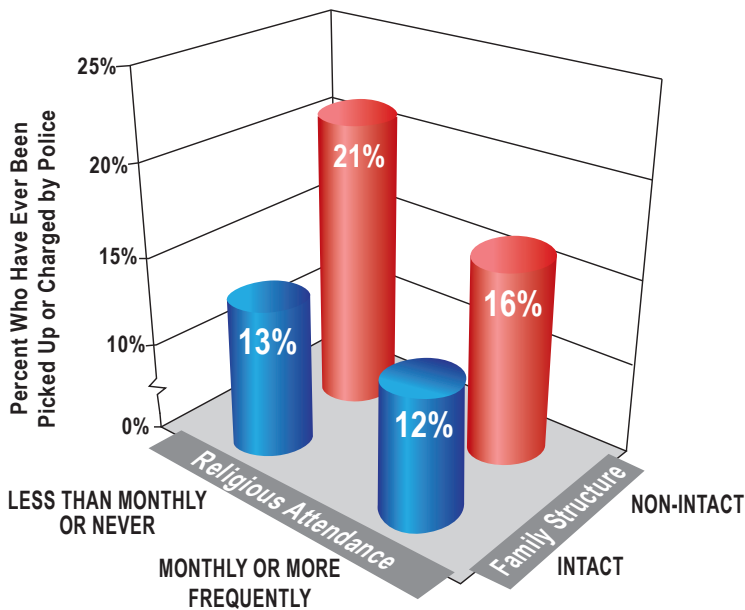




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 57

Intergenerational Links to Being Picked Up or Charged by Police: Religious Attendance and Family Structure

Percent Who Have Ever Been Picked Up or Charged by Police by Their Religious Attendance and Family Structure during Adolescence



Religious Attendance and Family Structure Combined

Source: General Social Surveys (GSS, 1972-1987)

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 to have ever been picked up or charged by police.

According to the General Social Surveys (GSS), 12 percent of adults who attended religious services at least monthly and lived in an intact family through adolescence have ever been picked up or charged by police, compared to 21 percent of adults who attended religious services less than monthly and lived in a non-intact family as adolescents. In between were those who lived in an intact family but attended religious services less than monthly (13 percent) and those who had attended religious services at least monthly but lived in a non-intact family (16 percent).¹

Other Studies

Though no other studies, to the best of our knowledge, have correlated adolescent religious attendance and family structure

with adult arrests, several contemporaneous studies corroborate the direction of these findings. Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas at Austin reported that adolescents with more religious parents and higher family satisfaction are less likely to exhibit delinquent behavior.²

Wendy Manning of Bowling Green State University and Kathleen Lamb of the University of Wisconsin also found that adolescents who were more religious and adolescents who lived with their married parents were less likely to paint graffiti or signs on someone else's property or in a public place, deliberately damage someone else's property, take something from a store without paying for it, drive a car without the owner's permission, use or threaten to use a weapon to get something from someone, and sell marijuana or other drugs.³

As the evidence shows, religious attendance and an intact family weave a powerful safety net that keeps both adolescents, and later adults, from being picked up or charged by police.

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1 This chart draws on data collected by the General Social Surveys, 1972-1987. The sample size averaged 1,500 each year. No GSS was conducted in 1979 or 1981.

2 Mark D. Regnerus, "Linked Lives, Faith and Behavior: Intergenerational Religious Influence on Adolescent Delinquency," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, vol. 42 (2003): 189-203.

3 Wendy D. Manning and Kathleen A. Lamb, "Adolescent Well-Being in Cohabiting, Married, and Single-Parent Families," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 65 (2003): 876-893.



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