

Children of Incarcerated Parents

DEFINITION

Children of incarcerated parents is the number of children with parents serving sentences at the Rhode Island Department of Corrections per 1,000 children under age 18. The data are reported by the place of the parent's last residence before entering prison.

SIGNIFICANCE

Approximately 1.7 million children in the U.S. have a parent incarcerated in state or federal prison, and a quarter of minor children with a parent in prison are under age five.¹ Having an incarcerated parent can negatively impact the quality of a child's attachment to their parent, which can lead to withdrawal, hyper-vigilance, aggression and other reactive behaviors.²

Parental incarceration can affect a child's emotional and behavioral development. Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to suffer from depression or anxiety, have an eating or sleeping disorder and be expelled or suspended from school. They also are more likely to engage in delinquent behavior and to be arrested and incarcerated as juveniles.³

Nationally, most children of incarcerated parents live with their other parent (84%), grandparents (15%) and/or other relatives (6%).⁴ Relative caregivers often experience significant

economic hardship. They may be unaware that they are eligible for services, may be worried about stigma, may have previously been denied benefits or may have privacy concerns.⁵

Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be involved with the child welfare system.⁶ In 2009, more than 14,000 children entered foster care due to, at least in part, the incarceration of a parent.⁷ These children often represent complex cases for child welfare agencies because they have been exposed to parental substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence and extreme poverty.⁸

Programs targeted at the unique needs of incarcerated pregnant women and mothers can improve outcomes for them and their families.⁹ Keeping siblings together, family counseling, access to health and mental health care, mentoring, peer supports and prison transition supports can alleviate the worst effects of parents' imprisonment on their children and improve the family reunification process.¹⁰

Of the 1,699 Rhode Island parents incarcerated on September 30, 2011, including those awaiting trial, 48% were White, 30% were Black, 21% were Hispanic and 2% were Native American, Asian or another race. Fifty-eight percent of incarcerated parents with a known in-state residence identified one of the four core cities as their last place of residence.¹¹

Parents at the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institutions, September 30, 2011

	INMATES SURVEYED*	# REPORTING CHILDREN	% REPORTING CHILDREN	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED
Awaiting Trial	659	331	50%	722
Serving a Sentence	2,500	1,368	55%	2,931
Total	3,159	1,699	54%	3,653

Source: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2011. *Does not include inmates who were missing responses to the question on number of children, inmates on home confinement or those from another state's jurisdiction.

◆ Of the 3,159 inmates awaiting trial or serving a sentence who were surveyed as of September 30, 2011 and answered the question on number of children, 1,699 inmates reported having 3,653 children. Thirty percent of incarcerated mothers had one to five year sentences and 29% of incarcerated fathers were sentenced to more than ten years.¹²

◆ Of the 99 sentenced mothers on September 30, 2011, 48% were serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense, 30% for a violent offense, 12% for drug-related offenses and 8% for breaking and entering. Of the 1,269 sentenced fathers, 19% were serving sentences for nonviolent offenses, 43% for violent offenses, 13% for drug-related offenses, 9% for breaking and entering and 15% for sex-related offenses.¹³

◆ Fifty-six percent of incarcerated parents awaiting trial or serving a sentence on September 30, 2011 had less than a high school degree and 6% had less than a ninth-grade education. Thirty-four percent of parents awaiting trial or serving a sentence had a high school diploma or a GED and 10% had at least some college education.¹⁴

◆ A supportive family, education, job training, stable housing, employment assistance, medical assistance and substance abuse treatment are critical to the parents' successful transition to the community after incarceration and also support the well-being of their children.¹⁵

◆ High-quality prison-based parenting programs can benefit incarcerated parents and their children. Parents participating in these programs have demonstrated improved relationships with their children and increased knowledge of child development and behavior management techniques. Children have shown signs of improved relationships with their incarcerated mother, diminished feelings of sadness and anger, fewer behavioral problems at school and better grades.¹⁶

Children of Incarcerated Parents

Table 28.

Children of Incarcerated Parents, Rhode Island, September 30, 2011

CITY/TOWN	# OF INCARCERATED PARENTS	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED*	2010 TOTAL POPULATION UNDER AGE 18	RATE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	0	0	4,597	0.0
Bristol	5	9	3,623	2.5
Burrillville	7	12	3,576	3.4
Central Falls	45	102	5,644	18.1
Charlestown	3	4	1,506	2.7
Coventry	23	45	7,770	5.8
Cranston	65	132	16,414	8.0
Cumberland	9	19	7,535	2.5
East Greenwich	5	12	3,436	3.5
East Providence	45	91	9,177	9.9
Exeter	8	14	1,334	10.5
Foster	0	0	986	0.0
Glocester	3	6	2,098	2.9
Hopkinton	3	8	1,845	4.3
Jamestown	3	6	1,043	5.8
Johnston	22	55	5,480	10.0
Lincoln	8	15	4,751	3.2
Little Compton	1	7	654	10.7
Middletown	5	12	3,652	3.3
Narragansett	9	20	2,269	8.8
New Shoreham	0	0	163	0.0
Newport	30	66	4,083	16.2
North Kingstown	7	16	6,322	2.5
North Providence	23	47	5,514	8.5
North Smithfield	4	8	2,456	3.3
Pawtucket	109	225	16,575	13.6
Portsmouth	2	4	3,996	1.0
Providence	423	956	41,634	23.0
Richmond	4	8	1,849	4.3
Scituate	5	11	2,272	4.8
Smithfield	7	13	3,625	3.6
South Kingstown	8	19	5,416	3.5
Tiverton	6	14	2,998	4.7
Warren	8	17	1,940	8.8
Warwick	72	124	15,825	7.8
West Greenwich	3	6	1,477	4.1
West Warwick	54	112	5,746	19.5
Westerly	21	32	4,787	6.7
Woonsocket	95	193	9,888	19.5
Unknown Residence	148	314	NA	NA
Out-of-State Residence**	70	177	NA	NA
Four Core Cities	672	1,476	83,570	17.7
Remainder of State	478	964	140,386	6.9
Rhode Island	1,150	2,440	223,956	10.9

Note to Table

Due to a change in methodology, *Children of Incarcerated Parents* in this Factbook cannot be compared to Factbooks prior to 2007. Previous Factbooks reported data as of December 31st. The data are now reported as of September 30th. The Children of Incarcerated Parents rate is based upon the sentenced population only. Prior to the 2006 Factbook, the rate was based on both the sentenced and awaiting trial populations.

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2011. Offenders who were on Home Confinement and the awaiting trial population are excluded from this table.

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2010.

*Data on the number of children are self-reported by the incarcerated parents and may include some children over age 18. Nationally and in Rhode Island, much of the existing research has relied upon self-reporting by incarcerated parents or caregivers.

**Data on Out-of-State Residence includes inmates who are under jurisdiction in Rhode Island, but report an out-of-state address. Inmates who were from another state's jurisdiction, but serving time in Rhode Island, are not included in the Rhode Island, core cities or remainder of state rates.

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

References

- ^{1,4} Glaze, L. E. & Maruschak, L. M. (2010). *Parents in prison and their minor children*. (Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, NCJ 222984). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.
- ² Nesmith, A. & Ruhland, E. (2008). Children of incarcerated parents: Challenges and resiliency in their own words. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30, 1119-1130.
- ^{3,16} Hoffman, H. C., Byrd, A. L. & Kightlinger, A. M. (2010). Prison programs and services for incarcerated parents and their underage children: Results from a national survey of correctional facilities. *The Prison Journal*, 90(4) 397-416.
- ³ Nolan, C. M. (2003). *Children of arrested parents: Strategies to improve their safety and well-being*. Sacramento, CA: California Research Bureau.

(continued on page 171)