

Family Structure and Sexual Abuse*

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:4

Growing up in a family with two married parents is the safest place for children. Social science research finds that:

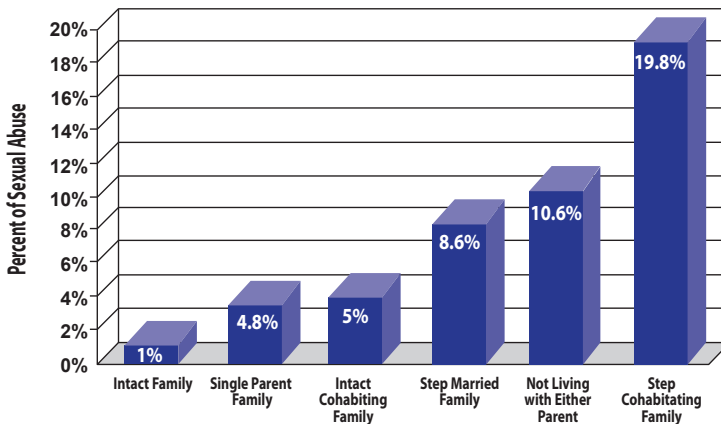
- Boys who live with one parent are more likely than boys who live with two parents to experience sexual abuse.
- Children in stepfamilies have a significantly higher risk of being sexually abused by a family member, than children in a single-parent home or intact biological family.
- When someone is abused as a child, they are more likely to abuse others when they become adults.
- When someone is abused as a child, they are more likely to consider or to attempt suicide.

Having experienced childhood abuse or neglect also predicts

- Excessive drinking in adult women
- Severe lifetime substance abuse in both men and women

Abuse's effects can be very complicated, and of course there are many wonderful stepfamilies where abuse never occurs. However, being a part of a non-intact family does bring its own stressors for parents and children. Do you pray for your friends who live in non-intact families? What are ways you can help them? Do you give them “break time” to get away, even for a few hours?

Relative Rates of Sexual Abuse by Family Structure Source: NIS-4, 2010



The accompanying graph illustrates the relative differences between sexual abuse rates of children between the various family structures. We can encourage the most overall healthy environment for children by strengthening the intact married family.

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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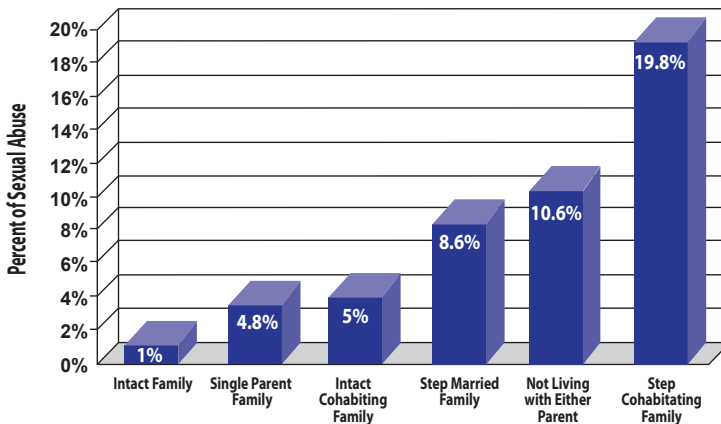
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