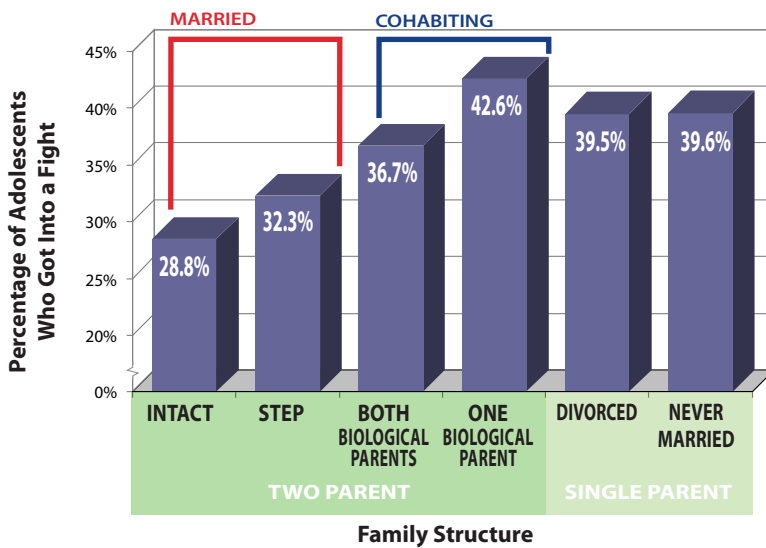




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 14

Family Structure and Fighting

Ever Got Into a Fight 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 in an intact married family are least likely to get into a fight.

Whereas 42.6 percent of adolescents living with one natural, cohabiting parent have been in a fight, only 28.8 percent of those with married parents have ever been in one, according to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II. Among other family structures, 32.3 percent of adolescents living in stepfamilies, 36.7 percent of those living with cohabiting biological parents, 39.5 percent of those whose parents are divorced, and 39.6 percent of those whose parents have never married have ever been in a fight.

Other Sources

Many other studies corroborate these findings. Analyzing violence patterns among 1,642 black children and teens in an Alabama school district, Darlene Wright of Birmingham-Southern College and Kevin Fitzpatrick of the University of Arkansas reported that “family intactness had a significant negative relationship with fighting.”²

Roy Oman of the University of Oklahoma and colleagues also found that inner-city youth in two-parent households were more likely to report not fighting in the previous 12 months (67 percent) than those in one-parent households (58 percent).³

Revealing the primacy of the intact married family, Sarah Halpern-Meekin and Laura Tach of Harvard University reported that children who live with half-siblings “have significantly higher delinquency scores” than children who live solely with full siblings, “even though they are both being raised by their biological [married] parents.”⁴

Chris Knoester and Dana Hayne of Ohio State University found that family structure significantly affects youth violence at the neighborhood level. They found that “the proportion of single-parent families in the neighborhood [is] positively associated with an adolescent’s risk of committing violence.”⁵

When it comes to rearing well-adjusted children who can keep their tempers in check, there is no better coach than the intact married family.

Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow
Director of the Center for Family and Religion
Family Research Council

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- 2 Darlene R. Wright and Kevin M. Fitzpatrick, “Violence and Minority Youth: The Effects of Risk and Asset Factors on Fighting among African American Children and Adolescents,” *Adolescence* 41 (2006): 251-262.
 - 3 Roy F. Oman, Sara K. Vesely, and Cheryl B. Aspy, “Youth Assets, Aggression, and Delinquency within the Context of Family Structure,” *American Journal of Health Behavior* 29.6 (2005): 557-568.
 - 4 Sarah Halpern-Meekin and Laura Tach, “Heterogeneity in Two-Parent Families and Adolescent Well-Being,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70 (2008): 435-451.
 - 5 Chris Knoester and Dana L. Haynie, “Community Context, Social Integration into Family, and Youth Violence,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67 (2005): 767-780.



FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL
801 G STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20001
800-225-4008
WWW.FRC.ORG

Mapping America
Editor: Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.
Managing Editor: Michael Leaser

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