

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 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. Focusing on prevention is equally critical and more cost-effective. In

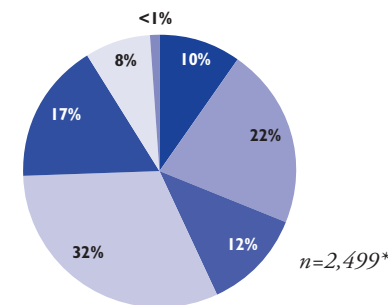
Rhode Island, if an investigation does not reveal maltreatment but family stressors and risk factors are identified, the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) refers families to community-based support services to reduce the risk of future involvement with DCYF. When maltreatment has occurred, 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) that families in the community can call to access home and community-based services previously available only through DCYF involvement.⁶

In 2021 in Rhode Island, there were 1,655 indicated investigations of child neglect and abuse involving 2,520 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 (16.5 victims per 1,000 children) than in the remainder of the state (8.7 victims per 1,000 children). Almost half (43%) of the victims of child neglect and abuse were young children ages five and under and one-third (32%) were ages three and younger.⁷

Child Neglect and Abuse, Rhode Island, 2021

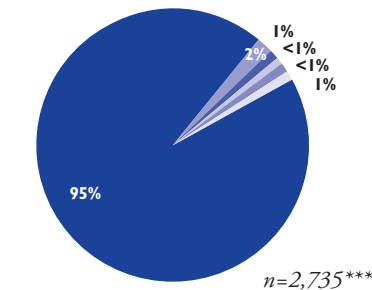
By Age of Victim*

10% (254)	Under Age 1
22% (538)	Ages 1 to 3
12% (292)	Ages 4 to 5
32% (791)	Ages 6 to 11
17% (427)	Ages 12 to 15
8% (195)	Ages 16 and Older
<1% (2)	Unknown



By Relationship of Perpetrator to Victims***

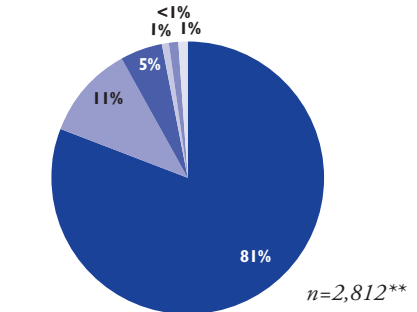
95% (2,604)	Parents
2% (55)	Relatives/Household Members
1% (27)	Foster Parents
<1% (8)	Residential Facility Staff
<1% (4)	Child Care Providers
1% (37)	Other or Unknown



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% (2,281)	Neglect
11% (317)	Physical Abuse
5% (127)	Sexual Abuse
1% (35)	Medical Neglect
<1% (10)	Emotional Abuse
1% (42)	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, 2012-2021

YEAR	TOTAL # UNDUPLICATED CHILD MALTREATMENT REPORTS	% AND # OF REPORTS WITH COMPLETED INVESTIGATIONS	# OF INDICATED INVESTIGATIONS
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
2021	14,876	34% (4,978)	1,704

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RIC HIST, 2012-2021.

*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 2019 to 2021 in Rhode Island, the number of unduplicated child maltreatment reports decreased by 23%, the number of completed investigations decreased by 31%, and the number of indicated investigations decreased by 24%. In 2021, 34% of completed investigations were indicated investigations in which there is a “preponderance of evidence” that a child has been neglected and/or abused.” The decrease in reports is the result of the sharp decrease in reporting at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when school buildings were closed, as well as targeted prevention efforts focused on ways to help families before a CPS call is warranted.^{8,9,10}

◆ Of the 14,876 maltreatment reports in 2021, 59% (8,790) 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, 2016-2020

YEAR	# OF EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS*	# OF HOSPITALIZATIONS*	# OF DEATHS**
2016	90	15	<5
2017	125	24	<5
2018	110	25	0
2019	88	40	<5
2020	102	98	<5
TOTAL	515	202	5

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, 2016-2020.

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.

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

◆ Between 2016 and 2020, there were 515 emergency department visits, 202 hospitalizations, and five deaths of Rhode Island children under age 18 due to child neglect and/or abuse.¹³ Nationally in 2020, 74% 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

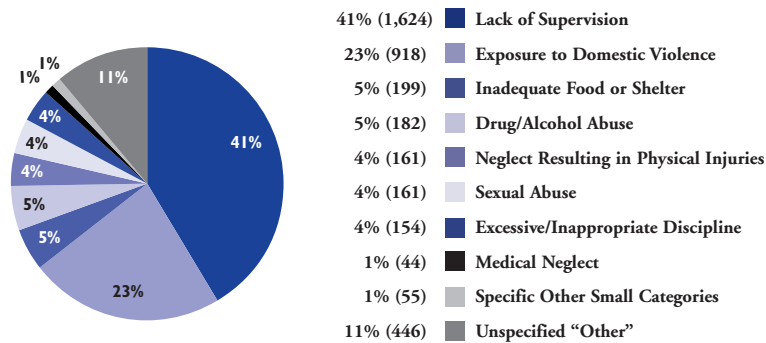
Child Neglect and Abuse in Rhode Island Communities

◆ Many parents at risk of child neglect and abuse 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.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 2021, Rhode Island had 11.3 child victims of neglect and abuse per 1,000 children, down from 12.0 in 2020. Woonsocket (28.9 victims per 1,000 children), West Warwick (20.9), and Central Falls (20.2) had the highest rates 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, 2021



n=3,944*

Source: Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, RIC HIST, 2021.

*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 3,944 indicated allegations (confirmed claims) of neglect of children under age 18 in Rhode Island in 2021, 41% 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 (23%) 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 (27), tying/close confinement (8), emotional abuse (7), emotional neglect (5), inappropriate restraint (4), poisoning/noxious substances (2), abandonment (1), and corporal punishment (1).²¹

Child Sexual Abuse, by Gender and Age of Victim, Rhode Island, 2021

◆ In Rhode Island in 2021, there were 161 indicated allegations (confirmed claims) of child sexual abuse. Some children were victims of sexual abuse more than once. There were 132 (82%) female victims, 27 (17%) male victims, and two (1%) victims whose gender was unknown with confirmed allegations. Forty-one percent of the female victims were under age 12, while 70% 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

Services & Supports for Young Children in the Child Welfare System

- ◆ 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.²⁴ Rhode Island specifically allows infants and toddlers who have experienced trauma, neglect, or abuse, to be determined eligible for Early Intervention under "informed clinical opinion - family circumstances" even if the child does not have a measurable developmental delay or diagnosed condition.²⁵
- ◆ In Rhode Island in State Fiscal Year 2021, there were 693 infants and toddlers involved with indicated cases of child neglect or abuse who were not already enrolled in Early Intervention or screened; 176 (25%) were referred to Early Intervention for a full evaluation and 500 (72%) were referred to First Connections for developmental screening. Outside of direct referrals from DCYF, only 86 additional victims were referred for an Early Intervention evaluation by First Connections or other programs. Of the 262 maltreated infants and toddlers who were referred to Early Intervention (directly or through First Connections), 161 (61%) were determined eligible. Ultimately, only 161 of the 693 children (23%) under age three who were victims of maltreatment were determined eligible for Early Intervention.²⁶
- ◆ Evidence-based Family Home Visiting programs promote positive parenting and provide new and expectant parents with information, support and referrals to community resources. Several models have been found to prevent and reduce neglect and abuse.^{27,28} Of the 728 infants and toddlers who experienced child neglect or abuse in Rhode Island in FY 2021, 52 (7%) were enrolled in an evidence-based family home visiting program.²⁹

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Table 32.

Indicated Investigations of Child Neglect and Abuse, Rhode Island, 2021

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	4,597	12	2.6	13	2.8
Bristol	3,623	24	6.6	30	8.3
Burrillville	3,576	20	5.6	31	8.7
Central Falls	5,644	71	12.6	114	20.2
Charlestown	1,506	6	4.0	6	4.0
Coventry	7,770	43	5.5	77	9.9
Cranston	16,414	90	5.5	105	6.4
Cumberland	7,535	42	5.6	45	6.0
East Greenwich	3,436	7	2.0	7	2.0
East Providence	9,177	75	8.2	117	12.7
Exeter	1,334	6	4.5	6	4.5
Foster	986	3	3.0	6	6.1
Glocester	2,098	9	4.3	8	3.8
Hopkinton	1,845	7	3.8	11	6.0
Jamestown	1,043	1	1.0	2	1.9
Johnston	5,480	31	5.7	42	7.7
Lincoln	4,751	18	3.8	29	6.1
Little Compton	654	4	6.1	4	6.1
Middletown	3,652	18	4.9	27	7.4
Narragansett	2,269	16	7.1	21	9.3
New Shoreham	163	0	0.0	0	0.0
Newport	4,083	41	10.0	66	16.2
North Kingstown	6,322	22	3.5	47	7.4
North Providence	5,514	67	12.2	101	18.3
North Smithfield	2,456	12	4.9	10	4.1
Pawtucket	16,575	179	10.8	286	17.3
Portsmouth	3,996	16	4.0	20	5.0
Providence	41,634	367	8.8	534	12.8
Richmond	1,849	5	2.7	14	7.6
Scituate	2,272	8	3.5	14	6.2
Smithfield	3,625	3	0.8	13	3.6
South Kingstown	5,416	31	5.7	54	10.0
Tiverton	2,998	17	5.7	23	7.7
Warren	1,940	15	7.7	25	12.9
Warwick	15,825	84	5.3	135	8.5
West Greenwich	1,477	4	2.7	4	2.7
West Warwick	5,746	68	11.8	120	20.9
Westerly	4,787	35	7.3	67	14.0
Woonsocket	9,888	178	18.0	286	28.9
Unknown Residence	NA	12	NA	0	NA
Out of State	NA	37	NA	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	73,741	795	10.8	1,220	16.5
Remainder of State	150,215	860	5.7	1,300	8.7
Rhode Island	223,956	1,655	7.4	2,520	11.3

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 2021. 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.

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 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.
- ^{5,10} Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families. (n.d.). *Program: Family Care Community Partnerships (FCCPs)*. Retrieved February 7, 2022, from www.dcyf.ri.gov

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