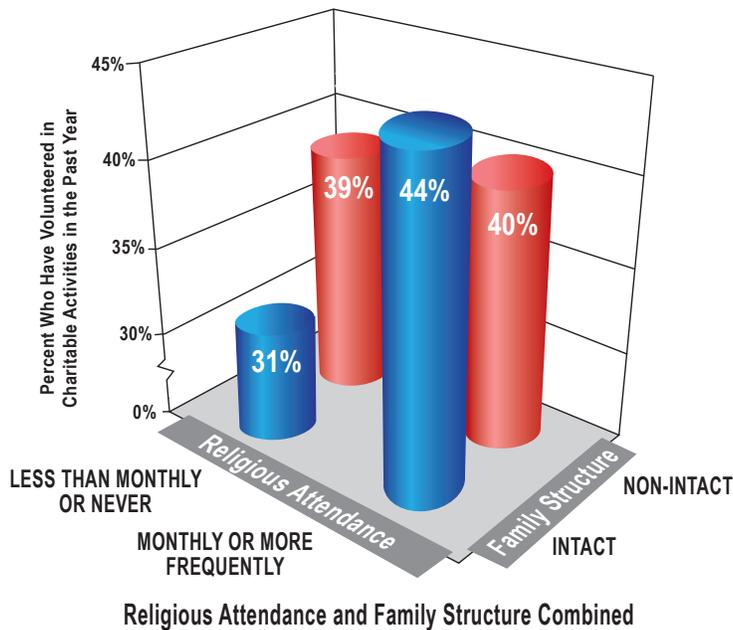




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 45

Intergenerational Links to Volunteering in Charitable Activities: Religious Attendance and Family Structure

Percent Who Have Volunteered in Charitable Activities in the Past Year by Frequency of Their Religious Attendance and Family Structure during Adolescence



This chart groups the data in four categories, with two different configurations for each of two major indicators, frequency of religious attendance (monthly or more/less than monthly) and family structure (intact/non-intact).

The intact category consists of families with both biological parents, married or unmarried, raising their children. The non-intact category is composed of families without both biological parents, including married stepfamilies, cohabiting stepfamilies, divorced single-parent families, and always single-parent families.

The resultant four categories are 1) intact family with monthly or more religious attendance; 2) intact family with less than monthly religious attendance; 3) non-intact family with monthly or more religious attendance; and 4) non-intact family with less than monthly religious attendance.

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

Adults who frequently attended religious services as adolescents and grew up living with both biological parents are most likely to have volunteered in a charitable activity in the past year.

According to the General Social Survey (GSS), 44 percent of adults who attended religious services at least monthly and lived in an intact family as adolescents had volunteered in a charitable activity in the last year, compared to 31 percent of adults who attended religious services less than monthly and lived in an intact family as adolescents. In between were those who lived in a non-intact family and attended religious services less than monthly (39 percent) and those who had attended religious services at least monthly but lived in a non-intact family (40 percent)¹.

As the findings show, family structure during adolescence has no effect on adult volunteerism, but when combined with adolescent religious attendance, large differences emerge in the patterns of volunteering in charitable activities as adults.

Other Studies

To the best of our knowledge, no other studies have correlated adolescent religious attendance and family structure with adult volunteerism in charitable activities, but some studies have correlated adolescent religious attendance and family structure with contemporaneous volunteerism.

Daniel Lichter of the Ohio State University and colleagues found that “religious attendance increases the likelihood of volunteerism” for males and females in late adolescence and that single-parent families “are negatively associated with later prosocial behaviors,” especially for boys.²

Judith Smetana and Aaron Metzger of the University of Rochester also reported that “middle class African American adolescents’ spirituality and religiosity had a significant influence on their civic involvement” and that their intended involvement in future civic activities was predicted by positive communication with their mothers and fathers.³

As the evidence indicates, adolescents who frequently attend religious services and live in intact families are most likely to volunteer in charitable activities, both now and in the future, while their less religious counterparts are least likely.

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1 This chart draws on data collected by the General Social Survey in 1998. Two samples totaling approximately 3,000 people were used.

2 Daniel T. Lichter, et al., “Helping Others?: The Effects of Childhood Poverty and Family Instability on Prosocial Behavior,” *Youth Society*, vol. 34 (2002): 89-119.

3 Judith G. Smetana and Aaron Metzger, “Family and Religious Antecedents of Civic Involvement in Middle Class African American Late Adolescents,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, vol. 15 (2005): 325-352.



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