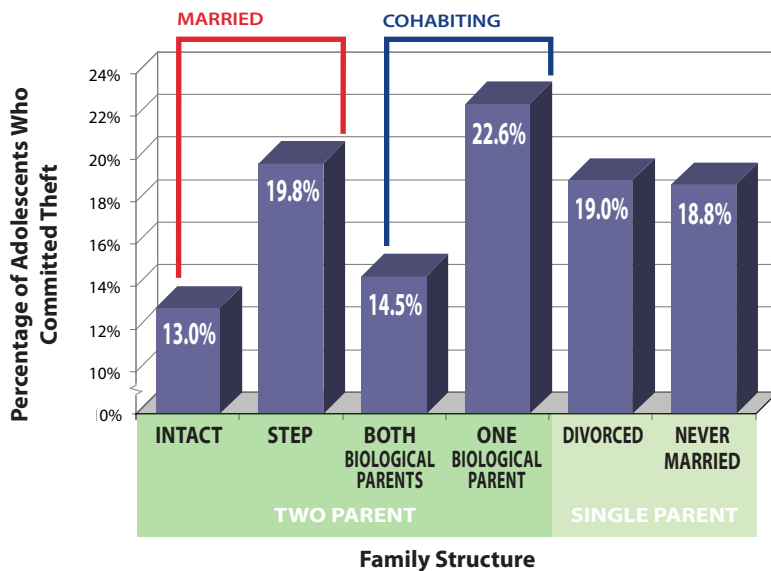




Family Structure and Theft

Theft by Family Structure¹



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

Adolescents who live in an intact married family are less likely to steal than those living in step-families, those whose parents are divorced, or those raised by cohabiting parents.

According to a confidential survey conducted as part of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II, 13 percent of children who live in an intact married family admit to having stolen at least \$50 worth of goods.² By comparison, 19 percent of children whose parents never married or are divorced have stolen as much, as have 20 percent of those living with a step-parent, 15 percent

of those living with cohabiting biological parents, and 23 percent of those living with one cohabiting biological parent.

Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate these findings. Amy Anderson of Pennsylvania State University found that children living in one-parent households were more likely to commit property crimes than those living in two-parent households.³

George Thomas of the Research Institute on Addictions and colleagues also reported that adolescents living with both biological parents have the lowest delinquency levels.⁴

In a study of adolescents in the United Kingdom, Patrick Miller and Martin Plant of the University of the West of England found that children living in single-parent households were more prone to vandalism and theft.⁵

When it comes to raising adolescents who don't steal, in general, married parents do the job better.

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

-
- 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.
 - 2 The data indicate those adolescents who have stolen more than \$50 worth of goods.
 - 3 Amy L. Anderson, "Individual and Contextual Influences on Delinquency: The Role of the Single-Parent Family," *Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 30 (2002): 575-587. The four measures for property crime included: stolen or tried to steal something worth less than US\$50; stolen or tried to steal something worth more than US\$50; entered or tried to enter a building to steal something; and stolen or attempted to steal a motor vehicle.
 - 4 George Thomas, et al., "The Effects of Single-Mother Families and Nonresident Fathers on Delinquency and Substance Abuse in Black and White Adolescents," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 58 (1996): 884-894. The delinquency measures included stealing, assault, gang fighting, credit card or check forgery, breaking into a house or car, engaging in sexual relations, taking money from a family member without his or her knowledge, pushing or hitting a parent, and throwing something at a family member.
 - 5 Patrick Miller and Martin Plant, "The Family, Peer Influences and Substance Use: Findings from a Study of UK Teenagers," *Journal of Substance Use*, vol. 8 (2003): 19-26.



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

Please feel free to make additional copies of this resource. We only ask that you comply with standard norms of attribution to the Family Research Council and to Mapping America.

WWW.MAPPINGAMERICAPROJECT.ORG