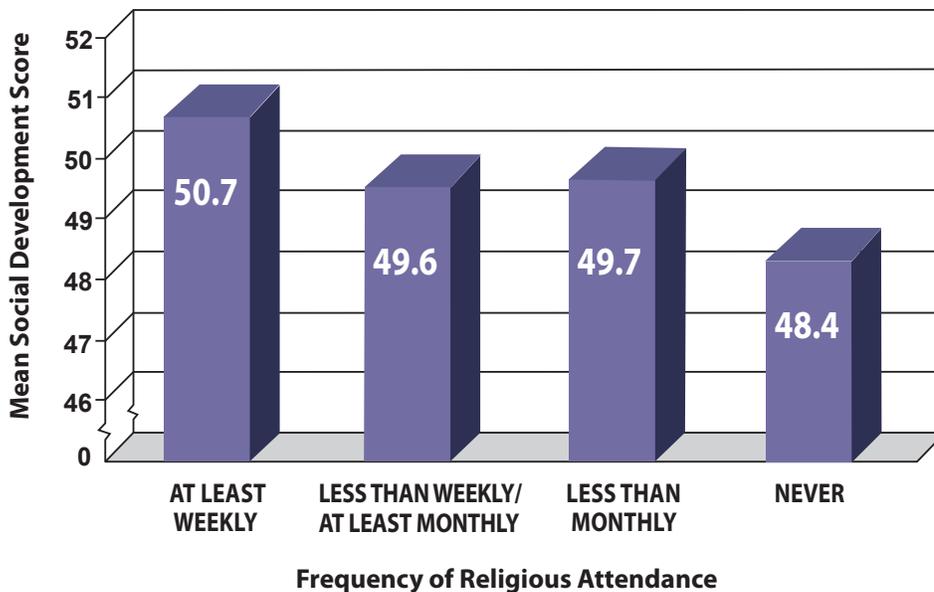




Children’s Positive Social Development and Religious Attendance

Children’s Positive Social Development by Religious Attendance



Source: National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH, 2003)

Nicholas Zill, Ph.D.¹ provided the data for this chart.²

Children who attend worship at least weekly are more socially developed than those who worship less frequently.

According to the National Survey of Children’s Health, children who attend religious services at least weekly score higher on the social development scale (50.7) than children who never attend religious services (48.4). In between are children who worship one to three times a

month (49.6) and children who attend religious services less than once a month (49.7).

Positive social development is shown by behaviors such as getting along with other children, showing respect for teachers and neighbors, trying to understand other people’s feelings, and trying to resolve conflicts between people.

Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate the direction of these findings. Analyzing data in a related field, Kenneth Steinman of Ohio State University and Marc Zimmerman of the University of Michigan found that adolescent religious attendance corresponded with fewer incidences of risky behavior.³

Stuart Varon of Johns Hopkins Hospital and Anne Riley of the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine reported that frequent maternal religious attendance appeared to strengthen the well-

being and social functioning of children in early adolescence, although adolescent religious attendance itself did not have any noticeable effect.⁴

As the evidence shows, adolescent and maternal religious attendance has a distinct, though small, positive effect on adolescents' social development.

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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 Kenneth J. Steinman and Marc A. Zimmerman, "Religious Activity and Risk Behavior among African American Adolescents: Concurrent and Developmental Effects," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 33 (2004): 151-161.
 - 4 Stuart R. Varon and Anne W. Riley, "Relationship between Maternal Church Attendance and Adolescent Mental Health and Social Functioning," *Psychiatric Services*, vol. 50 (1999): 799-805.



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