

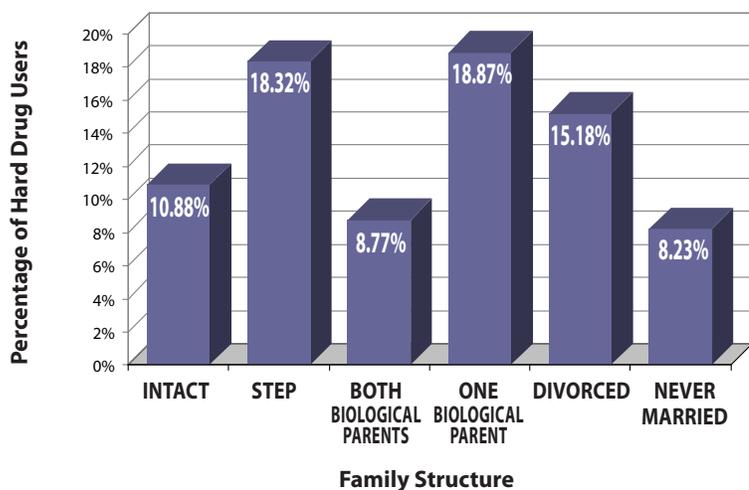


Mapping America™

Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 8

Family Structure and Adolescent Use of Hard Drugs

Hard Drug Use by Family Structure¹



Source: Adolescent Health Survey, Wave I. Adolescents grade 7-12.

¹ This chart draws on a large national sample (16,000) from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. This work was done by the author in cooperation with former colleagues at The Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C.

Adolescents who live with both biological parents are less likely to use hard drugs than those living in step-families, those whose parents have divorced, or those raised by a cohabiting single parent.

According to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II, children who live with both biological parents are less inclined to try hard drugs (nine percent of adolescents with cohabiting biological parents and 11 percent of adolescents with married parents).² More than 15 percent of adolescents whose parents are divorced have used hard drugs, and for those living with a step-parent or only one natural cohabiting parent, the percentage increases to 18 and 19, respectively.

Just eight percent of adolescents whose parents never married admitted to ever using hard drugs.

Other Studies³

Shanta Dube of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that divorce and parental separation not only increase the likelihood that adolescents will try drugs, but also the amount of drug use, intravenous use, and addiction. Fourteen-year-olds whose parents divorced were nearly four times as likely to try illicit drugs and twice as likely to use them when they become adults.⁴

Several other studies confirm these findings and contradict the anomalous data point represented in the chart that shows adolescents whose parents never married with the lowest percentage of hard drug use. Rebecca Turner of Alliant International University in San Francisco and colleagues reported that adolescents with single parents are more likely to experiment with substances than those in intact families. They also found that the more emotionally detached adolescents are from one or both of their biological parents, the more substances they will try. Adolescents with single parents use an average of 2.49 substances while those in intact families use an average of 1.8 substances.⁵

Kathleen Rodgers and Hilary Rose of Washington State University found that adolescents residing with divorced parents, whether remarried or single, are more likely to use drugs, even when controlling for parenting style, community, and demographic factors.⁶

The data strongly indicate that adolescents in intact married families are least likely to use hard drugs. Family structure matters.

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2 There is no statistical difference between these two data sets.

3 The following findings are from www.familyfacts.org.

4 Shanta R. Dube, "Childhood Abuse, Neglect, and Household Dysfunction and the Risk of Illicit Drug Use: The Adverse Experiences Study," *Pediatrics* 111 (2003): 564-572.

5 Rebecca A. Turner, Charles E. Irwin Jr., and Susan G. Millstein, "Family Structure, Family Processes, and Experimenting with Substances during Adolescence," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 1 (1991): 93-106.

6 Kathleen B. Rodgers and Hilary A. Rose, "Risk and Resiliency Factors among Adolescents Who Experience Marital Transitions," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 64 (2002): 1024-1037.



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