

# 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.<sup>1</sup> Having an incarcerated parent can negatively impact the quality of a child's attachment to their parent, which can lead to anxiety, withdrawal, hyper-vigilance, low self-esteem and other reactive behaviors.<sup>2,3</sup>

As a result of parental incarceration, children may face social stigma, disruptions in their homes, temporary caregivers or placements in foster care, financial hardship and an increased risk of child abuse and neglect.<sup>4,5</sup> Compared to other children, children of incarcerated parents also are at greater risk for poor academic achievement, housing instability and mental health problems, including aggressive behavior.<sup>6,7,8,9</sup>

Nationally, most children of incarcerated parents live with their other parent (84%), a grandparent (15%) or other relatives (6%).<sup>10</sup> Relative caregivers

often experience significant economic hardship. They may be unaware that they are eligible for services, they may be worried about stigma, they may have previously been denied benefits or they may have privacy concerns.<sup>11</sup>

Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be involved with the child welfare system, and represent complex cases for child welfare agencies. These children have often been exposed to parental substance abuse, mental illness, domestic violence and extreme poverty.<sup>12,13</sup>

Programs targeted at the unique needs of incarcerated pregnant women and mothers can improve outcomes for them and their families.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

Of the 1,763 Rhode Island parents incarcerated on September 30, 2010, including those awaiting trial, 49% were White, 28% were Black, 21% were Hispanic, and 2% were Native American, Asian or another race. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of incarcerated parents with a known in-state residence identified one of the core cities as their last place of residence.<sup>16</sup>

**Parents at the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institutions, September 30, 2010**

	INMATES SURVEYED*	# REPORTING CHILDREN	% REPORTING CHILDREN	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED
Awaiting Trial	480	321	67%	480
Serving a Sentence	2,161	1,442	67%	2,862
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,641</b>	<b>1,763</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>3,342</b>

Source: Rhode Island Department of Corrections, September 30, 2010. \*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 2,641 inmates awaiting trial or serving a sentence who were surveyed as of September 30, 2010 and answered the question on number of children, 1,763 inmates reported having 3,342 children. Thirty-one percent of incarcerated mothers had one to five year sentences and 27% of incarcerated fathers were sentenced to more than ten years.<sup>17</sup>
- ◆ Of the 101 sentenced mothers on September 30, 2010, 43% were serving a sentence for a nonviolent offense, 34% for a violent offense, 14% for drug-related offenses, 5% for breaking and entering and less than 1% for sex-related offenses. Of the 1,341 sentenced fathers, 43% were serving sentences for violent offenses, 17% for nonviolent offenses, 14% for drug-related offenses, 10% for breaking and entering and 15% for sex-related offenses.<sup>18</sup>
- ◆ Fifty-eight percent of incarcerated parents awaiting trial or serving a sentence on September 30, 2010, had less than a high school degree and 7% 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 8% had some college education.<sup>19</sup>
- ◆ Inadequate education, poor housing, unemployment and poor health put parents at risk of incarceration.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>
- ◆ Maintaining positive and healthy familial bonds between children and their incarcerated parents can be important to the children's emotional well-being, reducing the negative effects children experience as a result of the parent's absence. Preservation of this bond also can have positive effects on the rehabilitation of incarcerated parents.<sup>22</sup>

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Table 28.

## Children of Incarcerated Parents, Rhode Island, September 30, 2010

CITY/TOWN	# OF INCARCERATED PARENTS	# OF CHILDREN REPORTED*	2000 TOTAL POPULATION UNDER AGE 18	RATE PER 1,000 CHILDREN
Barrington	0	0	4,745	0.0
Bristol	9	17	4,399	3.9
Burrillville	9	16	4,043	4.0
Central Falls	49	107	5,531	19.3
Charlestown	7	13	1,712	7.6
Coventry	29	61	8,389	7.3
Cranston	76	159	17,098	9.3
Cumberland	16	30	7,690	3.9
East Greenwich	8	23	3,564	6.5
East Providence	32	71	10,546	6.7
Exeter	7	18	1,589	11.3
Foster	0	0	1,105	0.0
Glocester	5	7	2,664	2.6
Hopkinton	2	8	2,011	4.0
Jamestown	3	8	1,238	6.5
Johnston	25	61	5,906	10.3
Lincoln	8	9	5,157	1.7
Little Compton	1	7	780	9.0
Middletown	5	10	4,328	2.3
Narragansett	11	23	2,833	8.1
New Shoreham	0	0	185	0.0
Newport	31	72	5,199	13.8
North Kingstown	13	32	6,848	4.7
North Providence	26	53	5,936	8.9
North Smithfield	4	7	2,379	2.9
Pawtucket	123	231	18,151	12.7
Portsmouth	2	4	4,329	0.9
Providence	435	984	45,277	21.7
Richmond	4	6	2,014	3.0
Scituate	2	5	2,635	1.9
Smithfield	10	17	4,019	4.2
South Kingstown	10	29	6,284	4.6
Tiverton	5	10	3,367	3.0
Warren	9	17	2,454	6.9
Warwick	72	126	18,780	6.7
West Greenwich	1	3	1,444	2.1
West Warwick	53	86	6,632	13.0
Westerly	19	33	5,406	6.1
Woonsocket	91	219	11,155	19.6
Unknown Residence	157	333	NA	NA
Out-of-State Residence**	73	176	NA	NA
Core Cities	782	1,699	91,945	18.5
Remainder of State	430	883	155,877	5.7
Rhode Island	1,212	2,582	247,822	10.4

### 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, 2010. Offenders who were on Home Confinement and the awaiting trial population are excluded from this table.

U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000.

\*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, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

### References

- <sup>1,10</sup> Glaze, L. E. & Maruschak, L. M. (2009). *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.
- <sup>2</sup> Nesmith, A. & Ruhland, E. (2008). Children of incarcerated parents: Challenges and resiliency in their own words. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30, 1119-1130.
- <sup>3,5,9,15</sup> De Masi, M. E. & Tueten Bohn, C. (2010). *Children with incarcerated parents: A journey of children, caregivers and parents in New York state*. New York, NY: Council on Children and Families.

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