

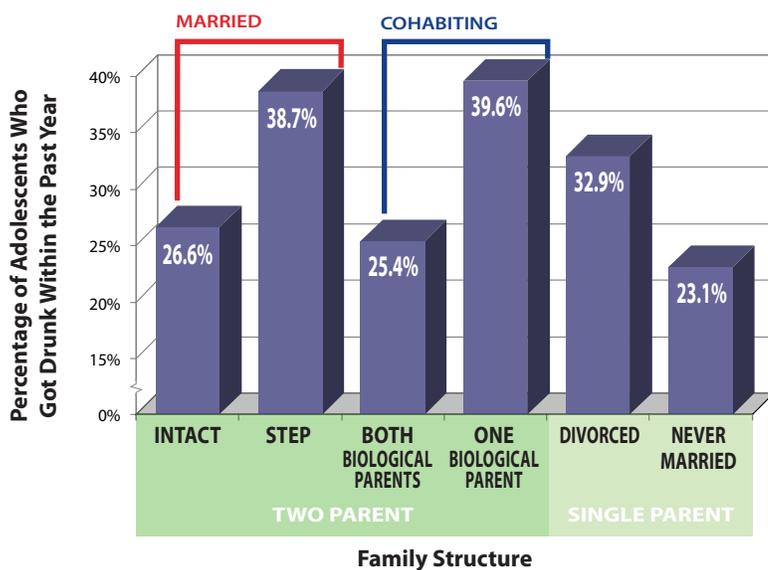


# Mapping America™

Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 17

## Family Structure and Drinking

Getting Drunk by Family Structure<sup>1</sup>



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

<sup>1</sup> This 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 live in an intact family are less likely to get drunk than those living in step-families, those whose parents have divorced, or those raised by a cohabiting biological parent.

According to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II, children who live with both biological parents are less likely to get drunk (25.4 percent of those living with cohabiting biological parents and 26.6 percent of those living with married parents).<sup>2</sup> Nearly 33 percent of adolescents whose parents are divorced got drunk in the year prior to being asked, and for those living with a step-parent or only

one biological cohabiting parent, the percentage increases to 39 and 40, respectively. Just 23 percent of adolescents whose parents never married admitted to getting drunk within that timeframe.

### Other Studies

Many other studies corroborate most of these findings but contradict the anomalous data point showing adolescents in single-parent homes as least likely to get drunk. Kathleen Rodgers and Hilary Rose of Washington State University, for instance, found that adolescents in intact families were less likely to engage in binge drinking than their peers in divorced or blended single-parent homes.<sup>3</sup>

Jeffrey Cookston of the University of Texas at Austin also reported that adolescents in single-parent families are more likely to use alcohol than those living with intact families.<sup>4</sup>

In a wide-ranging study of factors influencing adolescent alcohol use, Edward Norton of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and colleagues found that “[l]iving in a single-parent family was by far the strongest predictor of adolescent drinking.”<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Kenneth Griffin of Cornell University Medical College and colleagues noted that “boys from single-parent families reported...drinking alcohol more frequently than other youth.”<sup>6</sup>

The data strongly indicate that an intact family is the superior family structure in protecting children from the ills of alcohol.

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2 There is no statistical difference between these two data sets.

3 Kathleen B. Rodgers and Hilary A. Rose, “Risk and Resiliency among Adolescents Who Experience Marital Transitions,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 64 (2002): 1024-1037. This finding is from [www.familyfacts.org](http://www.familyfacts.org).

4 Jeffrey T. Cookston, “Parental Supervision and Family Structure: Effects on Adolescent Problem Behaviors,” *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, vol. 32 (1999): 107-122.

5 Edward C. Norton, Richard C. Lindrooth, and Susan T. Ennett, “Controlling for the Endogeneity of Peer Substance Use on Adolescent Alcohol and Tobacco Use,” *Health Economics*, vol. 7 (1998): 439-453.

6 Kenneth W. Griffin, Gilbert J. Botvin, Lawrence M. Scheier, Tracy Diaz, and Nicole L. Miller, “Parenting Practices as Predictors of Substance Use, Delinquency, and Aggression among Urban Minority Youth: Moderating Effects of Family Structure and Gender,” *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 14.2 (2000): 174-184.



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