Religious Attendance, Family Structure, and Shoplifting

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 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.

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.³

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.⁴

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.⁵

Jerry Trusty of Texas A&M University and Richard Watts of Baylor University also reported that the greater the import 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.⁶

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.

Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow
Director of the Center for Family and Religion
Family Research Council

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