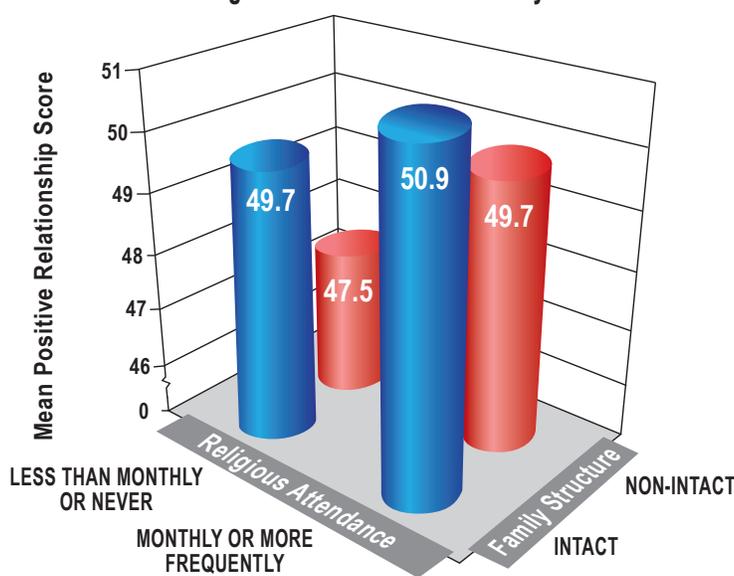




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 48

Quality of Parent-Child Relationship, Religious Attendance, and Family Structure

Quality of Parent-Child Relationship by Children's Religious Attendance and Family Structure



Religious Attendance and Family Structure Combined

Source: National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH)

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 or two adoptive parents, married or unmarried, raising their children. The non-intact category is composed of families without both biological parents or two adoptive parents, including married stepfamilies, cohabiting stepfamilies, divorced single-parent families, always single-parent families, foster-parent families, and other-relative 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 Nicholas Zill, Ph.D.¹ for Family Research Council.²

Children from intact families who frequently attend worship are most likely to have a high-quality relationship with their parents.

This chart depicts the mean positive parental relationship score of children aged 6 to 17, correlated with religious attendance and family structure. Children who worship frequently and live with both biological parents or with two adoptive parents have a higher score (50.9) than those who worship less than monthly and live in single-parent or reconstituted families (47.5). In between are those who live in intact families and worship less than monthly (49.7) and those who live in non-intact families who worship at least monthly (49.7). The data are taken from the National Survey of Children's Health.

The stress of marital conflict and separation, and the strains of maintaining a household and rearing children as a single parent, often interfere with the task of interacting with children in a calm, positive, yet firm and authoritative manner.³

On the other hand, when parents and children are involved in a religious

community, other members of the community and their children provide emotional support and practical assistance to the family and make it easier for parents to raise their children. Members of a religious community also reinforce the moral and spiritual lessons that parents try to impart to their children.⁴

Other Studies

Several other sources corroborate the direction of these findings. John Bartkowski of Mississippi State University and W. Bradford Wilcox of Princeton University reported that single parents “are more likely to yell” at their children and that conservative Protestant parents are less likely to do so.⁵

W. Jean Yeung of the University of Michigan and colleagues also found that fathers in intact families devote more time to their children and that most of the “social activity” time fathers spend with their children consists of religious activities.⁶

As the data indicate, religious attendance, religiosity, and intact families are building blocks of healthy parent-child relationships.

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- 1 Nicholas Zill is a research psychologist and consultant. Until his recent retirement, he was a vice president of Westat Inc. He was the founder of Child Trends and its executive director for 13 years.
 - 2 This chart draws on data collected by the National Center for Health Statistics in the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) in 2003. The data sample consisted of parents of 102,353 children and teens in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. 68,996 of these children and teens were between six and 17 years old, the age group that was the focus of the study. The survey sample in this age range represented a population of nearly 49 million young people nationwide.
 - 3 Paul R. Amato, “The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children,” vol. 62 (2000): 1,269-1,287.
 - 4 E. Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly, *For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2002): 75-76.
 - 5 John P. Bartkowski and W. Bradford Wilcox, “Conservative Protestant Child Discipline: The Case of Parental Yelling,” *Social Forces*, vol. 79 (2000): 265-290.
 - 6 W. Jean Yeung, et al., “Children’s Time with Fathers in Intact Families,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 63 (2001): 136-154.



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