Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good
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Welcome to *Mapping America*!

*Mapping America* is a weekly release that uses federal survey data to show how the intact married family that worships weekly is the greatest generator of human and social goods and the core strength of the United States. The federal surveys used include the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, the General Social Surveys, and the National Survey of Children's Health.

Each new issue correlates religious attendance, family structure, or both with topics such as marital happiness, drug use, and fighting. Each “maps” America and gives a snapshot of who we are or how we behave on each issue.

Though only launched in 2008, *Mapping America* is already being used by many in the pro-family movement. For instance, Julaine Appling of the Wisconsin Family Council frequently uses the weekly *Mapping America*: “We find these helpful and useful in a number of areas. Right now we use them frequently to help shape our ‘Wisconsin Family Minute’ radio spots.” Dr. Michael Ross of Defending Our Father’s House says, “These data are of vital importance to my work in advocating for the legal and institutional integrity of marriage and family.”

For this special collection of *Mapping America*, we have selected the most interesting and engaging “maps,” those combining religious attendance and family structure. It is our hope that *Mapping America* will make the “core strength of the nation” more obvious to more and more people, thus encouraging the restoration of faithful marriage and religious worship.

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Senior Fellow and Director, Marriage and Religion Research Institute (MARRI)
Intergenerational Links to Marital Happiness: Religious Attendance and Family Structure

This chart is taken from a study conducted by Visiting Fellow Althea Nagai for Family Research Council.

Adults who frequently attended religious services as adolescents and grew up living with both biological parents experience higher levels of marital happiness.

According to the General Social Survey (GSS), 65 percent of married adults who attended religious services at least monthly and lived in an intact family as adolescents were very happy with their current marriage, compared to 53 percent of married adults who attended religious services less than monthly and lived in a non-intact family as adolescents. In between were those married adults who had attended religious services at least monthly but lived in a non-intact family (59 percent) and those who lived in an intact family but attended religious services less than monthly (also 59 percent).1

Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate the direction of these findings. Paul Amato and Alan Booth of the Pennsylvania State University...
reported that strong parental religiosity led to fewer instances of parental marital discord and “that parents’ marital quality has a causal impact on offspring’s marital quality.”

W. Bradford Wilcox also found that husbands who believed strongly in religious attendance and the importance of intact families had wives who reported high levels of marital happiness.

The data indicate that the benefits of frequent religious attendance and the intactness of parents’ marriages will positively effect marital happiness in adulthood.

Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D. & Althea Nagai, Ph.D.

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1 This chart draws on data collected by the General Social Survey, 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.


This chart is taken from a study conducted by Nicholas Zill, Ph.D. for Family Research Council.

Children from intact families who frequently attend worship are most likely to have a high-quality relationship with their parents.

This chart depicts the mean positive parental relationship score of children aged 6 to 17, correlated with religious attendance and family structure. Children who worship frequently and live with both biological parents or with two adoptive parents have a higher score (50.9) than those who worship less than monthly and live in single-parent or reconstituted families (47.5). In between are those who live in intact families and worship less than monthly (49.7) and those who live in non-intact families who worship at least monthly (49.7). The data are taken from the National Survey of Children’s Health.

The stress of marital conflict and separation, and the strains of maintaining a household and rearing children as a single parent, often interfere with the task of interacting with children in a calm, positive, yet firm and authoritative manner.

On the other hand, when parents and children are involved in a religious
community, other members of the community and their children provide emotional support and practical assistance to the family and make it easier for parents to raise their children. Members of a religious community also reinforce the moral and spiritual lessons that parents try to impart to their children.4

Other Studies

Several other sources corroborate the direction of these findings. John Bartkowski of Mississippi State University and W. Bradford Wilcox of Princeton University reported that single parents “are more likely to yell” at their children and that conservative Protestant parents are less likely to do so.5

W. Jean Yeung of the University of Michigan and colleagues also found that fathers in intact families devote more time to their children and that most of the “social activity” time fathers spend with their children consists of religious activities.6

As the data indicate, religious attendance, religiosity, and intact families are building blocks of healthy parent-child relationships.

Nicholas Zill, Ph.D.
Research Psychologist
Former Vice President of Westat
Founding President of Child Trends

1 Nicholas Zill is a research psychologist and consultant. Until his recent retirement, he was a vice president of Westat Inc. He was the founder of Child Trends and its executive director for 13 years.
2 This chart draws on data collected by the National Center for Health Statistics in the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) in 2003. The data sample consisted of parents of 102,353 children and teens in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. 68,996 of these children and teens were between six and 17 years old, the age group that was the focus of the study. The survey sample in this age range represented a population of nearly 49 million young people nationwide.
4 E. Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly, For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2002): 75-76.
Intergenerational Links to Happiness: Religious Attendance and Family Structure

This chart is taken from a study conducted by Visiting Fellow Althea Nagai for Family Research Council.

Adults who frequently attended religious services as adolescents and grew up living with both biological parents are most likely to be very happy.

According to the General Social Survey (GSS), 35 percent of adults who attended religious services at least monthly and lived in an intact family through adolescence considered themselves very happy, compared to 23 percent of adults who attended religious services less than monthly and lived in a non-intact family as adolescents. In between were those who had attended religious services at least monthly but lived in a non-intact family (26 percent) and those who lived in an intact family but attended religious services less than monthly (30 percent).

The combination of frequent religious attendance during adolescence and an intact family background clearly increases the likelihood of being very happy in adulthood. The data indicate, however, that family structure may have a more pronounced effect than religious attendance.
Other Studies

Very few studies have examined contemporaneous effects of both religious attendance and family structure on happiness, let alone intergenerational effects, but these studies generally support the direction of these findings. Arthur Brooks of Syracuse University reported that while “practicing a religion makes people very happy, on average,” married people are “nearly twice as likely as singles” to report being very happy.2

In a study of Caribbean adolescents, Robert Blum of the University of Minnesota and colleagues found that adolescents who report having religious beliefs and connectedness with their parents are less likely to experience rage.3

Though the evidence demonstrates that an intact family may have a greater influence than religiosity on the likelihood of being very happy, the combination of frequent religious attendance and an intact family yields the highest proportion of very happy people, as adolescents and adults.

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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 worshiped 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.”

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.”

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.


Adult Religious Attendance by Religious Attendance and Family Structure in Adolescence

Visiting Fellow Althea Nagai provided the data for this chart.

Adults who attended religious services at least monthly as adolescents and grew up in an intact family are significantly more likely to attend religious services monthly or more frequently as adults than are those who attended less frequently and whose family of origin was non-intact.

Additionally, those who attended religious services at least monthly frequently as adolescents were substantially more likely to attend religious services as adults, regardless of whether they came from an intact or non-intact family. In other words, with regard to adult religious worship, frequent worship in adolescence significantly mitigates the negative effects of growing up in a non-intact family.

Description: According to the General Social Surveys (GSS),

- 60 percent of adults who grew up attending religious services at least monthly and lived in an intact family (i.e., lived with two biological parents) attend religious services once a month or more as adults;
• 49 percent of adults who grew up in a non-intact family but attended religious services at least monthly also attend religious services at least monthly as adults;
• 37 percent of adults who lived in a non-intact family and attended religious services less than monthly attend religious services at least monthly as adults;
• 35 percent of adults who grew up in an intact family but worshiped less than monthly as adolescents attend religious services at least monthly as adults.¹

Related Insights from Other Studies

Several other studies add insight to these findings. Scott Myers of the Pennsylvania State University reported that “parents’ religiosity is the primary influence on the religiosity of their adult offspring” and that adults “raised in households characterized by high marital happiness and with both biological parents present are more likely to resemble their parents in religious beliefs.”²

Darren Sherkat of Vanderbilt University also found that childhood religious participation along with strong parental religious participation helps sustain religious adherence in adults and counteracts secularizing influences.³

As the evidence shows, children who grow up in intact families that attend religious services frequently are more likely to worship frequently as adults.

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¹ The statistics in this chart draw on data from the General Social Surveys, 1972-2006. From 1972 to 1993, the sample size averaged 1,500 per year. No survey was conducted in 1979, 1981, or 1992. Since 1994, the GSS was conducted only in even-numbered years, with two samples per survey, totaling approximately 3,000 respondents. In 2006, a third sample was added for a total sample size of 4,510.


Adolescent girls from intact families who worship frequently have the fewest sexual partners in high school.

This chart depicts the average number of sexual intercourse partners for American female adolescents in Grades 7-12 when correlated with religious attendance and family structure. Female students in Grades 7-12 have an average of 0.47 sexual partners when they live in intact families and worship at least monthly. By contrast, those who worship less than monthly and come from broken or reconstituted families have an average of 1.55 sexual partners. Those who worship at least monthly but come from broken or reconstituted families have 0.93 partners. Girls who come from intact families but worship less than monthly have a slightly higher average of 1.14. The data is taken from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II.

Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate findings along these lines. Analyzing fathers’ relationships with their adolescent daughters, Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas...
at Austin and Laura Luchies of Northwestern University report that while dads may feel off balance when their daughters become teenagers, their involvement in their daughters’ lives makes a significant difference, especially if they take them to church weekly and minimize their dating.³

Surveying more than 26,000 female and male adolescents, Christina Lammers of South Dakota State University and colleagues reveal that teens are more likely to practice sexual abstinence if they are more religious, live in a two-parent household, and believe that their parents care about their actions.⁴

Michael J. Donahue and Peter L. Benson of the Search Institute in Minneapolis also find that religious worship is the aspect of religiosity most directly correlated to abstinence among adolescents, more so than considering religion important or participating in church-related activities.⁵

Analyzing contextual environmental data on family structure and religious adherence, Karin L. Brewster of the University of North Carolina and colleagues report that adolescent girls who live in neighborhoods with a high percentage of divorced or separated women are particularly likely to have premarital sexual intercourse. This likelihood, however, is modified by the percentage of religious believers in the community. The greater the percentage of those who practice their faith the less the sexual activity of adolescent girls.⁶

Absent fathers and empty churches contribute to the increased sexual activity of female adolescents. The evidence strongly indicates that teenage girls are least likely to engage in sexual intercourse when living in an intact family that worships frequently.

Thus the two great relationships, between spouses and with God, seem most protective of the sexuality of young female teenagers.

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2 The following findings are from www.familyfacts.org, except for Regnerus and Luchies, which is from the Howard Center for Family, Religion, and Society.


Religious Attendance, Family Structure, and Adolescent Use of Hard Drugs

Adolescents from intact families who worship frequently are least likely ever to try hard drugs.

This chart depicts the percentage of adolescents in Grades 7-12 who have ever tried hard drugs when correlated with religious attendance and family structure. Only 8.5 percent of adolescent students who live with both biological parents and worship at least monthly have ever tried hard drugs. By contrast, over 20 percent of adolescent students who worship less than monthly and come from single-parent or reconstituted families have used hard drugs. In between are those in a non-intact family who worship at least monthly (9.5 percent) and those who live in an intact family but worship less than monthly (14.6 percent). The data are taken from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II.

Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate the direction of these findings. Jerry Trusty of Texas A&M University and Richard Watts of Baylor University found that students who attend religious activities frequently are more likely to have involved parents and less likely to use drugs.2

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

2 These findings are consistent with other research that suggests a positive relationship between religious attendance and lower rates of drug use among adolescents.
Jo Anne Grunbaum of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and colleagues found that increased church attendance and family involvement are significantly associated with decreased cocaine use among students in high school recovery/dropout prevention programs.3

Analyzing data from a random set of 13,250 adolescents in Utah in 1994, Stephen Bahr of Brigham Young University and colleagues reported that while good father-adolescent relationships, as well as good mother-adolescent relationships, have an effect on deterring drug use, a much more significant deterrent to drug use is a student’s religiosity.4

Ray Merrill of Brigham Young University and colleagues found that students at Brigham Young University were less likely to have used drugs if their parents were involved in church and had frequent discussions with their children about appropriate conduct. By contrast, those students whose parents had a neutral or dismissive attitude toward religion were more likely to have used drugs.5

While religious attendance appears to be even more protective than intact marriage, the intact married family that worships frequently is the most protective. The two great loves, of spouse and of God, make a difference to adolescents.

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Religious Attendance, Family Structure, and Shoplifting

Adolescents from intact families who worship frequently are least likely to shoplift repeatedly.

This chart depicts the percentage of adolescents in Grades 7-12 who have repeatedly shoplifted (3+ times) when correlated with religious attendance and family structure. Only six percent of adolescent students who live with both biological parents and worship at least monthly have repeatedly shoplifted. By contrast, over 12 percent of adolescent students who worship less than monthly and come from single-parent or reconstituted families have shoplifted repeatedly. In between are those in a non-intact family who worship at least monthly (7.9 percent) and those who live in an intact family but worship less than monthly (9.9 percent). The data are taken from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II.

Other Sources

Several studies corroborate the direction of these findings. Byron Johnson of Baylor University and colleagues found that while religiosity...
in adolescents has a negative impact on delinquency, adolescents who live with both biological parents are also less likely to associate with delinquent friends.  

Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas at Austin reported that adolescents with higher family satisfaction and a greater degree of parent religiosity are less likely to be delinquent.

In another study, Regnerus and Glen Elder of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that the more important religion is to adolescents and the more satisfied adolescents are with their family, the less likely they are to engage in delinquent behavior.

Jerry Trusty of Texas A&M University and Richard Watts of Baylor University also reported that the greater the importance adolescents place on religion and the more often they attend religious activities, the more likely they are to have involved parents and the less likely they are to be delinquent.

The moral beliefs and values developed through frequent religious worship and an intact family powerfully counteract the temptations of shoplifting and other delinquent acts. Through attendance at religious service and the influence of married parents, adolescents are more likely to respect others’ property.

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2 The last two findings are from www.familyfacts.org.


Adolescents from intact families who worship frequently are least likely to get into a fight.

This chart depicts the percentage of adolescents in Grades 7-12 who have ever been in a fight, correlated with religious attendance and family structure. Only 27.1 percent of adolescents who live with both biological parents and worship at least monthly have ever been in a fight. By contrast, 43.5 percent of adolescent students who worship less than monthly and come from single-parent or reconstituted families have ever been in a fight. In between are those in non-intact families who worship at least monthly (34.3 percent) and those who live with both biological parents and worship less than monthly (32.1 percent). The data are taken from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II.

Other Sources

Many other studies confirm the direction of these findings. Wendy Manning and Kathleen Lamb of Bowling Green State University reported that teens who were more...
religious had less behavioral problems than other teens. They also found that adolescents living with married biological parents were less delinquent than those living within any other family structure.²

Michelle Pearce of Yale University and colleagues found that “a greater level of parent involvement and private religious practices were associated with a decrease in conduct problems over a 1-year period.”³

Lela McKnight and Ann Loper of the University of Virginia also reported that residing in a single-parent household was one of only two significant risk factors associated with delinquency in female adolescents. Degree of religious belief was one of five significant resilience factors.⁴

Christian Smith of the University of Notre Dame found that adolescent children whose parents attended church regularly were more likely to expect their parents to be upset if they discovered their children had been fighting.⁵

When it comes to keeping children from getting into fights, the intact married family that worships regularly is the most effective peacekeeping force.

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Adolescents from intact families who worship frequently are least likely to abuse alcohol.

This chart depicts the percentage of adolescents in Grades 7-12 who admitted to getting drunk in the year prior to being asked, correlated with religious attendance and family structure. Only 22.4 percent of adolescents who live with both biological parents and worship at least monthly have abused alcohol. By contrast, 41.2 percent of adolescents who worship less than monthly and come from single-parent or reconstituted families have abused alcohol. In between are those in non-intact families who worship at least monthly (24.5 percent) and those who live with both biological parents and worship less than monthly (33.4 percent). The data are taken from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II.

Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate the direction of these findings. Roy Oman of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center and colleagues...
found “a positive, significant relationship between [participation in church or religious activities] and the nonuse of alcohol” and also that “[y]ouths from 2-parent households were significantly more likely than those from 1-parent households to report nonuse of alcohol.”

W. Alex Mason and Michael Windle of the University of Alabama at Birmingham reported that adolescents who had close familial bonds “were more likely to be religiously committed and involved” and that this religious commitment and familial support were both directly related to less alcohol consumption over time.

In a study of adolescent students in British schools, Ian Sutherland and Jonathan Shepherd of the University of Wales College of Medicine found that 31.4 percent of students who frequently attended religious services used alcohol regularly, compared to 68.3 percent of students who did not attend religious services, and that “[a]dolescents without religious convictions were…2.8 times as likely to drink alcohol.” They also noted that 59.4 percent of students from intact families regularly used alcohol, compared to 65.9 percent of those from non-intact families.

The data indicate that the intact family that worships frequently is most protective against the abuse of alcohol.

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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 smoke.

According to the General Social Surveys (GSS), 31 percent of adults who attended religious services at least monthly and lived in an intact family through adolescence currently smoke, compared to 44 percent of those who attended religious services less than monthly and grew up in a non-intact family. In between were those who attended religious services at least monthly but lived in a non-intact family (42 percent) and those who grew up in an intact family but worshiped less than monthly (36 percent).1

Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate the direction of these findings. In a study of Australian twins, Arpana Agrawal of the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis and colleagues found that infrequent religious attendance correlated with frequent cigarette
smoking and that “children separated from a biological parent were...more likely to report regular cigarette smoking as adults.”

Analyzing various degrees of smoking in adolescents, Stephen Soldz and Xingjia Cui of Health and Addictions Research reported that nonsmokers attended religious services most frequently, whereas early escalator smokers attended less frequently and continuous smokers least frequently. They also found that at the sixth grade in school, “quitters and experimenters were more likely to be living with both parents, whereas late escalators and continuous smokers were more likely to be living with a single parent or an extended family.”

Thomas Wills of Yeshiva University and colleagues also found that adolescents’ religiosity was inversely correlated with tobacco use and that adolescents from intact families were less likely to use tobacco than those from blended and single-parent families.

As the evidence demonstrates, frequent religious attendance and intact families are just what the surgeon general ordered.

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Adolescents from intact families who worship frequently are the least likely to steal.

This chart depicts the percentage of adolescents in Grades 7-12 who have ever stolen more than $50 worth of goods, correlated with religious attendance and family structure. Only 12 percent of adolescents who live with both biological parents and worship at least monthly have ever stolen as much. By contrast, 24 percent of adolescents who worship less than monthly and come from single-parent or reconstituted families have stolen more than $50 worth of goods. In between are those in non-intact families who worship at least monthly (15.8 percent) and those who live with both biological parents and worship less than monthly (15.3 percent). The data are taken from a confidential survey conducted as part of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II.

Other Studies

Though little additional research has been done that correlates these three measures, what studies exist corroborate the direction of these
findings. Wendy Manning of Bowling Green State University and Kathleen Lamb of the University of Wisconsin reported that adolescents who were more religious were less likely to be delinquent, as were adolescents who lived with their married parents.²

Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas at Austin and Glen Elder of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that adolescents who attended religious services at least weekly and adolescents who are satisfied with their family were less likely to engage in delinquent behavior.³

In another study, Regnerus reported that family satisfaction and religiosity were strong protective factors against adolescent delinquency, although religiosity affected adolescent boys only indirectly through higher levels of family satisfaction.⁴

The available evidence indicates that the dual influence of religious attendance and an intact married family prove to be most effective in reducing theft by adolescents.

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


Intergenerational Links to Viewing X-Rated Movies: Religious Attendance and Family Structure

This chart is taken from a study conducted by Visiting Fellow Althea Nagai, Ph.D. for Family Research Council.

Adults who frequently attended religious services as adolescents and grew up living with both biological parents are less likely to have viewed an X-rated film in the past year.

According to the General Social Survey (GSS), 21 percent of adults who attended religious services at least monthly and lived in an intact family as adolescents had viewed an X-rated film in the last year, compared to 34 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 (25 percent) and those who had attended religious services at least monthly but lived in a non-intact family (28 percent).1

Other Studies

Though no corresponding studies have been conducted, there are several studies in related...
areas which indicate that high religiosity and parental involvement during adolescence encourage the development of a healthy sexuality. Carolyn Halpern of the University of North Carolina and colleagues found that religiosity and parental disapproval of sex during adolescence significantly contributed to young adults’ adoption of traditional values regarding extramarital and premarital sex.²

Cristina Lammers of the University of Uruguay and colleagues also reported that adolescents with greater religiosity who live in two-parent homes and believe that those parents care about them are more likely to postpone sexual intercourse.³

Though further research would be instructive, the available evidence suggests that intact families and religious observance during adolescence are strong indicators of a healthy and moral sexuality.

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Intergenerational Links to Volunteering in Charitable Activities: Religious Attendance and Family Structure

This chart is taken from a study conducted by Visiting Fellow Althea Nagai for Family Research Council.

Adults who frequently attended religious services as adolescents and grew up living with both biological parents are most likely to have volunteered in a charitable activity in the past year.

According to the General Social Survey (GSS), 44 percent of adults who attended religious services at least monthly and lived in an intact family as adolescents had volunteered in a charitable activity in the last year, compared to 31 percent of adults who attended religious services less than monthly and lived in an intact family as adolescents. In between were those who lived in a non-intact family and attended religious services less than monthly (39 percent) and those who had attended religious services at least monthly but lived in a non-intact family (40 percent).

As the findings show, family structure during adolescence has no effect on adult volunteerism, but when combined with

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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/less than monthly) and family structure (intact/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 frequent 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.
adolescent religious attendance, large differences emerge in the patterns of volunteering in charitable activities as adults.

**Other Studies**

To the best of our knowledge, no other studies have correlated adolescent religious attendance and family structure with adult volunteerism in charitable activities, but some studies have correlated adolescent religious attendance and family structure with contemporaneous volunteerism.

Daniel Lichter of the Ohio State University and colleagues found that “religious attendance increases the likelihood of volunteerism” for males and females in late adolescence and that single-parent families “are negatively associated with later prosocial behaviors,” especially for boys.$^2$

Judith Smetana and Aaron Metzger of the University of Rochester also reported that “middle class African American adolescents’ spirituality and religiosity had a significant influence on their civic involvement” and that their intended involvement in future civic activities was predicted by positive communication with their mothers and fathers.$^3$

As the evidence indicates, adolescents who frequently attend religious services and live in intact families are most likely to volunteer in charitable activities, both now and in the future, while their less religious counterparts are least likely.

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1 This chart draws on data collected by the General Social Survey in 1998. Two samples totaling approximately 3,000 people were used.


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

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.


Mapping America is a weekly chart and commentary series that demonstrates, mainly through U.S. federal survey data, how the intact married family that worships weekly is the greatest generator of human goods and social benefits and is the core strength of the United States.

Recent topics have included the correlation of adolescent religious attendance and family structure with grade point average, sex partners, hard drug use, shoplifting, fighting, drinking, and expulsion or suspension from school.

For more information, visit www.mappingamericaproject.org.

Dr. Patrick F. Fagan
Editor, Mapping America

Mapping America is a project of the Family Research Council.

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