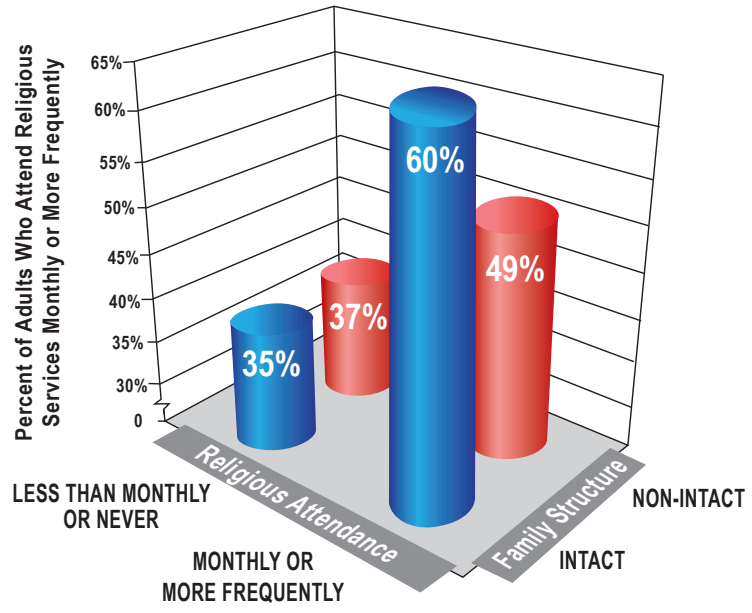




Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 72

Adult Religious Attendance by Religious Attendance and Family Structure in Adolescence

Attending Religious Services Monthly or More Frequently in Adulthood by Frequency of Religious Attendance and Family Structure During Adolescence



Religious Attendance and Family Structure During Adolescence Combined

Source: General Social Surveys (GSS)

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 frequently vs. less than monthly or never) and family structure (intact vs. 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.

Visiting Fellow Althea Nagai provided the data for this chart.

Adults who attended religious services at least monthly as adolescents and grew up in an intact family are significantly more likely to attend religious services monthly or more frequently as adults than are those who attended less frequently and whose family of origin was non-intact.

Additionally, those who attended religious services at least monthly as adolescents were substantially more likely to attend religious services as adults, regardless of whether they came from an intact or non-intact family. In other words, with regard to adult religious worship, frequent worship in adolescence significantly mitigates the negative effects of growing up in a non-intact family.

Description: According to the General Social Surveys (GSS),

- 60 percent of adults who grew up attending religious services at least monthly and lived in an intact family (i.e., lived with two biological parents) attend religious services once a month or more as adults;

- 49 percent of adults who grew up in a non-intact family but attended religious services at least monthly also attend religious services at least monthly as adults;
- 37 percent of adults who lived in a non-intact family and attended religious services less than monthly attend religious services at least monthly as adults;
- 35 percent of adults who grew up in an intact family but worshiped less than monthly as adolescents attend religious services at least monthly as adults.¹

Related Insights from Other Studies

Several other studies add insight to these findings. Scott Myers of the Pennsylvania State University reported that “parents’ religiosity is the primary influence on the religiosity of their adult offspring” and that adults “raised in households characterized by high marital happiness and with both biological parents present are more likely to resemble their parents in religious beliefs.”²

Darren Sherkat of Vanderbilt University also found that childhood religious participation along with strong parental religious participation helps sustain religious adherence in adults and counteracts secularizing influences.³

As the evidence shows, children who grow up in intact families that attend religious services frequently are more likely to worship frequently as adults.

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- 1 The statistics in this chart draw on data from the General Social Surveys, 1972-2006. From 1972 to 1993, the sample size averaged 1,500 per year. No survey was conducted in 1979, 1981, or 1992. Since 1994, the GSS was conducted only in even-numbered years, with two samples per survey, totaling approximately 3,000 respondents. In 2006, a third sample was added for a total sample size of 4,510.
 - 2 Scott M. Myers, “An Interactive Model of Religiosity Inheritance: The Importance of Family Context,” *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 858-66.
 - 3 Darren E. Sherkat, “Counterculture or Continuity? Competing Influences on Baby Boomers’ Religious Orientations and Participation,” *Social Forces* 76 (1998): 1087-1115.



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