

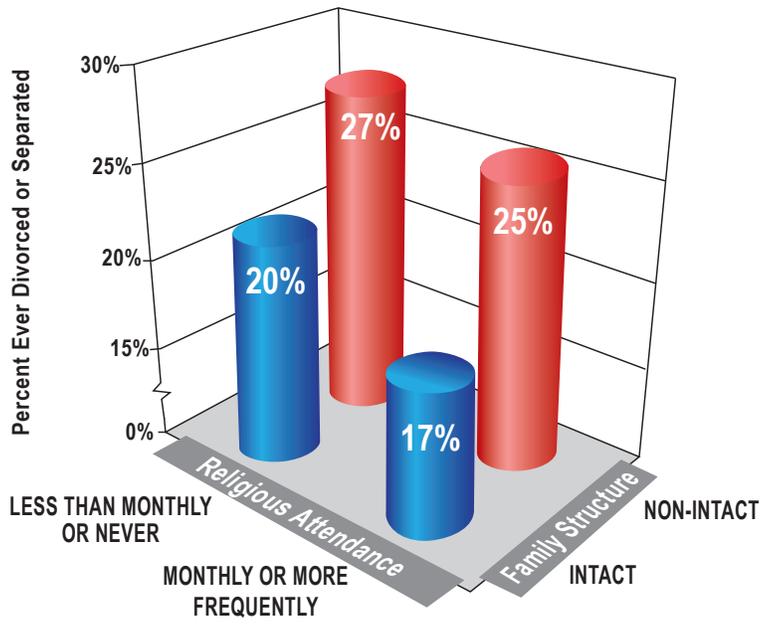


Mapping America™

Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 63

Divorce or Separation: Religious Attendance and Family Structure in Adolescence

Divorce or Separation in Adulthood by Religious Attendance and Family Structure during Adolescence



During Adolescence:
Religious Attendance and Family Structure Combined

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

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 frequently vs. less than monthly or never) and family structure (intact vs. 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.

Visiting Fellow Althea Nagai provided the data for this chart.

Adults who frequently attended religious services as adolescents and grew up living with both biological parents are least likely ever to be divorced or separated.

According to the General Social Surveys (GSS), 17 percent of adults who attended religious services at least monthly and lived in an intact family through adolescence have ever been divorced or separated, compared to 27 percent of those who attended religious services less than monthly and lived in a non-intact family as adolescents. In between were those who attended religious services at least monthly but lived in a non-intact family (25 percent) and those who lived in an intact family but worshipped less than monthly (20 percent).¹

Other Studies

Several other studies analyzing religiosity, childhood family structure, and adult divorce corroborate the direction of these findings. Matthew Bramlett and William Mosher of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

found that “women whose religion is somewhat or very important are...less likely to experience a breakup of their first marriage than those whose religion is not important” and that women who grew up living with both parents “are less likely to experience the breakup of their first marriage than women who were not raised with two parents throughout childhood.”²

Examining divorce in the Netherlands, Paul de Graaf of Radboud University Nijmegen and Matthijs Kalmijn of Tilburg University also reported that “religion has a clear negative effect on divorce” and that “the overall effect of a parental divorce is significant and substantial: People who have divorced parents (when they were growing up) have a 1.9 times higher odds of divorce than others.”³

As the data show, religion and an intact family during childhood prove effective in strengthening marriages against the possibility of divorce.

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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 Matthew D. Bramlett and William D. Mosher, “Cohabitation, Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the United States,” *Vital and Health Statistics*, series 22 (2002): 1-32.

3 Paul de Graaf and Matthijs Kalmijn, “Change and Stability in the Social Determinants of Divorce: A Comparison of Marriage Cohorts in the Netherlands,” *European Sociological Review*, vol. 22 (2006): 561-572.



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