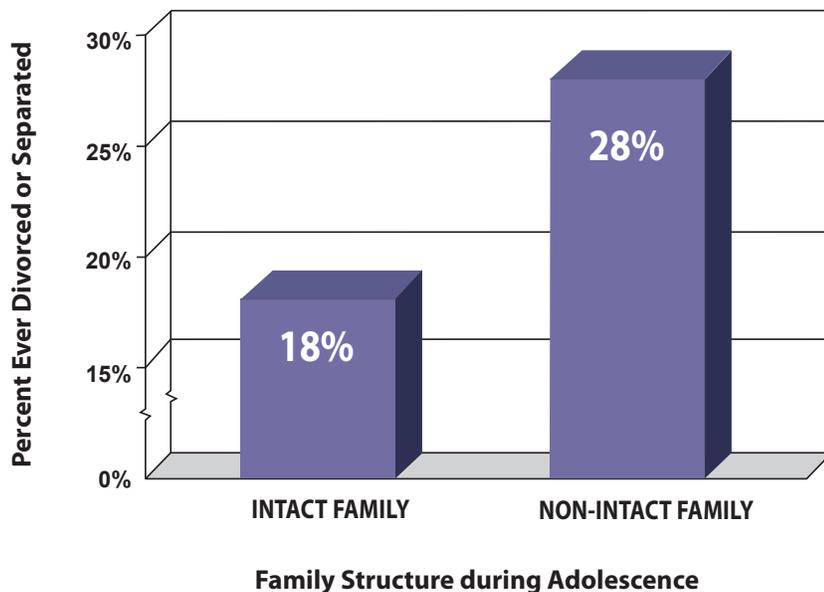




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 62

Divorce or Separation: Family Structure in Adolescence

Divorce or Separation in Adulthood by Family Structure in Adolescence



Source: General Social Surveys (GSS, 1972-2006)

Visiting Fellow Althea Nagai provided the data for this chart.

Adults who grew up living with both biological parents are less likely ever to be divorced or separated than those who did not.

According to the General Social Surveys (GSS), 18 percent of adults who lived in an intact family have ever been divorced or separated, compared to 28 percent of those who lived in a non-intact family.¹

Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate the direction of these findings. Paul Amato of the University of Nebraska found that “adult children of divorced parents have an elevated risk of seeing their own marriages end in divorce.”²

Pamela Webster of Brown University and colleagues reported that “children of divorce, more than those from any other single-parent family type, express the most doubts about their marital stability (in addition to the greater perceived chances of divorce, they more often report marital trouble even when very happily married). Moreover, among those in less than very happy marriages, children of divorce are more likely than those with any other single-parent history

to escalate conflict and reduce communication with their spouse, and those marital interactions are associated with an increased self-reported risk of divorce.”³

As the data show, brokenness often begets brokenness in American families.

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- 1 This chart draws on data collected by the General Social Surveys, 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, “Explaining the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 58 (1996): 628-640.
 - 3 Pamela S. Webster, et al., “Effects of Childhood Family Background on Adult Marital Quality and Perceived Stability,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 101 (1995): 404-432.



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