“Ever Smoked, Drank, or Used Marijuana as a Minor”
by Current Religious Attendance and Structure of Family of Origin

This chart looks at the percentage of minors who have ever smoked, drank, or used marijuana at the extremes of four demographic quadrants. These four quadrants are derived from combining two sets of family structures (always-intact vs. all other family structures*) and two sets of religious attendance (weekly vs. never).

The families occupying the four corners (or four extremes) of these quadrants are:
- The always-intact married family that worships weekly;
- The always-intact married family that never worships;
- All other family structures* that worship weekly;
- All other family structures* that never worship.

(*The non-intact group consists of individuals in the following categories: married stepfamily, cohabiting stepfamily, single divorced parent, and always-single parent. In all these structures, there has been rejection between the biological father and mother, and thus the original pairing is no longer intact.)
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The 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth shows that minors who grew up in always-married families and who currently attend religious services weekly are least likely to use tobacco, alcohol, or marijuana.

**Description:** Examining only *structure of family of origin*, 12 percent of adolescents who grew up in a cohabiting stepfamily have used substances as minors, followed by adolescents from intact married families (20 percent), intact cohabiting families (21 percent), always-single parent families (22 percent), married stepfamilies (26 percent), and divorced single-parent families (27 percent).

Examining only *current religious attendance*, 16 percent of adolescents who worship at least weekly have used substances under age, followed by those who attend religious services at least once a month (24 percent), those who attend less than once monthly (27 percent), and those who never attend religious services (30 percent).

Examining *current religious attendance and structure of family of origin combined*, 8 percent of adolescents who worship weekly and grew up in always-married families have used substances under age. By contrast, 18 percent of adolescents who never attend religious services and come from non-intact family backgrounds have used substances under age. Between these two extremes are those who never worship and grew up in always-married families (11 percent) and those who attend religious services weekly but grew up in non-intact families (14 percent).

**Related Insight from Other Studies**

A study of 1,760 young adults found that those from two-parent families were at a lower risk for substance use. Even after controlling for race, “respondents from such families report lower levels of problematic substance use than their peers from single-parent families.” Similarly, a large sample of almost 15,000 youths revealed that those from two-parent families were far less likely to ever have used marijuana or to have friends who use marijuana. Youths from two-parent families, even from families with high levels of conflict, have lower levels of marijuana usage than youths from low- or high-conflict homes in which one or both of the biological parents are gone.

Religion also influences substance abuse by minors. One study examined young adult women recovering from drug use. Those women who participated in religious rituals, particularly church attendance with their families, were significantly less likely to use drugs. There was a strong negative correlation between frequency of church attendance and drug use.

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