

Youth Violence

DEFINITION

Youth violence is the number of arrests of youth under age 18 in Rhode Island for assault and weapons offenses and the percentage of high school students who report experiencing 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 can impact 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 in 2019, 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 2019, the juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes in the U.S. reached a historic low and juvenile arrests for violent crimes made up 6% of juvenile arrests in the U.S.¹⁰ In 2020 in Rhode Island, there were 239 juvenile arrests for assault offenses and 51 juvenile arrests for weapons offenses.¹¹ Violent crimes made up 6% (175) of the 2,858 juvenile offenses referred to Rhode Island Family Court.¹²

Bully Status, by Gender and Grade Level, Rhode Island, 2019

	MIDDLE SCHOOL		HIGH SCHOOL	
	MALE	FEMALES	MALE	FEMALE
Bullied on School Property	27%	37%	13%	20%
Bullied Electronically	15%	27%	9%	17%
Been in a Physical Fight	24%	9%	12%	7%

Source: 2019 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 2019, 8% 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
- ◆ Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place online or by digital communication through text messages, instant messengers, social media, and/or other digital applications.¹⁶ In 2019 in Rhode Island, 20% of middle school students (27% of females and 15% of males) and 13% of high school students (17% of females and 9% 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 all children and teens ages.¹⁹ In Rhode Island between 2016 and 2020, there were 189 emergency department visits, 22 hospitalizations, and five deaths of children and youth attributed to firearms.²⁰

Table 28.

Youth Violence, Rhode Island

Youth Violence

CITY/TOWN	COMMUNITY CONTEXT		VIOLENCE IN HIGH SCHOOLS, 2021		JUVENILE ARRESTS FOR VIOLENCE, 2020		
	VIOLENT CRIME OFFENSES (ALL AGES) 2019	TOTAL POPULATION AGES 11-17 2010	% OF STUDENTS WHO WORRY ABOUT VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL	% OF STUDENTS WHO REPORT PHYSICAL FIGHTS IN SCHOOL	# FOR ASSAULT/VIOLENT OFFENSES	# FOR WEAPONS OFFENSES	TOTAL # FOR ASSAULT AND WEAPONS OFFENSES
Barrington	4	2,186	2%	1%	2	0	2
Bristol	16	1,545	10%	9%	3	0	3
Burrillville	9	1,526	8%	5%	7	0	7
Central Falls	82	2,089	17%	10%	8	1	9
Charlestown	6	659	8%	6%	0	0	0
Coventry	31	3,509	9%	6%	10	0	10
Cranston	127	6,984	9%	10%	8	3	11
Cumberland	25	3,271	5%	1%	4	1	5
East Greenwich	5	1,671	4%	1%	1	1	2
East Providence	62	3,730	12%	16%	12	0	12
Exeter	NA	673	19%	17%	0	0	NA
Foster	3	467	4%	2%	0	0	0
Glocester	4	1,000	4%	2%	2	1	3
Hopkinton	4	826	8%	6%	0	1	1
Jamestown	4	528	NA	NA	0	0	0
Johnston	32	2,376	7%	8%	2	0	2
Lincoln	25	2,189	4%	1%	9	1	10
Little Compton	2	284	NA	NA	0	0	0
Middletown	11	1,504	5%	1%	11	1	12
Narragansett	14	1,052	2%	2%	5	0	5
New Shoreham	3	64	0%	0%	0	0	0
Newport	68	1,484	9%	8%	10	0	10
North Kingstown	23	2,917	4%	4%	17	0	17
North Providence	44	2,303	8%	7%	8	2	10
North Smithfield	6	1,132	4%	1%	2	0	2
Pawtucket	293	6,268	13%	21%	45	10	55
Portsmouth	11	1,881	4%	1%	1	3	4
Providence	892	16,024	11%	6%	25	12	37
Richmond	3	759	8%	6%	0	0	0
Scituate	6	1,143	3%	1%	1	0	1
Smithfield	6	1,729	3%	2%	8	1	9
South Kingstown	19	2,498	5%	5%	11	2	13
Tiverton	11	1,318	9%	6%	2	0	2
Warren	18	777	10%	9%	6	1	7
Warwick	76	6,781	12%	11%	8	2	10
West Greenwich	4	678	19%	17%	0	0	0
West Warwick	54	2,139	7%	7%	9	1	10
Westerly	15	2,003	9%	7%	3	1	4
Woonsocket	237	3,649	18%	32%	24	6	30
State Police/Other	NA	NA	NA	NA	13	0	13
Four Core Cities	1,504	28,030	13%	14%	102	29	131
Remainder of State	751	65,586	7%	6%	162	22	184
Rhode Island	2,255	93,616	8%	8%	277	51	328

Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Total violent crime offense data are from U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2019). *Crime in the United States 2019: Rhode Island offenses known to law enforcement*. Retrieved April 19, 2022, from ucr.fbi.gov

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

Data on high school students experiencing violence at school are from the 2020-2021 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” and “how often do students get into physical fights in 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 assault and weapons offenses data are from Rhode Island Department of Public Safety, Unified Crime Reporting/National Incident Based Reporting, 2020. NA indicates that the data are not available. Exeter arrest numbers are included in the State Police/Other totals.

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 April 15, 2022, 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.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). *The social-ecological model: A framework for prevention*. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from cdc.gov

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