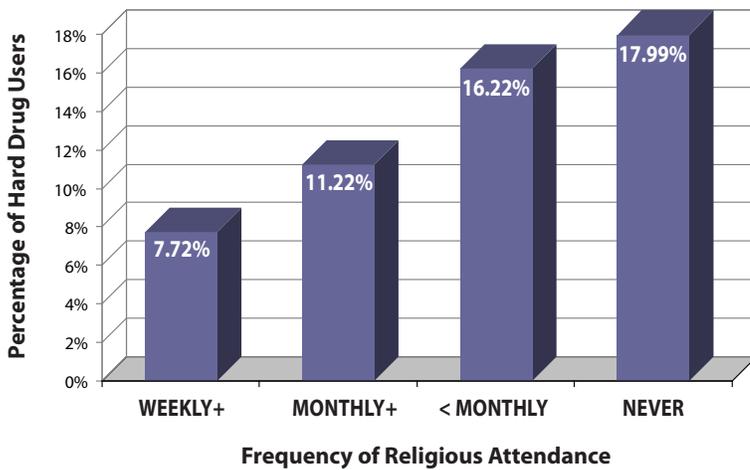




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 7

Religious Attendance and Adolescent Use of Hard Drugs

Hard Drug Use by Religious Attendance ¹



Source: Adolescent Health Survey, Wave I. Adolescents grade 7-12.

¹This chart draws on a large national sample (16,000) from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. This work was done by the author in cooperation with former colleagues at The Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C.

Adolescents who worship at least weekly are less likely to use hard drugs than those who worship less frequently.

Whereas only eight percent of students in Grades 7-12 who worship at least weekly have ever used hard drugs, 18 percent of those who never worship admit using hard drugs. In between are those who attend one to three times a month (11 percent) and less than once a month (16 percent). The data are taken from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II.

Other Studies

Many other studies corroborate the direction of these findings.² Examining the same data set used above, Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas at Austin and Glen Elder of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported that the likelihood of drug use decreases when an adolescent considers religion to be important or when religion becomes important to him over time. This correlation held even when accounting for other factors that increase the likelihood of drug use.³

Researching another data set on high school seniors, Jerry Trusty of Texas A&M University and Richard Watts of Baylor University found that those who report frequent attendance at religious activities and who perceive religion positively are less likely to take drugs than adolescents who attend church less frequently.⁴

Lisa Pullen of the University of Tennessee and colleagues also found that as adolescent religious attendance increases, drug abuse decreases.⁵

Examining adolescent cocaine use in Miami public schools, Barbara Yarnold of Florida International University reported that the only statistically significant factor that inhibits adolescents' cocaine use is the importance of religion in their lives.⁶

In a wide-ranging treatise on American adolescents, Elder found that religious activity correlates to less drug use and fewer manifestations of the self-destructive attitudes and actions that accompany drug use.⁷

In combating the evils of drug use, frequency of religious worship is repeatedly and powerfully protective.

Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.
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2 The following findings are from www.familyfacts.org.

3 Mark D. Regnerus and Glen H. Elder Jr., "Religion and Vulnerability among Low-Risk Adolescents," *Social Science Research* 32 (2003): 633-658.

4 Jerry Trusty and Richard E. Watts, "Relationship of High School Seniors' Religious Perceptions and Behavior to Educational, Career, and Leisure Variables," *Counseling and Values* 44 (1999): 30-40.

5 L. Pullen, M. A. Modrcin-Talbott, W. R. West, and R. Muenchen, "Spiritual High vs. High on Spirits: Is Religiosity Related to Adolescent Alcohol and Drug Abuse?" *Journal of Psychiatric & Mental Health Nursing* 6 (1999): 3-8.

6 Barbara Yarnold, "Cocaine Use among Miami's Public School Students, 1992: Religion versus Peers and Availability," *Journal of Health and Social Policy* 11 (1999): 69-84.

7 Glen H. Elder Jr., *Children of the Land* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).



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