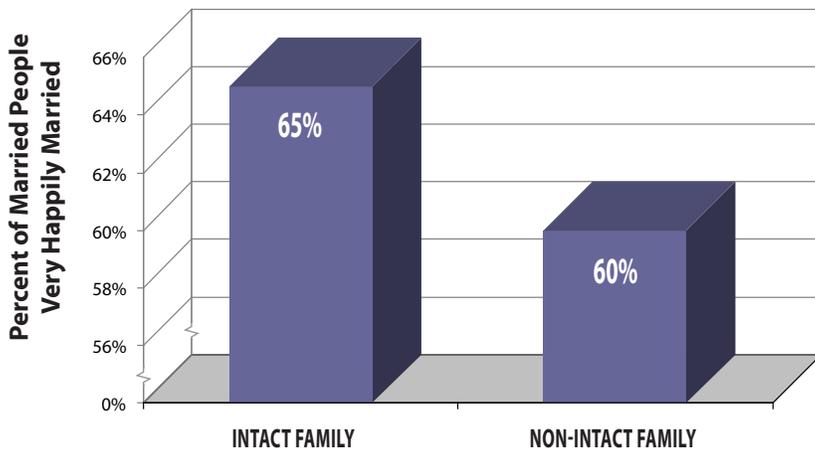




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 32

Intergenerational Links to Marital Happiness: Family Structure

Percent of Married People Very Happily Married by Their Family Structure during Adolescence



Family Structure during Adolescence

Source: General Social Survey (GSS)

This chart is taken from a study conducted by Visiting Fellow Althea Nagai for Family Research Council.

Adults who grew up living with both biological parents experience higher levels of marital happiness.

According to the General Social Survey (GSS), 65 percent of married adults who lived in an intact family as adolescents were very happy with their current marriage, compared to 60 percent of married adults who lived in a non-intact family.¹

Other Studies

Several divorce studies corroborate the import of these findings. Paul Amato of the Pennsylvania State University and Danelle DeBoer of the University of Nebraska reported a causal relationship between the instability of parents' marriages and their children's marriages. They found that "coming from a divorced family of origin increases the risk of seeing one's own marriage end in divorce."²

Nicholas Wolfinger of the University of Utah also reported that "[m]arriages between the children of divorce are even more likely to fail than are unions involving just one spouse from a divorced family of origin."³

Timothy Biblarz and Greg Gottainer of the University of Southern California found that the general happiness levels of adults who lived with two biological parents were similar to those who lived with widowed single mothers. Both categories, though, scored “substantially higher than those of children from divorced single-mother families.”⁴

The data clearly show that an intact married family, unmarred by divorce, offers children the best chance for marital happiness.

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- 1 This chart draws on data collected by the General Social Survey, 1972-2006. From 1972 to 1993, the sample size averaged 1,500 each year. No GSS was conducted in 1979, 1981, or 1992. Since 1994, the GSS has been conducted only in even-numbered years and uses two samples per GSS that total approximately 3,000. In 2006, a third sample was added for a total sample size of 4,510.
 - 2 Paul R. Amato and Danelle D. DeBoer, “The Transmission of Marital Instability across Generations: Relationship Skills or Commitment to Marriage?” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 63 (2001): 1,038-1,051.
 - 3 Nicholas H. Wolfinger, “Family Structure Homogamy: The Effects of Parental Divorce on Partner Selection and Marital Stability,” *Social Science Research*, vol. 32 (2003): 80-97.
 - 4 Timothy Biblarz and Greg Gottainer, “Family Structure and Children’s Success: A Comparison of Widowed and Divorced Single-Mother Families,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 62 (2000): 533-548.



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