

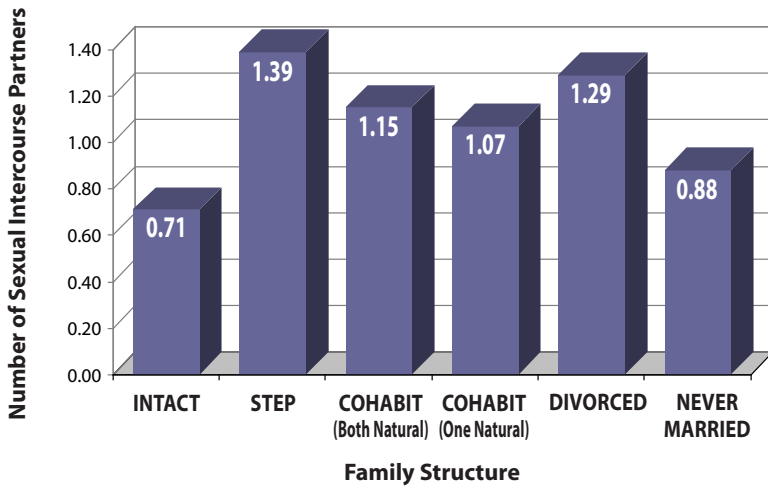


Mapping America

Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 5

Family Structure and Sexual Intercourse Partners— Adolescent Girls

Sexual Intercourse Partners for Girls by Family Structure ¹



Source: Adolescent Health Survey, Wave I. Adolescents grade 7-12.

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.

Adolescent girls living in intact married families have the fewest sexual partners.

Female students in Grades 7-12 have an average of 0.71 sexual partners when they live in intact married families, whereas those who have a stepparent or divorced parents have an average of 1.39 and 1.29 sexual partners, respectively. In between are those whose parents never married (0.88), and those who live in cohabiting families with one natural parent (1.07) or both natural parents (1.15), according to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II.

Other Studies

Many other studies corroborate this finding.² Patricia Goodson of Texas A&M University and colleagues insist that family structure is one of the most well-documented environmental factors affecting early sexual activity in adolescent females. According to the literature, girls living apart from their biological fathers due to out-of-wedlock births or divorce are most likely to become sexually active.³

H. H. Cleveland of Texas Tech University also finds that adolescent girls from non-intact families generally have more sexual partners than those from intact families.⁴

J. C. Abma of the National Center for Health Statistics and colleagues found that 43 percent of female adolescents living with both parents, biological or adoptive, have ever had sex.⁵ Comparatively, 64 percent of female adolescents living without a parent have had sex. In between are those living with a parent and stepparent (55 percent) and those living with a single or cohabiting parent (59 percent).⁶

Mignon R. Moore of the University of Chicago reports that white adolescent girls not living with both biological parents are significantly more likely to have sex at an earlier age. In black and white single-parent families girls are more likely to have sex early than those living with both biological parents.⁷

Moore and P. Lindsay Chase-Lansdale of Northwestern University and Kristin A. Moore of Child Trends also find that a black female adolescent in a cohabiting family is more than three times as likely to be sexually active than a girl living with her married parents.⁸ The daughter of a single parent whose marriage was disrupted is three times more likely to be sexually active than if she were living with married parents.⁹

The evidence overwhelmingly confirms that female adolescents are least likely to engage in premarital sexual intercourse when raised in an intact married family. When parents belong to each other in always-intact marriage their children benefit sexually and are less likely to make early mistakes in this area of life.

Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.

2 The following findings are from www.familyfacts.org.

3 Patricia Goodson, Alexandra Evans, and Elizabeth Edmundson, "Female Adolescents and Onset of Sexual Intercourse: A Theory-Based Review of Research from 1984 to 1994," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 21 (1997): 147-156.

4 H. H. Cleveland and Michael Gilson, "The Effects of Neighborhood Proportion of Single-parent Families and Mother-adolescent Relationships on Adolescents' Number of Sexual Partners," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 33 (2004): 319-329.

5 The percentages in this paragraph are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

6 J. C. Abma, G. M. Martinez, W. D. Mosher, and B. S. Dawson, "Teenagers in the United States: Sexual Activity, Contraceptive Use, and Childbearing," *National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat* 23 (24) (2004): 19-20.

7 Mignon R. Moore, "Socially Isolated? How Parents and Neighborhood Adults Influence Youth Behavior in Disadvantaged Communities," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 26 (November 2003): 988-1005.

8 The numbers in this paragraph are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

9 Mignon R. Moore and P. L. Chase-Lansdale, "Sexual Intercourse and Pregnancy among African-American Girls in High-poverty Neighborhoods: The Role of Family and Perceived Community Environment," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63 (2001): 1146-1157.



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