⁵
- ◆ In total, of the 848 infants and toddlers who were victims of child maltreatment in FY 2020, 210 (25%) were determined eligible for Early Intervention.²⁶
- ◆ Of the 848 young victims of maltreatment, 87 (10%) were enrolled in an evidence-based family home visiting program in Rhode Island. Children may be enrolled in both Early Intervention and Family Home Visiting.²⁷

Table 32.

Indicated Investigations of Child Neglect and Abuse, Rhode Island, 2020

CITY/TOWN	# OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18	# OF INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT	INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS PER 1,000 CHILDREN	# OF VICTIMS OF CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT	VICTIMS OF CHILD NEGLECT/ABUSE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	4,597	3	0.7	8	1.7
Bristol	3,623	27	7.5	29	8.0
Burrillville	3,576	23	6.4	45	12.6
Central Falls	5,644	87	15.4	145	25.7
Charlestown	1,506	12	8.0	18	12.0
Coventry	7,770	66	8.5	97	12.5
Cranston	16,414	96	5.8	132	8.0
Cumberland	7,535	23	3.1	41	5.4
East Greenwich	3,436	10	2.9	15	4.4
East Providence	9,177	78	8.5	97	10.6
Exeter	1,334	4	3.0	3	2.2
Foster	986	5	5.1	4	4.1
Glocester	2,098	17	8.1	23	11.0
Hopkinton	1,845	14	7.6	18	9.8
Jamestown	1,043	1	1.0	1	1.0
Johnston	5,480	35	6.4	39	7.1
Lincoln	4,751	21	4.4	23	4.8
Little Compton	654	1	1.5	0	0.0
Middletown	3,652	17	4.7	24	6.6
Narragansett	2,269	12	5.3	22	9.7
New Shoreham	163	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newport	4,083	62	15.2	82	20.1
North Kingstown	6,322	30	4.7	35	5.5
North Providence	5,514	53	9.6	84	15.2
North Smithfield	2,456	9	3.7	9	3.7
Pawtucket	16,575	203	12.2	300	18.1
Portsmouth	3,996	17	4.3	25	6.3
Providence	41,634	403	9.7	623	15.0
Richmond	1,849	4	2.2	4	2.2
Scituate	2,272	8	3.5	9	4.0
Smithfield	3,625	11	3.0	14	3.9
South Kingstown	5,416	15	2.8	31	5.7
Tiverton	2,998	15	5.0	21	7.0
Warren	1,940	16	8.2	29	14.9
Warwick	15,825	91	5.8	154	9.7
West Greenwich	1,477	6	4.1	11	7.4
West Warwick	5,746	97	16.9	144	25.1
Westerly	4,787	45	9.4	48	10.0
Woonsocket	9,888	173	17.5	273	27.6
Unknown Residence	NA	16	NA	1	NA
Out of State	NA	36	NA	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	73,741	866	11.7	1,341	18.2
Remainder of State	150,215	996	6.6	1,340	8.9
Rhode Island	223,956	1,862	8.3	2,681	12.0

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 2020. 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 2010 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.

In 2019, Rhode Island increased the eligibility for voluntary extended DCYF services to under age 21.

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

References

- ^{1,12,13} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2019). *Strong and thriving families: 2019 prevention resource guide*. Retrieved April 2, 2021, 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 Vasileva, M., & Petermann, F. (2016). Attachment, development, and mental health in abused and neglected preschool children in foster care: A meta-analysis. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse, 1*(16), 1-16.
- ⁴ Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, Child Protective Services, 2018.

(continued on page 185)