

Sexual Activity and Religious Practice*

“Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” Hebrews 13:1-4

Social science research shows that religion influences an individual’s decisions, and that religious beliefs play a role in sexual choices:

- There is an increased frequency of premarital sex among young adults who do not see religion as significant in their lives.
- Declines in religious attendance are associated with increased non-marital sexual activity, such as premarital sex.
- A large decrease in personal religious practices occurs over time in young people who are sexually active.

However, there is good news:

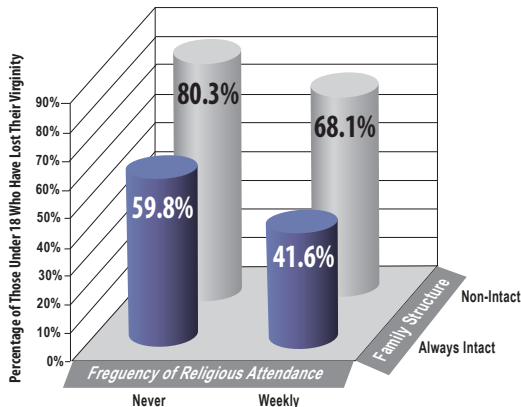
- Adolescents who are religiously active are less likely to have multiple sexual partners.
- Religious women are more likely to practice abstinence and to desire to marry someone who was also abstinent, than are non-religious women.

Though religious beliefs influence adolescents’ sexual choices, parents have the strongest influence on their child’s sexual choices. Given these findings, what could you discuss with your child?

The accompanying chart shows the higher rate of premarital sexual activity among non-religious young women. Such data suggests that strong sexual ethics and strong religious commitment feed off each other in the life of an adolescent. These are prime years in which to help young people solidify religious involvement.

Percentage of Those Who Lost Their Virginity Before the Age of 18 by Religious Attendance and Family Structure

Source: National Survey of Family Growth, 2003.



For links to the research behind these statements, please visit www.marri.us/one-pagers/

*It bears emphasizing that these patterns hold for the groups involved, not for all the individuals who make up each group. There is naturally a wide variation among individuals.



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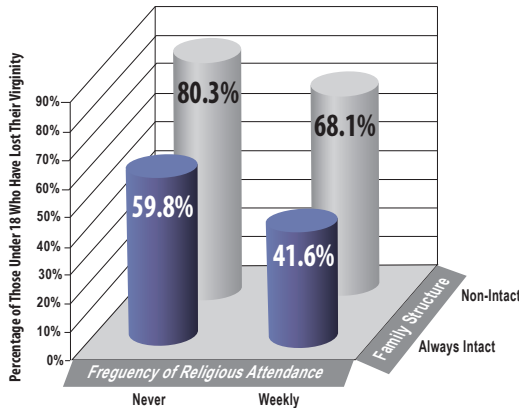
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