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## Effects of Child Poverty in Rhode Island

According to the 2018 Kids Count Factbook, almost 20% of children under 18 years old in Rhode Island are living in poverty. As stated by the director of Children's Incorporated, Shelley Callahan, "Poverty not only includes a lack of income, but also a lack of resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods, such as food, clothing, clean water, and proper shelter. Poverty has many detrimental outcomes for children – hunger and malnutrition, ill-health, limited or a lack of access to education and other basic services, just to name a few". The 2017 Report on Hunger in Rhode Island informs that at 12.8%, Rhode Island has the highest rate of child poverty in New England (Borg). Poverty in Rhode Island is significantly high because 11.6% of families' income is below the poverty line, affecting many children in physical and mental health negatively (Refer to p.# 5).

Child poverty in Rhode Island is caused because around 130,000 people live in households with an income under the poverty line, which depends on the number of people living in a house. For instance, the poverty level for a house of four is an annual income of \$25,750. (Borg).

"According to the 2018 Rhode Island Standard of Need, it costs a single-parent family with two young children \$55,115 a year to pay basic living expenses, more than two and a half times the federal poverty level for a family of three" (Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook 2019,36 ).

Moreover, the National Center for Children in Poverty states that 42% (33,578) of children who live in low-income families in Rhode Island has at least one parent who is employed full-time, year-round compared to 89% (113,876) of children who do not live in a low-income household. The other 35% (28,333) of children who live in low-income families have at least one parent who is employed either part-year or part-time compared to 9% (12,031) of children in an above low-income household. And another 23% (18,711) of children who live in low-income households do not have an employed parent compared to 2% (2,048) of children who don't live in a low-income household.

According to the Child Count Factbook 2019, "Rhode Island's unemployment rate has declined", many parents are not able to find jobs to live a comfortable life with their children. "Conditions at low-wage jobs, such as fluctuating work hours, lack of paid time off, and strict attendance policies can harm children's development by making it difficult for parents to find and keep affordable high-quality child care and education for their children" ( 2019 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook).

"Rhode Island and Connecticut have similar reasons why the kids and families in their communities are under the belt of poverty. Both of these states have families where the parents earn a low income and then most of that income ends up going towards their bills" (Laudat). The low income is so bad for some families in the state that "One in eight Rhode Island households can't afford to buy enough food for their families, according to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture" (Schiff).

The Children's Society Organization specifies the negative effects poverty has on children. First, they are likely to have poor physical health because they can't afford to buy healthy food. As stated by the American Academy of Pediatrics, "Children who are poor have higher rates of

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hospital admissions, disability days, and death rates. They have inadequate access to preventive, curative, and emergency care and are affected more frequently by poor nutrition, single-parent families, dysfunctional families, and poor housing.”

In agreement with the 2019 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook, children under the age of 6 years old are at higher risk of developing health problems than any other age group. Living in poverty results in poor nutrition, maternal depression, trauma and it can also affect their physical and mental development. “They may experience mental health problems, have a low sense of well-being, underachieve at school, have employment difficulties in adult life, experience social deprivation, feel unsafe, experience stigma and bullying at school” (Children’s Society).

“One in ten children experience mental health problems to some degree in any year; and the impacts of mental health problems ripple out to affect many more people through their social networks of family, education, work, and community. Poverty increases the risk of mental health problems and can be both a causal factor and a consequence of mental ill-health. Mental health is shaped by the wide-ranging characteristics (including inequalities) of the social, economic and physical environments in which people live” (Poverty and Mental Health)

In addition to the high risk of developing health problems, living in an old house can also affect children’s health. In accordance with the American Academy of Pediatrics, “ Exposure to lead hazards is an example of how poverty directly impacts child health. Four to five million children, the vast majority of whom are poor, reside in older homes with lead levels exceeding the accepted threshold for safety. More than 1.5 million of these children (younger than 6 years) have elevated blood lead levels”.

Children who live in low-income families are less likely to finish school. According to the Urban Institute statistics, Children who are poor from birth to age 2 are 30 percent less likely to complete high school than children who are poor for the first time later in their life. That can limit these children’s future both economically because they are less likely to get well-paid jobs as adults. (Operation Warm).

“Poverty during a child’s early years has a more powerful influence on grade completed than poverty during school years. The high school dropout rate for central cities is 14% compared with 7% for adolescents in the suburbs. In areas with high poverty, graduation rates approach only 50% of those who started high school. It is estimated that an increase in mean family income of \$10 000 during the child’s first 5 years of life results in almost 1 full year of schooling” (Wood).

In conclusion, Poverty does not only includes money. Poverty is a combination of unfortunate situations that many families have to go through because they don't have the money to rent a good apartment and buy enough food or healthy food for the family. That can cause them malnutrition, and other health problems. Because 11.6% of families have a low income below the poverty line, almost 20% of children are poor in Rhode Island. As a result, many children are living in very difficult conditions that cause them permanent physical and mental damage that doesn’t guarantee them a good economic future because of the lack of education most of these children receive and because most poor children do not finish school. “Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.” (Nelson Mandela)