A Portrait of Family and Religion in America

Key Outcomes for the Common Good

Based on data from the
National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health

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The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (commonly called the Add Health), Waves I and II, is the dataset used in this study. Wave I is a nationally representative survey of 90,000 American adolescents from grades 7 to 12, on average aged 12 to 17. From this, a sub-sample of 14,027 was used—those children from the family structures described below who answered the "in-home" section of the survey in Wave II.

Wave I (1994 –1995) and Wave II (1996) examine the variables that may influence adolescents' behavior. In particular, personal traits, families, friendships, romantic relation-ships, peer groups, schools, neighborhoods, and communities were measured.
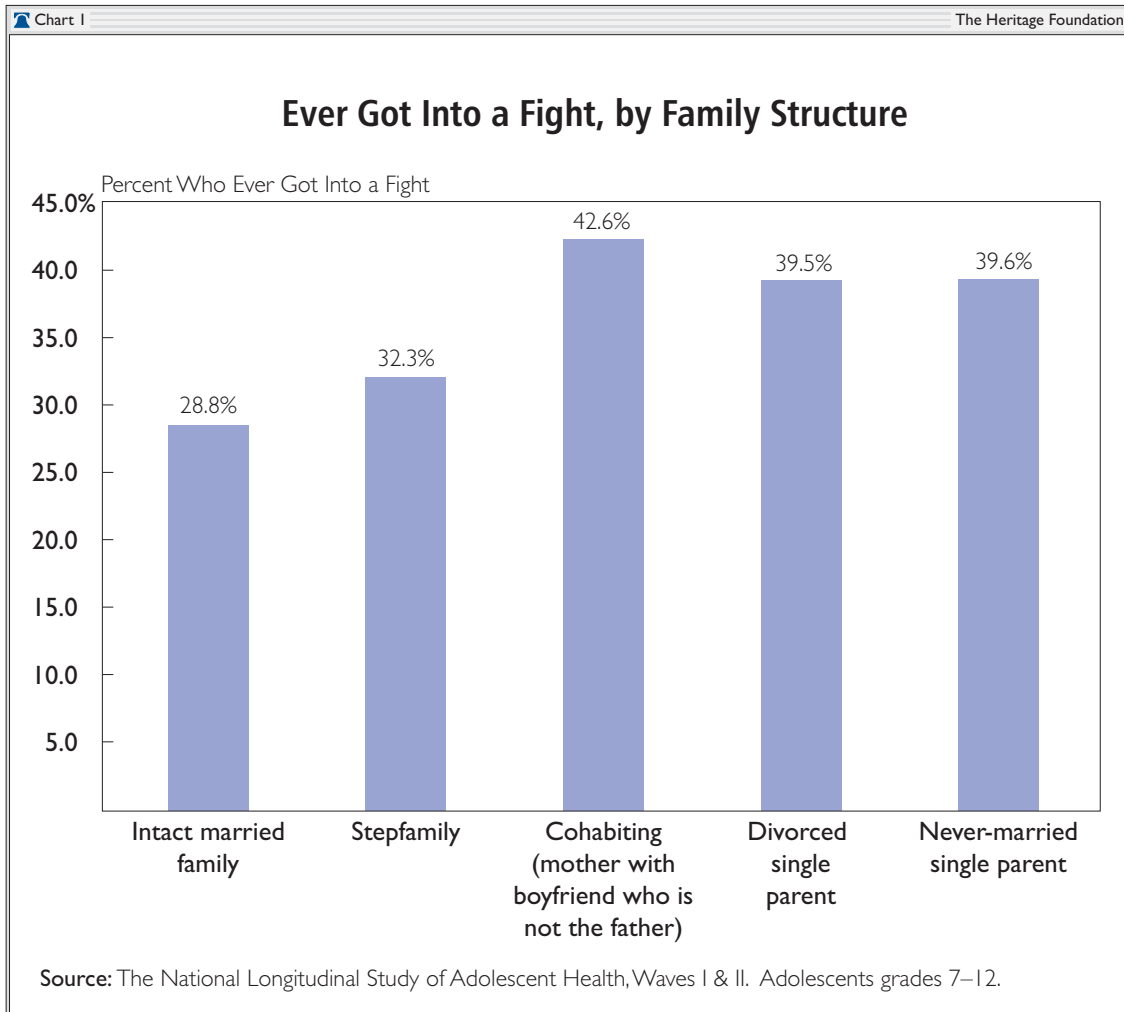
Intact married parent families: n = 9,668 (68.9 percent of the sample)
Stepparent families: n = 517 (3.69 percent)
One biological parent cohabiting with a partner families: n = 247 (1.76 percent)
Both biological parents cohabiting families: n = 327 (2.3 percent)
Always single, never-married parent families: n = 725 (5.17 percent)
Divorced single-parent families: n = 2,543 (18.13 percent)

The n's for the different levels of religious attendance examined are:
Worship weekly or more, n = 5,204 (37.1 percent),
Less than weekly but more than monthly, n = 2,749 (19.6 percent),
Less than monthly, n = 2,580 (18.4 percent), and
Never, n = 3,494 (24.9 percent).

Outcomes by Family Structure

Chart 1   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Got Into a Fight, by Family Structure

Percent Who Ever Got Into a Fight

45.0%	
40.0	
35.0	
30.0	
25.0	
20.0	
15.0	
10.0	
5.0	

28.8%   32.3%   42.6%   39.5%   39.6%

Intact married family   Stepfamily   Cohabiting (mother with boyfriend who is not the father)   Divorced single parent   Never-married single parent

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.
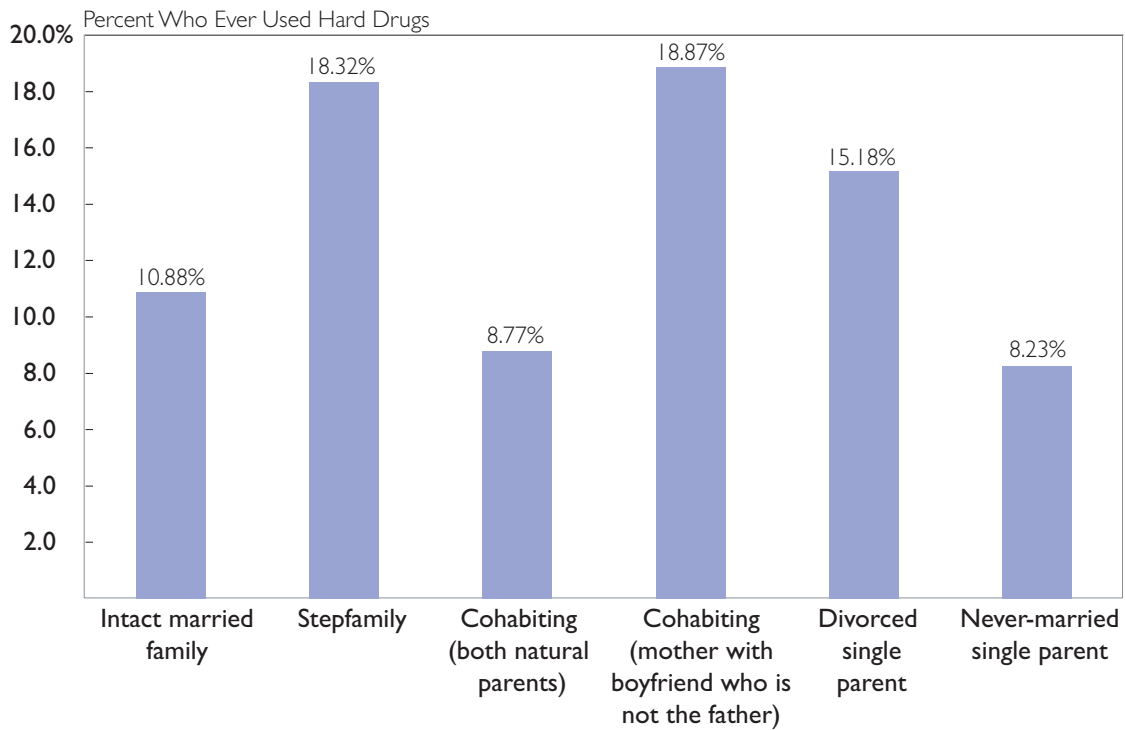
These first few charts relate to citizenship or participation in the larger society. The first chart illustrates the correlation between family structure and the incidence of having ever gotten into a fight.

Those from the intact married family were the least likely to have ever gotten into a fight, and those from a family where the mother was cohabiting with a boyfriend were the most likely.

Chart 2   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Used Hard Drugs, by Family Structure

Percent Who Ever Used Hard Drugs

20.0%	
18.0	
16.0	
14.0	
12.0	
10.0	
8.0	
6.0	
4.0	
2.0	

10.88%   18.32%   8.77%   18.87%   15.18%   8.23%

Intact married family | Stepfamily | Cohabiting (both natural parents) | Cohabiting (mother with boyfriend who is not the father) | Divorced single parent | Never-married single parent

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

This chart illustrates the correlation between family structure and hard drug use (cocaine, crack, inhalants, LSD, PCP, ecstasy, heroin, "pills," or some other non-marijuana drug).

In this instance teenagers from cohabiting families (mother with boyfriend who is not the father), stepfamilies and divorced single parent families were more likely to have ever used hard drugs.

Chart 3   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Committed Theft of $50 or More, by Family Structure

Percent Who Committed Theft of $50 or More

25.0%	
20.0	
15.0	
10.0	
5.0	

13.0% 19.8% 14.5% 22.6% 19.0% 18.8%

Intact married family | Stepfamily | Cohabiting (both natural parents) | Cohabiting (mother with boyfriend who is not the father) | Divorced single parent | Never-married single parent
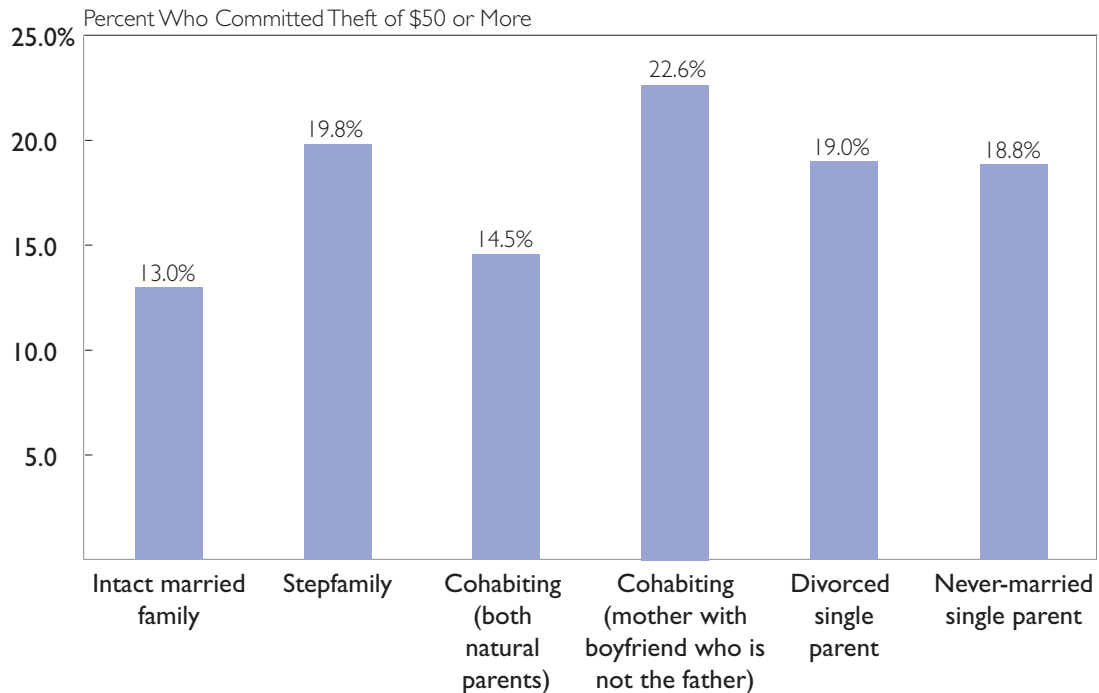
Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

This graph illustrates the rates of ever committing a theft of $50 or more (which among American teenagers frequently means stealing a car). Teenagers from the intact married family were the least likely to commit this crime, while those from the family in which the mother was cohabiting with a boyfriend were the most likely.

Chart 4   The Heritage Foundation

Repeat Shoplifting, by Family Structure
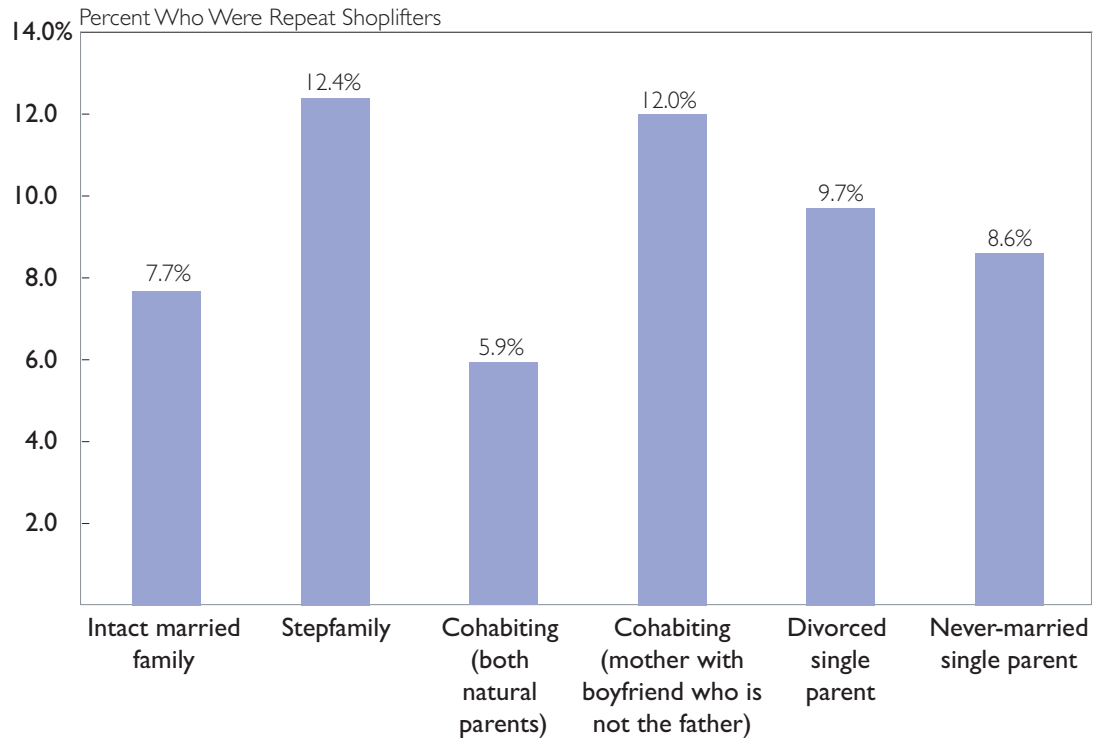
Percent Who Were Repeat Shoplifters

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

In this measure of repeat shoplifting, teenagers from the cohabiting family (both natural parents) and the intact married family were the least likely to be repeat offenders. Those most likely to be repeat offenders came from families in which the adult male was not the biological father: the stepfamily and the family composed of a mother cohabiting with a boyfriend.

Chart 5   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Run Away, by Family Structure
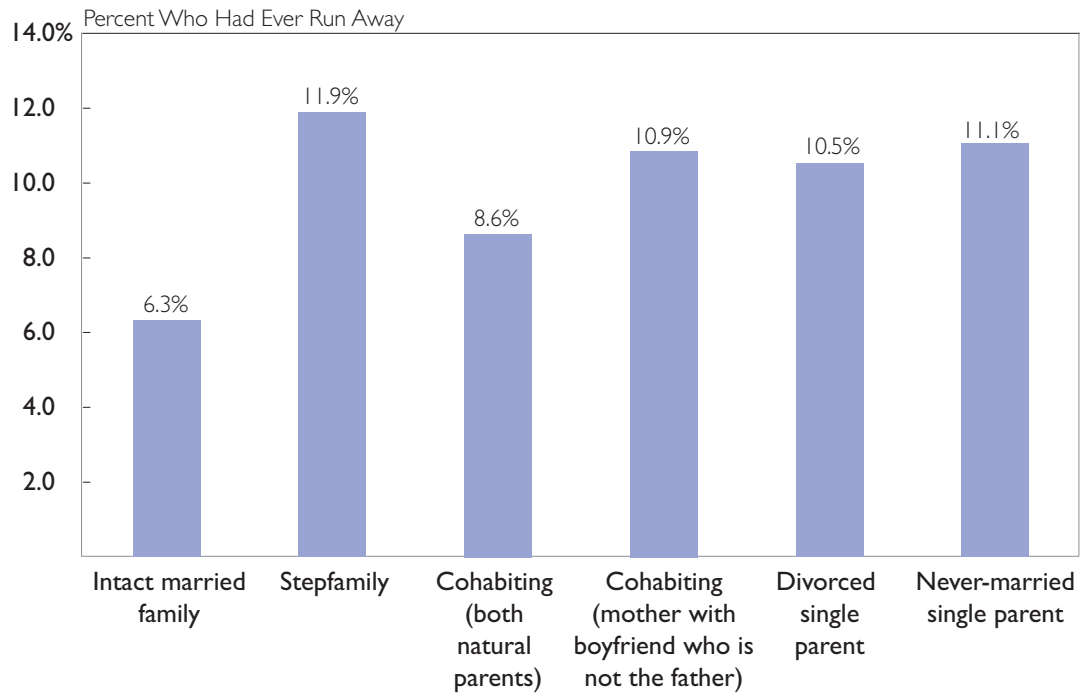
Percent Who Had Ever Run Away

14.0%

12.0 — .... 11.9% ....

10.0 — .... 10.9% .... 10.5% 11.1%

8.0 — 8.6%

6.0 — 6.3%

4.0 —

2.0 —

Intact married family | Stepfamily | Cohabiting (both natural parents) | Cohabiting (mother with boyfriend who is not the father) | Divorced single parent | Never-married single parent
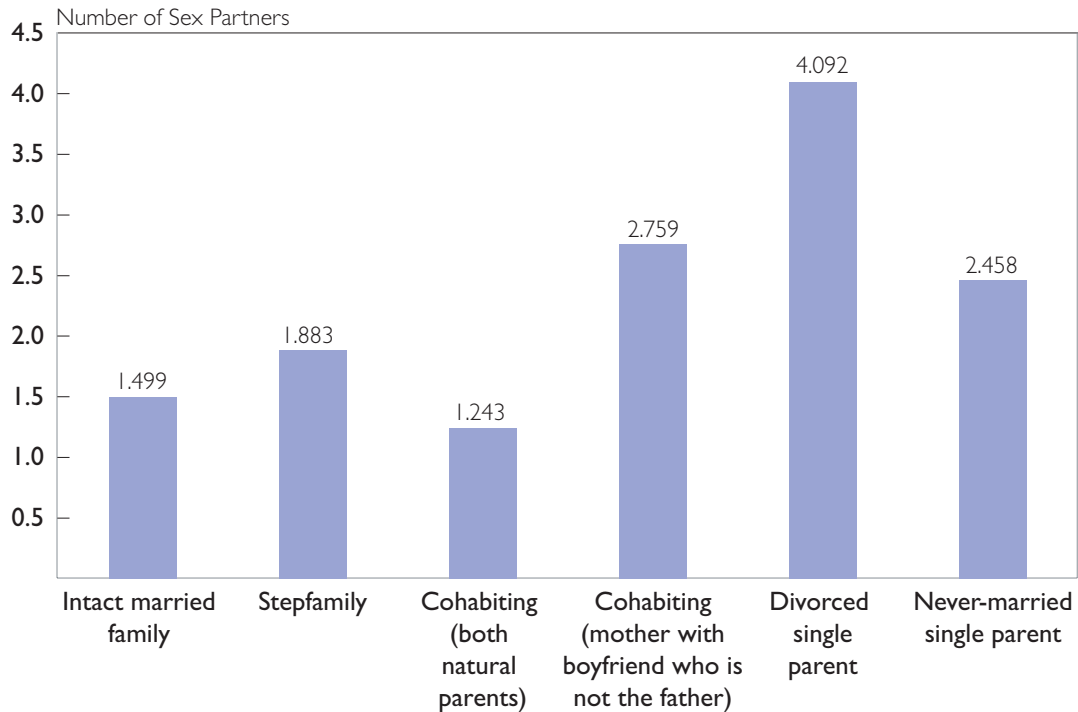
Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

When it comes to running away from home, there was a clear difference between the intact married family and all other family structures. Teenagers from the intact married family were the least likely to run away from home.

Chart 6   The Heritage Foundation

Boys: Average Number of Sexual Partners, by Family Structure

Number of Sex Partners

Family Structure	Number of Sex Partners
Intact married family	1.499
Stepfamily	1.883
Cohabiting (both natural parents)	1.243
Cohabiting (mother with boyfriend who is not the father)	2.759
Divorced single parent	4.092
Never-married single parent	2.458

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

This graph shows the relationship between family structure and the average number of sexual partners for teenage boys, grades 7–12. Boys from the intact family (natural parents, married or cohabiting) had the lowest average number of sexual partners. Boys living in the divorced, single-parent family averaged the most sexual partners.

Chart 7   The Heritage Foundation

Girls: Average Number of Sexual Partners, by Family Structure

Number of Sex Partners

Intact married family	0.71
Stepfamily	1.39
Cohabiting (both natural parents)	1.15
Cohabiting (mother with boyfriend who is not the father)	1.07
Divorced single parent	1.29
Never-married single parent	0.88
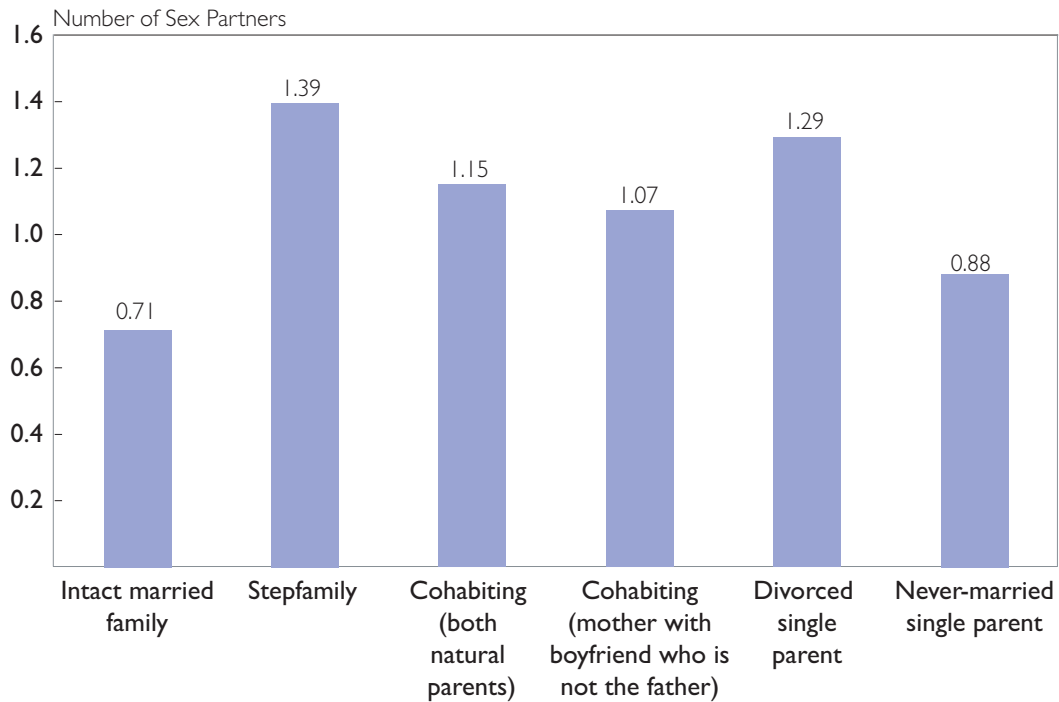
Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

For teenage girls, the pattern is slightly different from boys when it comes to the average number of sexual partners. Girls had fewer partners—typically only about half as many as boys. Girls from the intact married family had the lowest average number of sexual partners.

Chart 8   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Been Drunk in the Past Year, by Family Structure
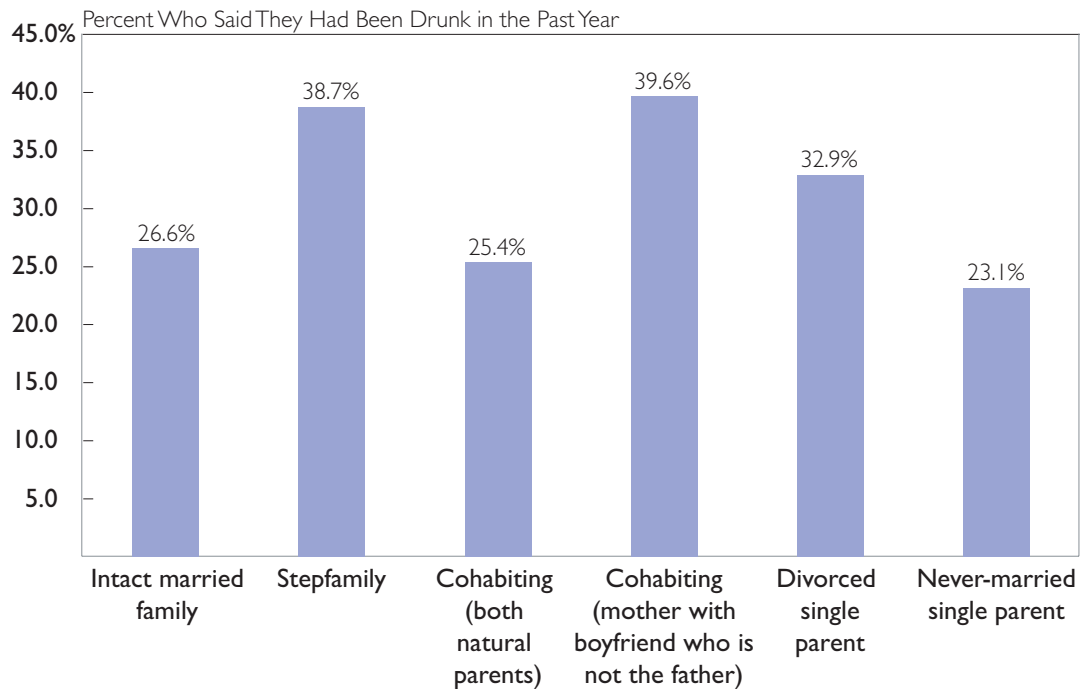
Percent Who Said They Had Been Drunk in the Past Year

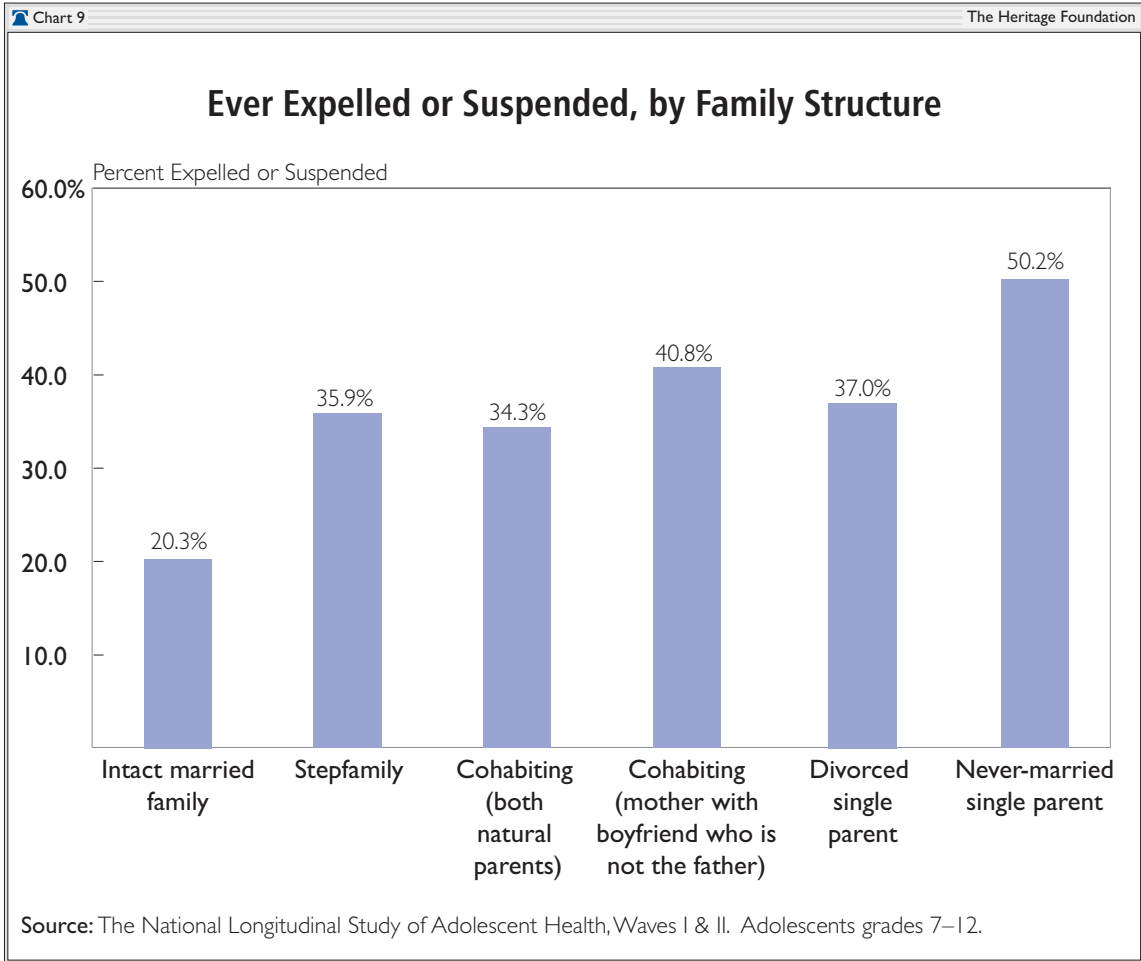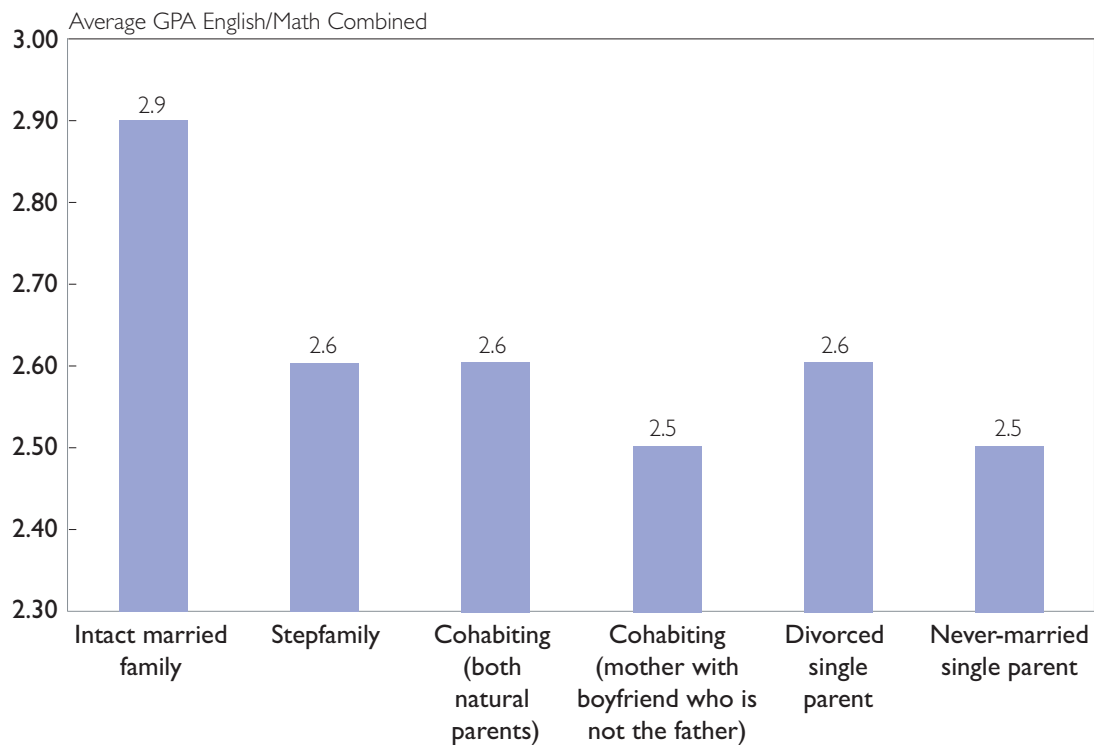| Family Structure	Percent
Intact married family	26.6%
Stepfamily	38.7%
Cohabiting (both natural parents)	25.4%
Cohabiting (mother with boyfriend who is not the father)	39.6%
Divorced single parent	32.9%
Never-married single parent	23.1%

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

A look at the relationship between drinking and family structure shows that teenagers who had the more stable family structure (the intact married family, the natural parents cohabiting, and the never-married single-parent family) were the least likely to have been drunk in the past year, while those with men in the family who are not the biological father of the teenager were the most likely to have ever been drunk in the past year. Interestingly, it is the teenager from the always-single-mother family who is the least likely to have ever gotten drunk, while the teenager from the family where the single mother was cohabiting with a boyfriend was the most likely to have ever done so.

Ever Expelled or Suspended, by Family Structure

Percent Expelled or Suspended

Family Structure	Percent
Intact married family	20.3%
Stepfamily	35.9%
Cohabiting (both natural parents)	34.3%
Cohabiting (mother with boyfriend who is not the father)	40.8%
Divorced single parent	37.0%
Never-married single parent	50.2%

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

This chart illustrates, by family structure, the percentage of teenagers who had ever been expelled or suspended from school. The percentage of those who had been expelled or suspended was lowest among teenagers from intact married families, while it was highest among those from the never-married single-parent families.

Chart 10   The Heritage Foundation

GPA English/Math, by Family Structure

Average GPA English/Math Combined

3.00					
2.90	2.9				
2.80					
2.70					
2.60		2.6	2.6	2.6	
2.50				2.5	2.5
2.40					
2.30					

Intact married family | Stepfamily | Cohabiting (both natural parents) | Cohabiting (mother with boyfriend who is not the father) | Divorced single parent | Never-married single parent

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.
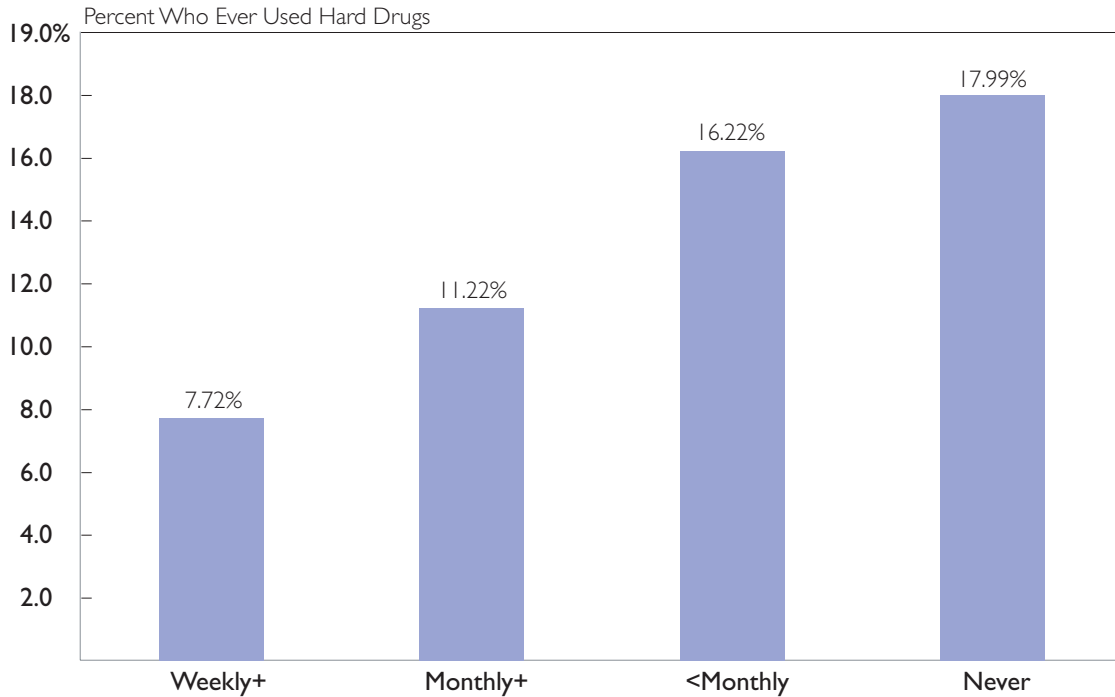
This chart illustrates that on average, teenagers from the intact married family score the highest on combined English and math scores. Those who score lowest come from the never-married single-parent family or from the family where the mother is cohabiting with a boyfriend who is not the father of the teenager.

Outcomes by Frequency of Religious Attendance

Chart 11   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Got Into a Fight, by Religious Attendance

Percent Who Ever Got Into a Fight

27.7%	33.5%	35.4%	37.9%
Weekly+	Monthly+	<Monthly	Never

40.0%
35.0
30.0
25.0
20.0
15.0
10.0
5.0

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.
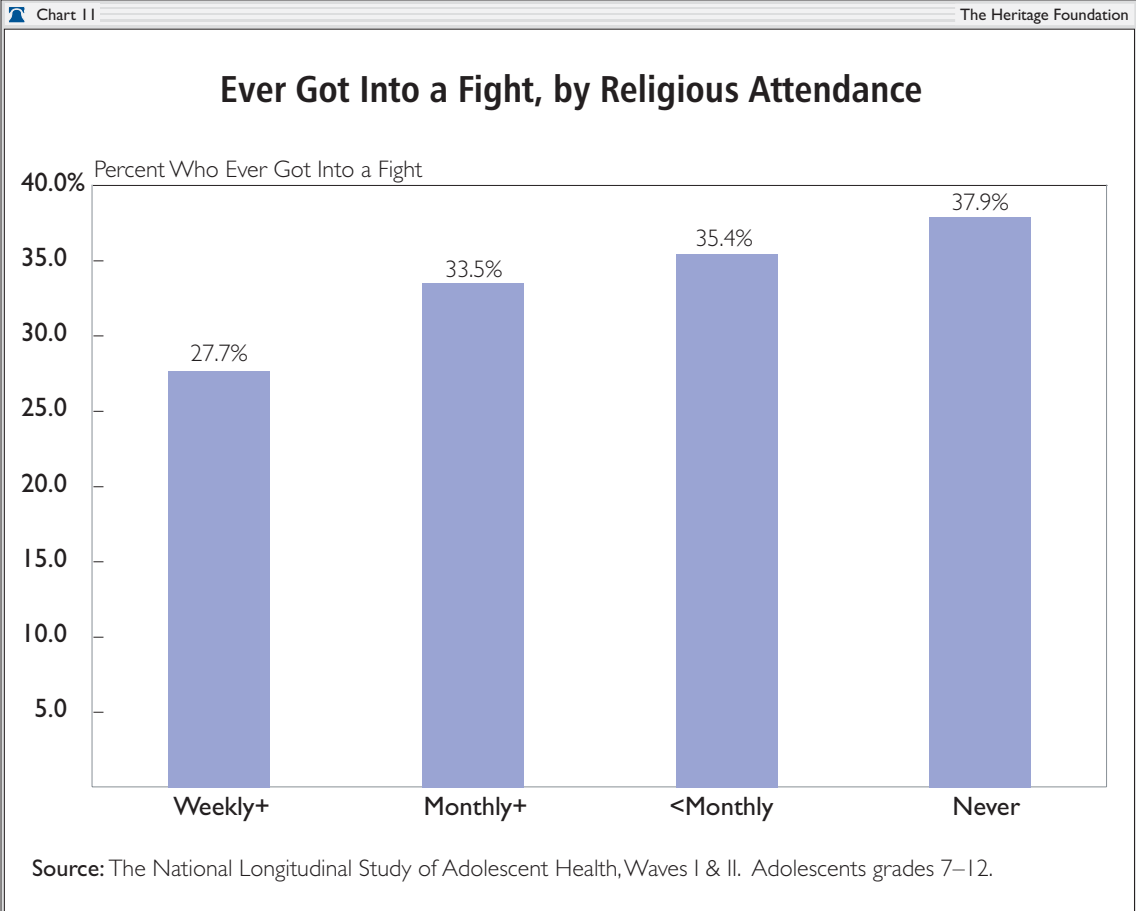
Teenagers who attended religious services at least weekly were the least likely to have ever been in a fight, while those who never attended were most likely to have ever been in a fight.
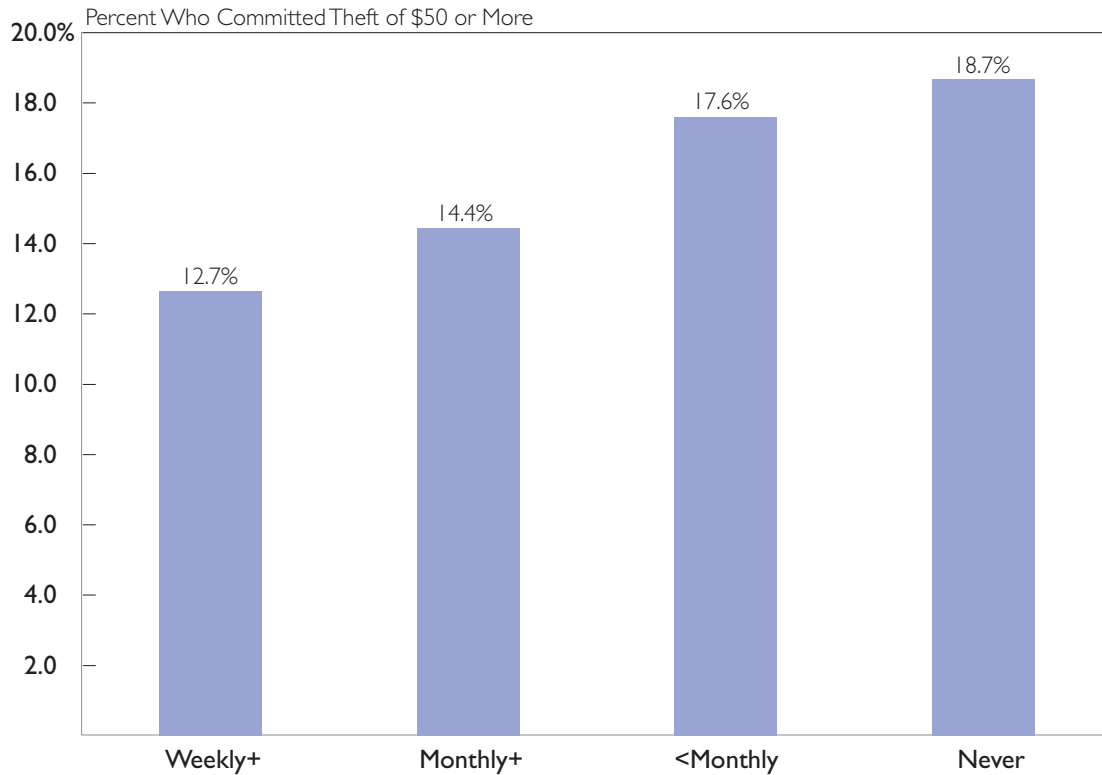
Chart 12   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Used Hard Drugs, by Religious Attendance

Percent Who Ever Used Hard Drugs

19.0%			
18.0			17.99%
16.0		16.22%	
14.0			
12.0	11.22%		
10.0			
8.0	7.72%		
6.0			
4.0			
2.0			

Weekly+   Monthly+   <Monthly   Never

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

Teenagers with weekly or more religious attendance were the least likely to have ever used hard drugs (cocaine, crack, inhalants, LSD, PCP, ecstasy, heroin, "pills," or some other non-marijuana drug). Those who never attended religious activities were the most likely.
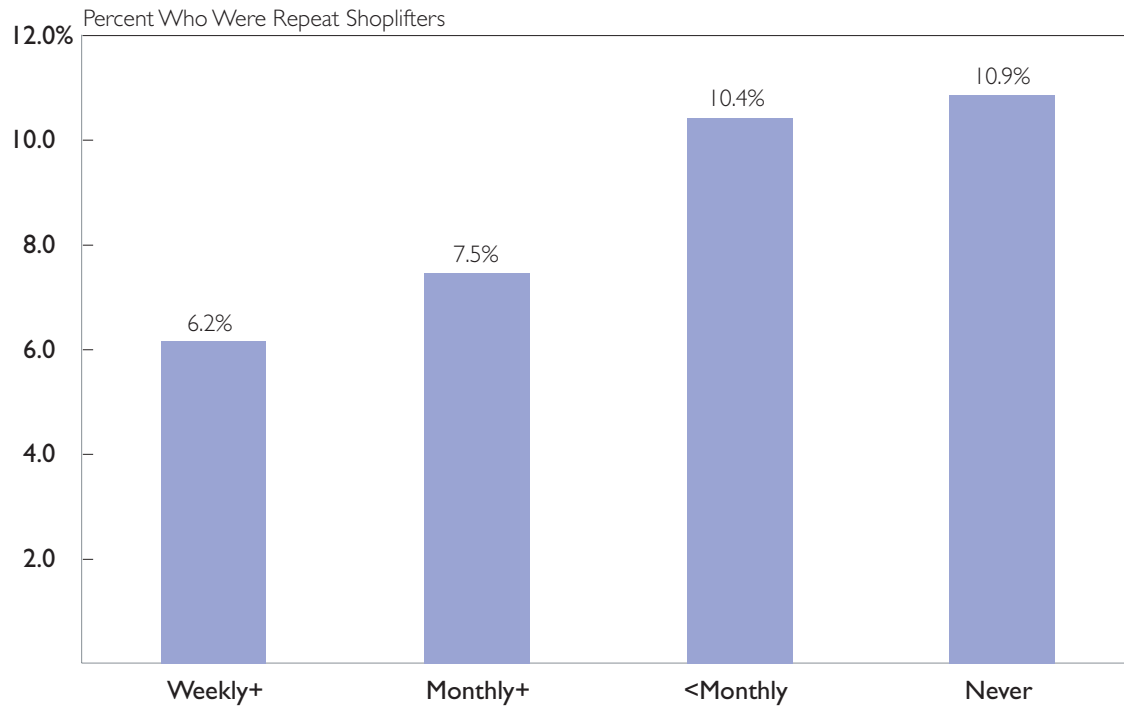
Chart 13   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Committed Theft of $50 or More, by Religious Attendance

Percent Who Committed Theft of $50 or More

20.0%	
18.0	
16.0	
14.0	
12.0	
10.0	
8.0	
6.0	
4.0	
2.0	

12.7%   14.4%   17.6%   18.7%

Weekly+   Monthly+   <Monthly   Never

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

In this graph we find that adolescents with the lowest rate of religious attendance were the most likely to have committed a theft of $50 or more. The opposite was true for those with the highest rate of religious attendance.
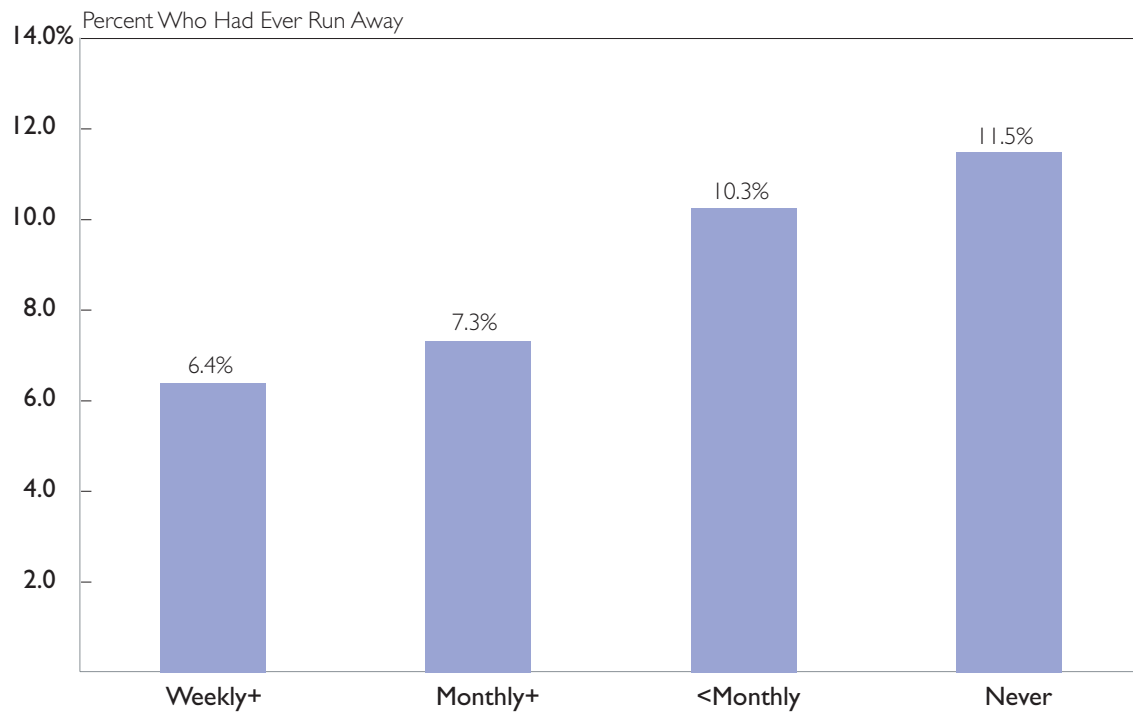
Chart 14   The Heritage Foundation

Repeat Shoplifting, by Religious Attendance

Percent Who Were Repeat Shoplifters

12.0%	
10.0	
8.0	
6.0	
4.0	
2.0	

6.2%   7.5%   10.4%   10.9%

Weekly+   Monthly+   <Monthly   Never

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

There was not much difference in the percentage of teenagers who had ever shoplifted between those who attended religious activities less than monthly and those who never did. Those who attended religious activities weekly or more were the least likely to have ever shoplifted.
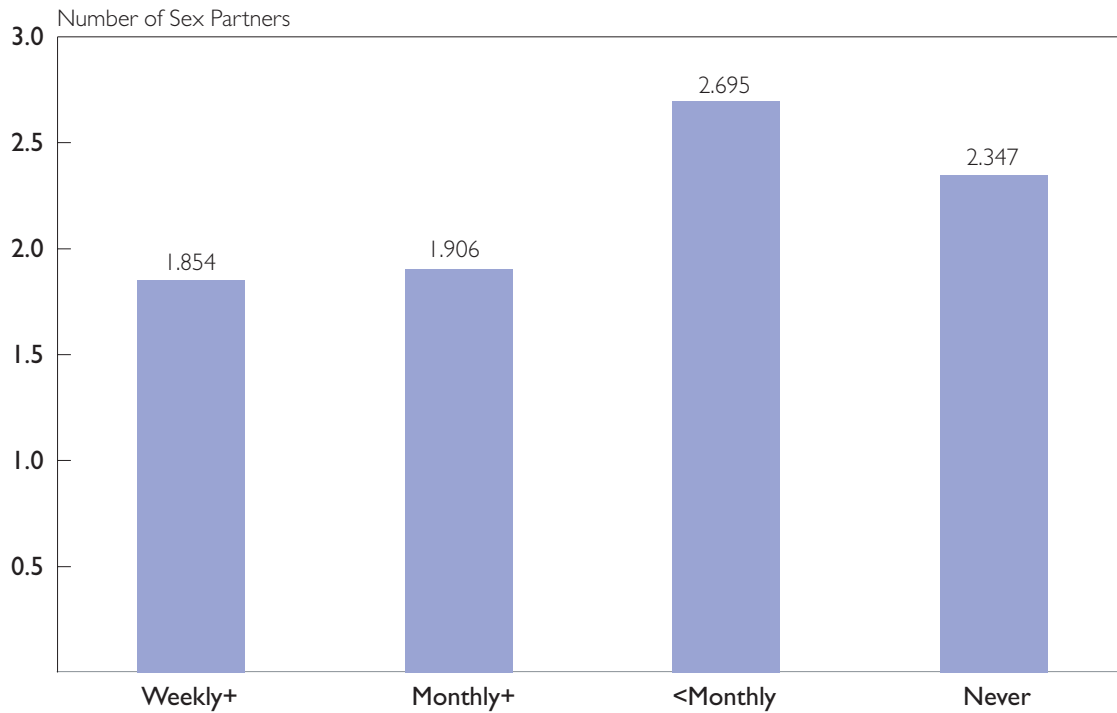
Chart 15   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Run Away, by Religious Attendance

Percent Who Had Ever Run Away

14.0%	
12.0	11.5%
10.0	10.3%
8.0	7.3%
6.0	6.4%
4.0	
2.0	

Weekly+   Monthly+   <Monthly   Never

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

The lowest percentage of those who have ever run away from home was among those who attended religious activities weekly or more. The highest percentage was among those who never attended.
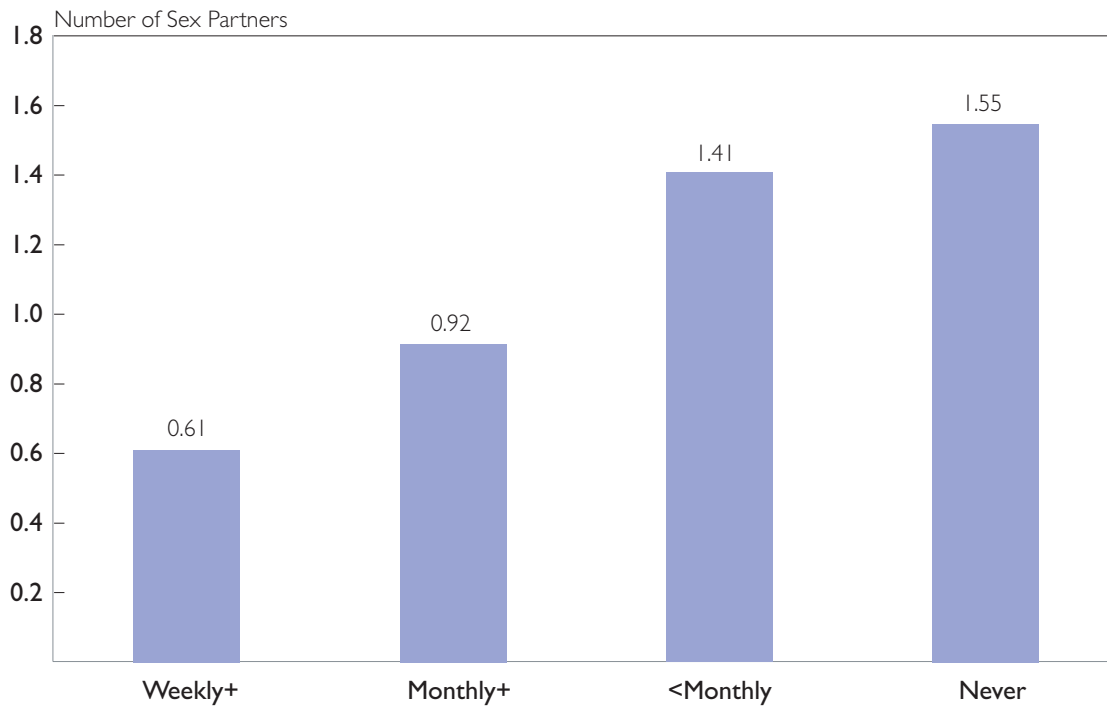
Chart 16   The Heritage Foundation

Boys: Average Number of Sexual Partners, by Religious Attendance

Number of Sex Partners

Weekly+	Monthly+	<Monthly	Never
1.854	1.906	2.695	2.347

Teenage boys who attended religious activities frequently (at least monthly) averaged the fewest sexual partners. Interestingly, it is the teenager who attended religious activities infrequently—rather than never—who averaged the most sexual partners. This pattern will be seen occasionally. (Note: this chart is the average for all teenagers from grades 7–12. There is a distinct difference between the averages for those in grade 7 and those in grade 12 on this outcome.)
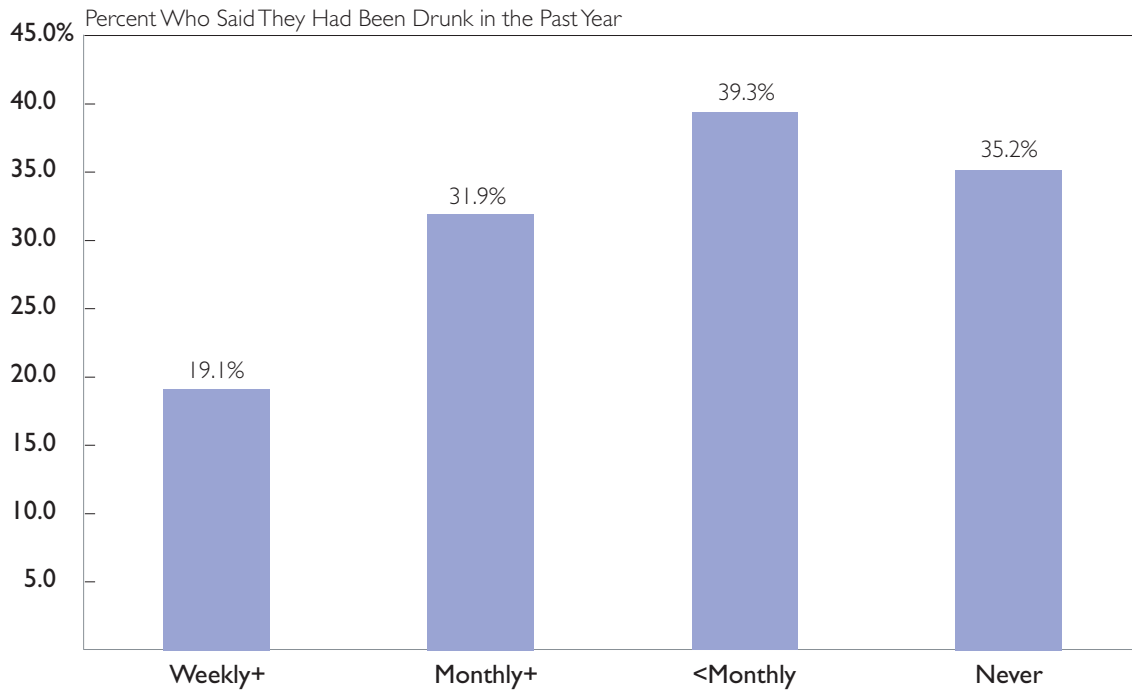
Chart 17   The Heritage Foundation

Girls: Average Number of Sexual Partners, by Religious Attendance

Number of Sex Partners

0.61	0.92	1.41	1.55
Weekly+	Monthly+	<Monthly	Never

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

For teenage girls, the relationship between religious attendance and number of sexual partners exhibited a stair-step pattern. Sexual activity was inversely related to religious attendance: girls who attended weekly or more averaged the fewest sexual partners.

Chart 18   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Been Drunk in the Past Year, by Religious Attendance

Percent Who Said They Had Been Drunk in the Past Year

	Weekly+	Monthly+	<Monthly	Never
	19.1%	31.9%	39.3%	35.2%

45.0%
40.0
35.0
30.0
25.0
20.0
15.0
10.0
5.0

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

Teenagers who attended religious activities less than monthly showed the highest percent-age of having ever been drunk in the previous year, while those who attended weekly or more had the lowest.

Chart 19   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Expelled or Suspended, by Religious Attendance
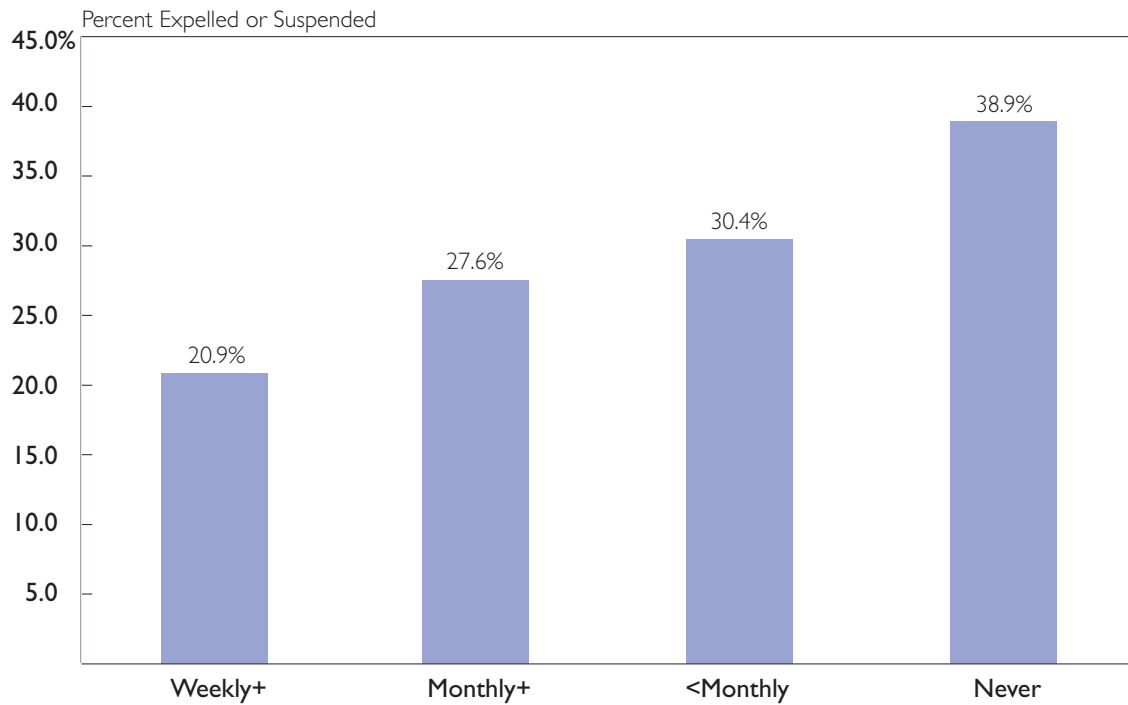
Percent Expelled or Suspended

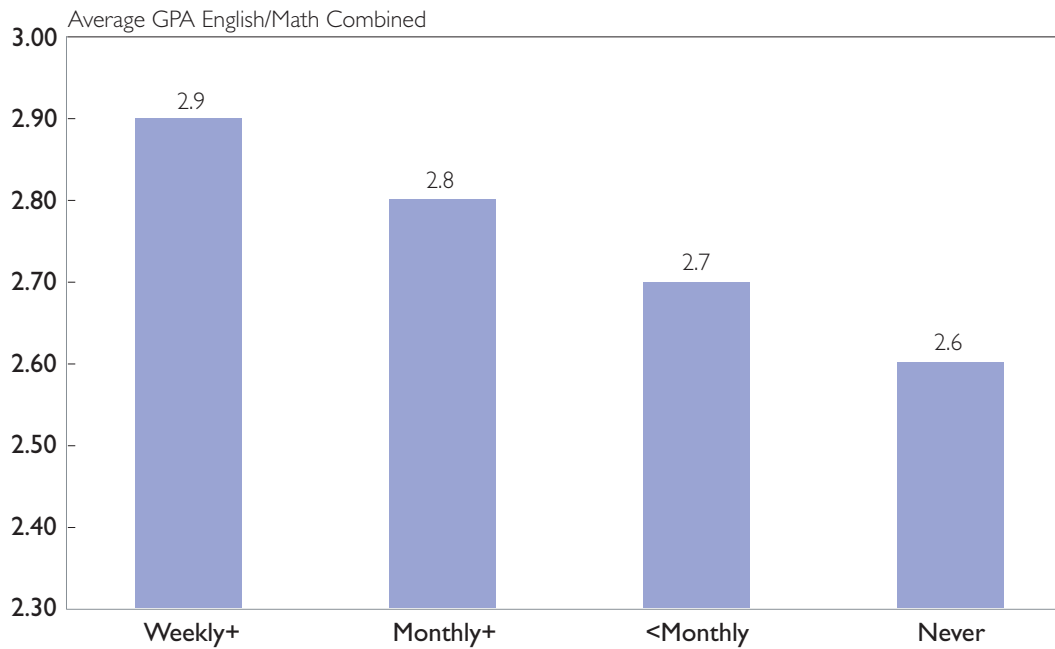|			
45.0%			
40.0			38.9%
35.0			
30.0		30.4%	
25.0	27.6%		
20.0	20.9%		
15.0			
10.0			
5.0			
	Weekly+	Monthly+	<Monthly	Never

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

The dominant pattern holds again in the case of suspension or expulsion from school: Teenagers with the highest rate of religious attendance had the lowest percentage of expulsion or suspension from school. Teenagers who never attended religious activities had the highest percentage.

Chart 20   The Heritage Foundation

GPA English/Math, by Religious Attendance

Average GPA English/Math Combined

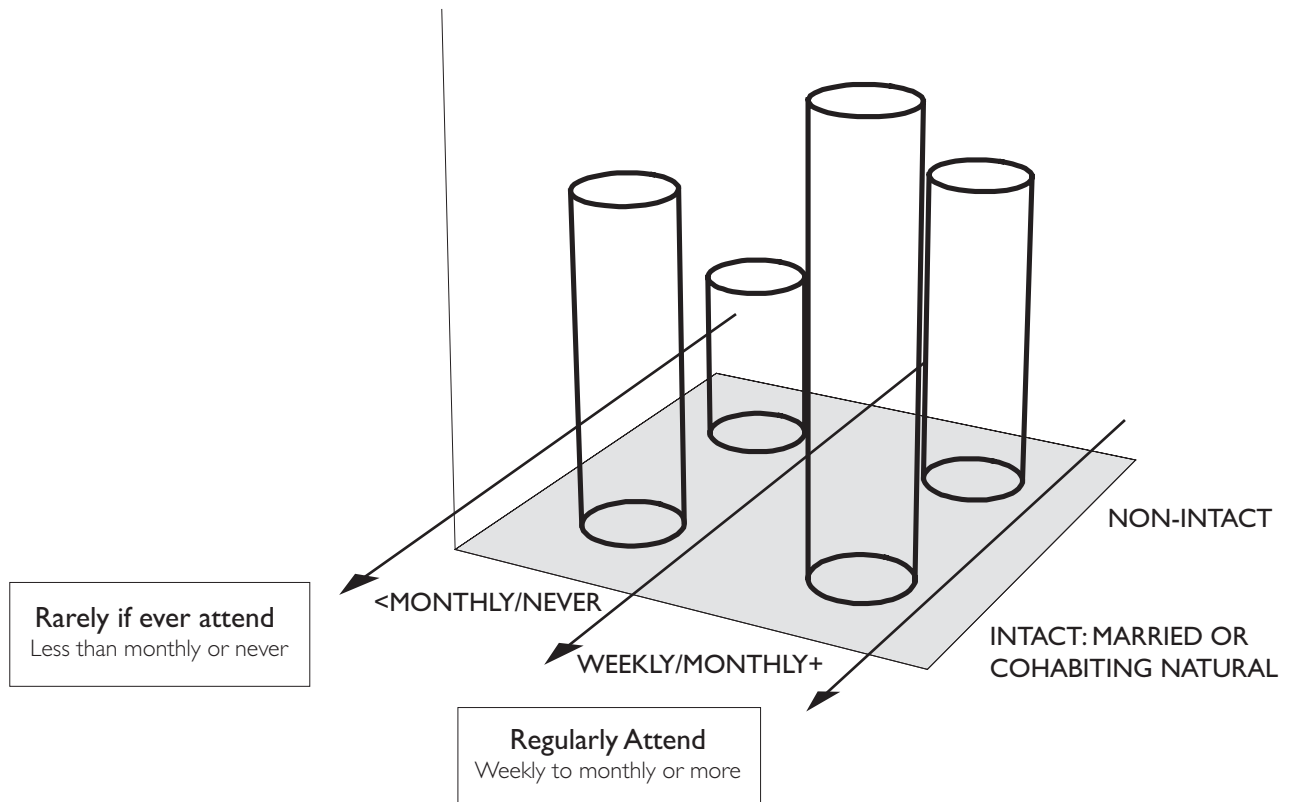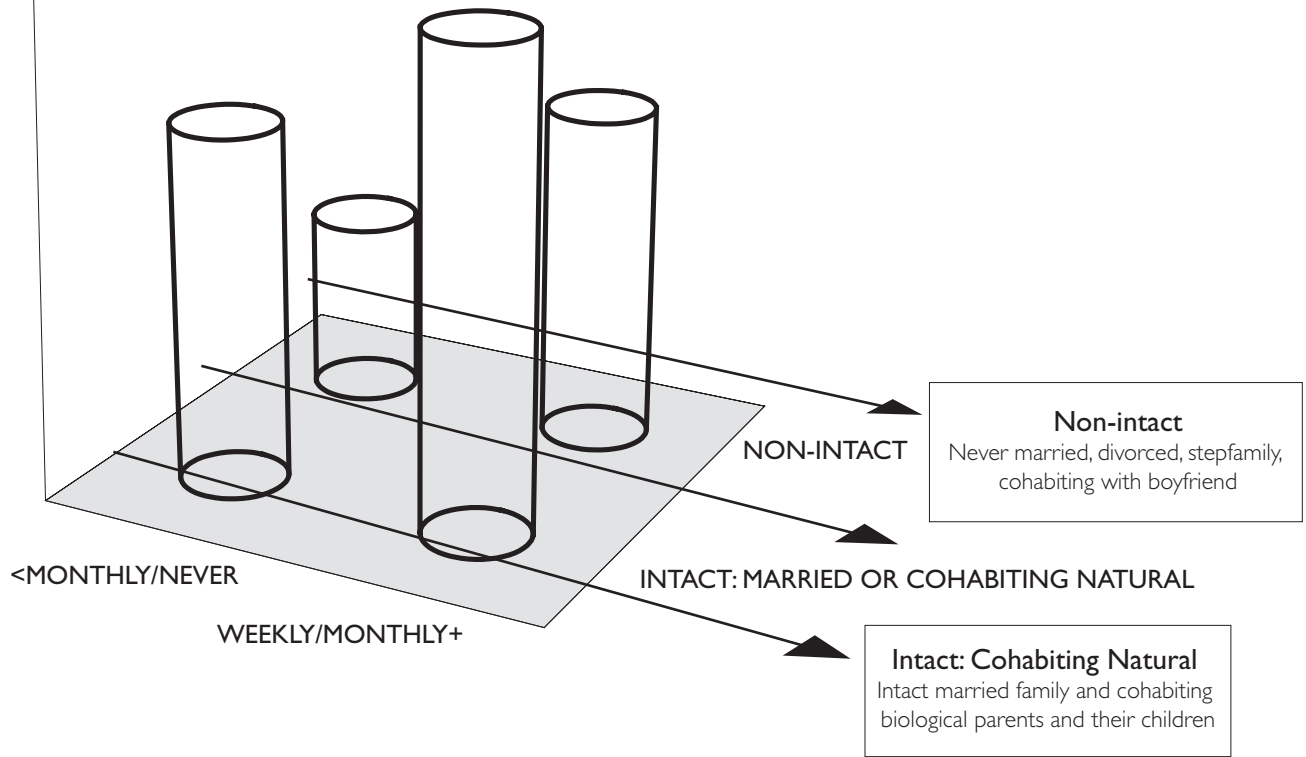|			
3.00			
2.9			
2.90	2.8		
2.80		2.7	
2.70			2.6
2.60			
2.50			
2.40			
2.30			
Weekly+	Monthly+	<Monthly	Never

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

Teenagers who attend religious activities weekly or more have the highest average combined English and math scores. Those who never attend religious activities have the lowest.

Outcomes by Family Structure and Frequency of Religious Attendance

Chart Example 1

NON-INTACT

Non-intact
Never married, divorced, stepfamily,
cohabiting with boyfriend

INTACT: MARRIED OR COHABITING NATURAL

<MONTHLY/NEVER

WEEKLY/MONTHLY+

Intact: Cohabiting Natural
Intact married family and cohabiting
biological parents and their children

NON-INTACT

Rarely if ever attend
Less than monthly or never

<MONTHLY/NEVER

WEEKLY/MONTHLY+

**INTACT: MARRIED OR
COHABITING NATURAL**

Regularly Attend
Weekly to monthly or more

This template describes how the four categories will be illustrated in the following charts. The illustration on top shows that the two front and back columns separate the family categories from each other. The illustration on the bottom right shows the division between frequent and infrequent church attendance.

Chart Example 2

LOCATION OF DIFFERENT COMBINATIONS OF
FAMILY STRUCTURES AND LEVELS OR RELIGIOUS PRACTICE
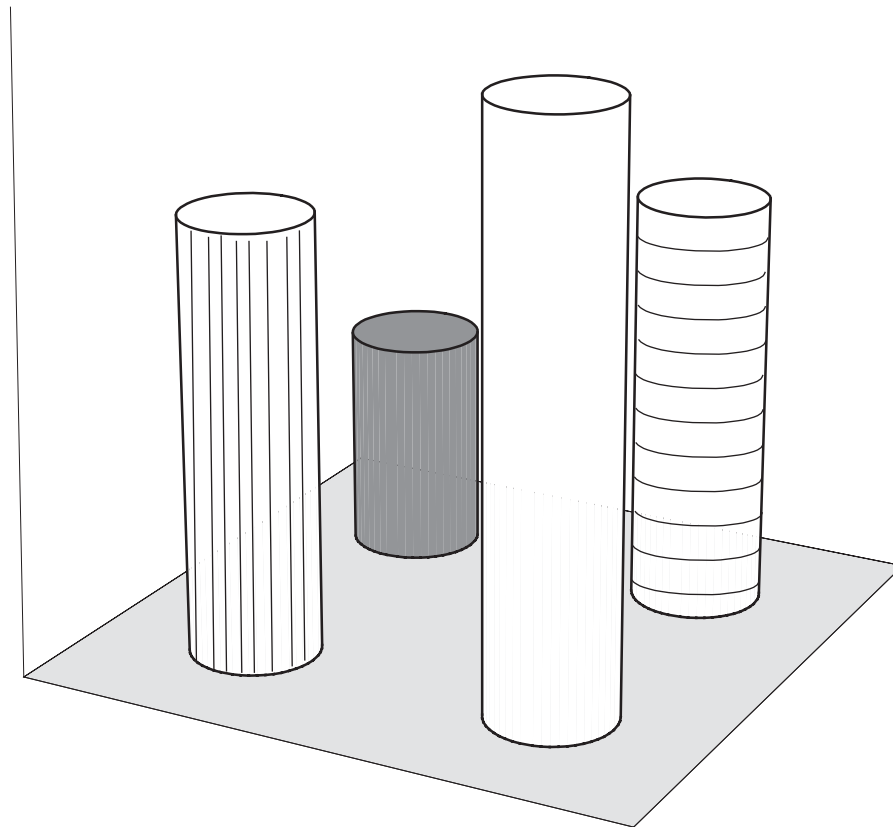
■ Non-Intact Family with Low to
No Religious Attendance

▤ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
Religious Attendance

▥ Intact Family with Low to
No Religious Attendance

☐ Intact Family with Frequent
Religious Attendance

This illustration combines the categories illustrated in the prior example, and shows their location in the charts that follow.

The white column is that of the intact or cohabiting natural family (intact married plus the cohabiting biological parents and their natural children) that worships frequently (at least monthly but as often as a few times a week).

The vertical striped column is the intact family (married or cohabiting) that worships infrequently or never.

The shaded column is the infrequently or never worshipping family in which both biological parents are not living together with their children.

The horizontal striped column is the frequently worshipping family in which the biological parents are not living together with their children.

Chart 21   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Got Into a Fight, by Category

Percent Who Ever
Got Into a Fight

43.5%

45.0%

40.0

35.0   32.1%   34.3%

30.0

27.1%

25.0

20.0

15.0

10.0

5.0

■ Non-Intact Family with Low to   ≋ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
    No Religious Attendance   Religious Attendance

▥ Intact Family with Low to   □ Intact Family with Frequent
    No Religious Attendance   Religious Attendance

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

This chart illustrates the relationship between family structure, religious attendance, and the likelihood of ever having gotten into a fight for teen-agers in grades 7 through 12.

Teenagers from intact families with frequent religious attendance were least likely to have ever gotten into a fight. Those from non-intact families with low to no religious attendance were the most likely to have gotten into a fight.

Chart 22   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Used Hard Drugs, by Category
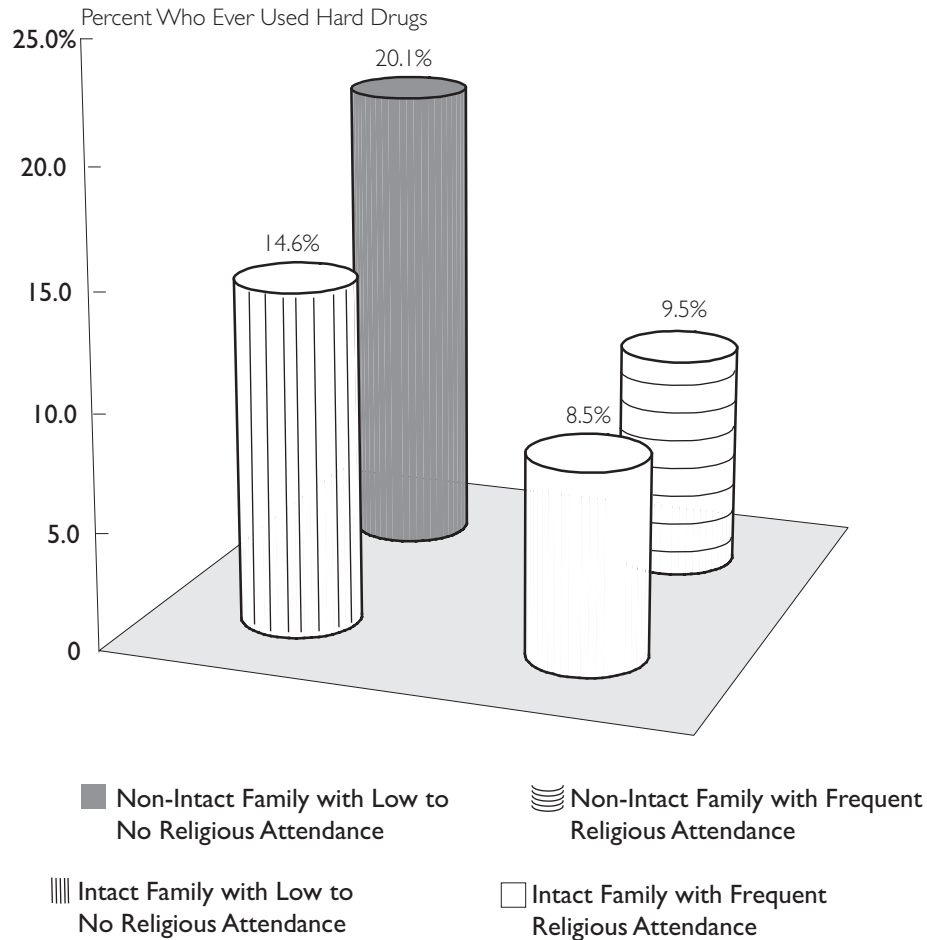
Percent Who Ever Used Hard Drugs

25.0%

20.1%

20.0

14.6%

15.0

9.5%

10.0

8.5%

5.0

0

■ Non-Intact Family with Low to
   No Religious Attendance

≋ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
   Religious Attendance

⦀ Intact Family with Low to
   No Religious Attendance

☐ Intact Family with Frequent
   Religious Attendance

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

Teenagers from non-intact families who rarely or never attended religious activities were most likely to have ever used hard drugs (cocaine, crack, inhalants, LSD, PCP, ecstasy, heroin, "pills," or some other non-marijuana drug). Those from intact families with frequent religious attendance were least likely.

Chart 23   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Committed Theft of $50 or More, by Category

Percent Who Committed
Theft of $50 or More

25.0%

23.5%

20.0

15.8%

15.3%

15.0

11.7%

10.0

5.0

■ Non-Intact Family with Low to   ≋ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
   No Religious Attendance   Religious Attendance

▥ Intact Family with Low to   ☐ Intact Family with Frequent
   No Religious Attendance   Religious Attendance
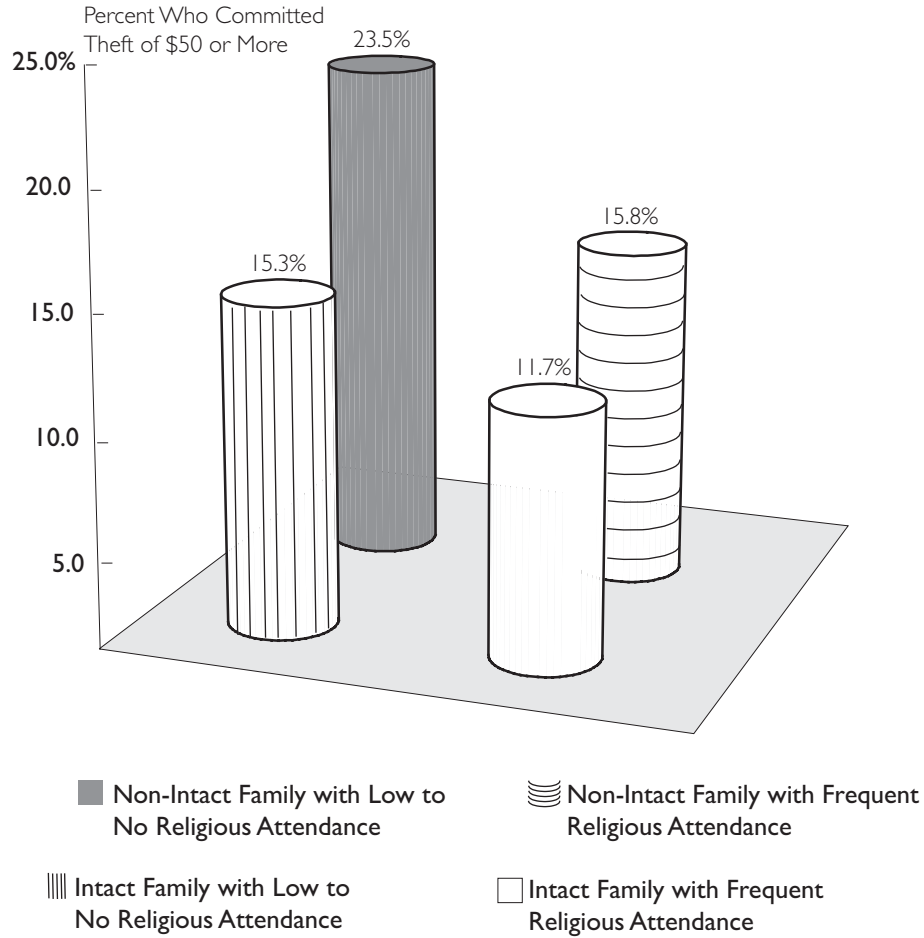
Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

Teenagers from intact families with frequent religious attendance were the least likely to
have ever committed a theft of $50 or more. Those from non-intact families with infre-
quent or no religious attendance were the most likely.

Chart 24   The Heritage Foundation

Repeat Shoplifting, by Category
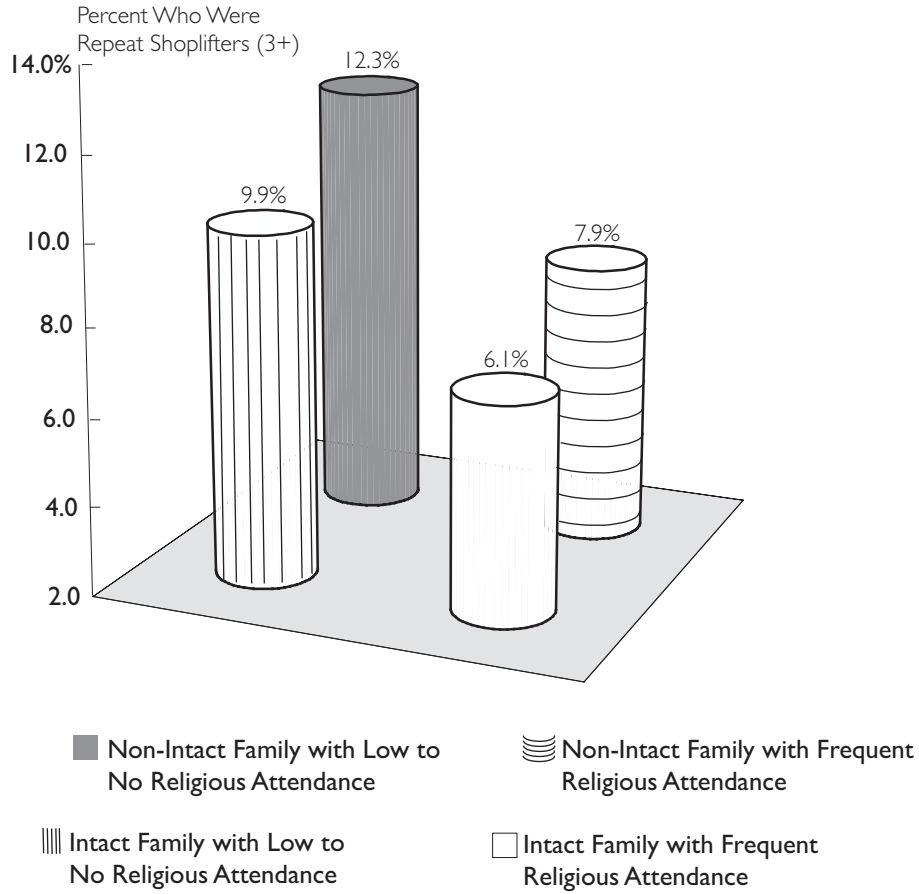
Percent Who Were
Repeat Shoplifters (3+)

14.0%

12.0

10.0

8.0

6.0

4.0

2.0

9.9%

12.3%

6.1%

7.9%

■ Non-Intact Family with Low to
No Religious Attendance

≋ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
Religious Attendance

||||| Intact Family with Low to
No Religious Attendance

□ Intact Family with Frequent
Religious Attendance

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

The dominant pattern is visible with this outcome. Teenagers from intact families with frequent religious attendance were the least likely to have ever shoplifted. Those from non-intact families with low to no religious attendance were the most likely.

Chart 25   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Run Away, by Category

Percent Who Had Ever Run Away

14.0%	
12.0	13.1%
10.0	8.5%
8.0	8.1%
6.0	5.2%
4.0	
2.0	

■ Non-Intact Family with Low to
No Religious Attendance

≋ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
Religious Attendance

▥ Intact Family with Low to
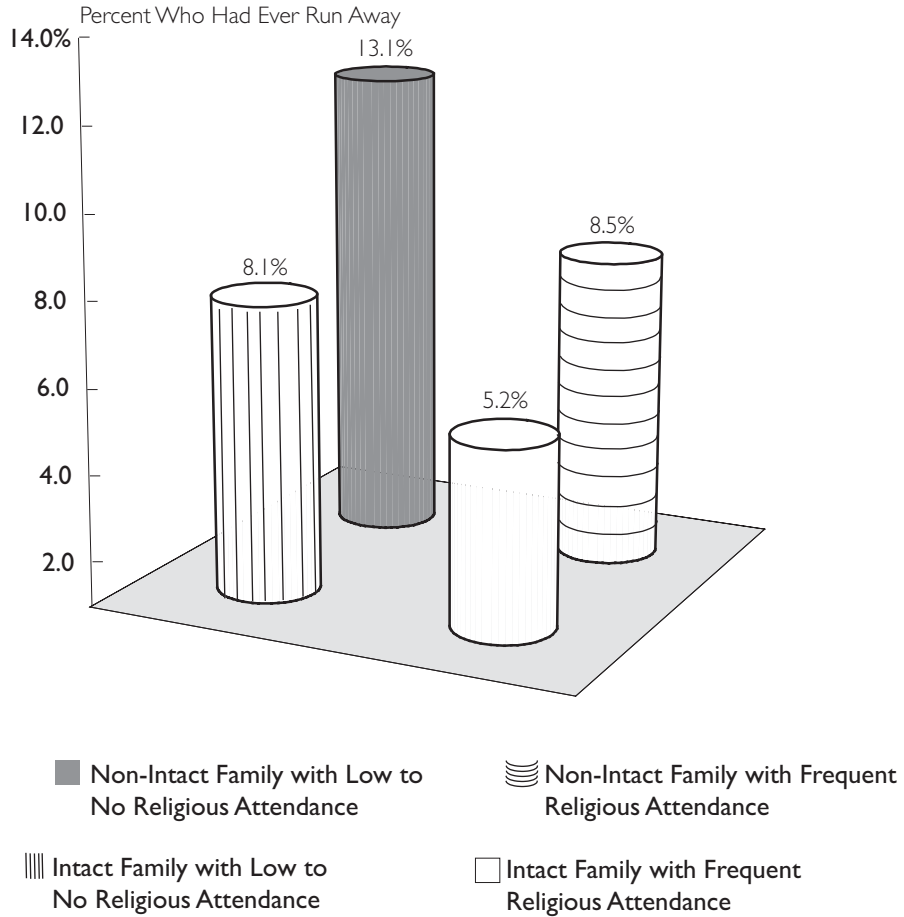No Religious Attendance

☐ Intact Family with Frequent
Religious Attendance

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

The dominant pattern is visible here again. Teenagers from intact families with frequent religious attendance were the least likely to have ever run away. Those from non-intact families with low to no religious attendance were the most likely to have ever run away.
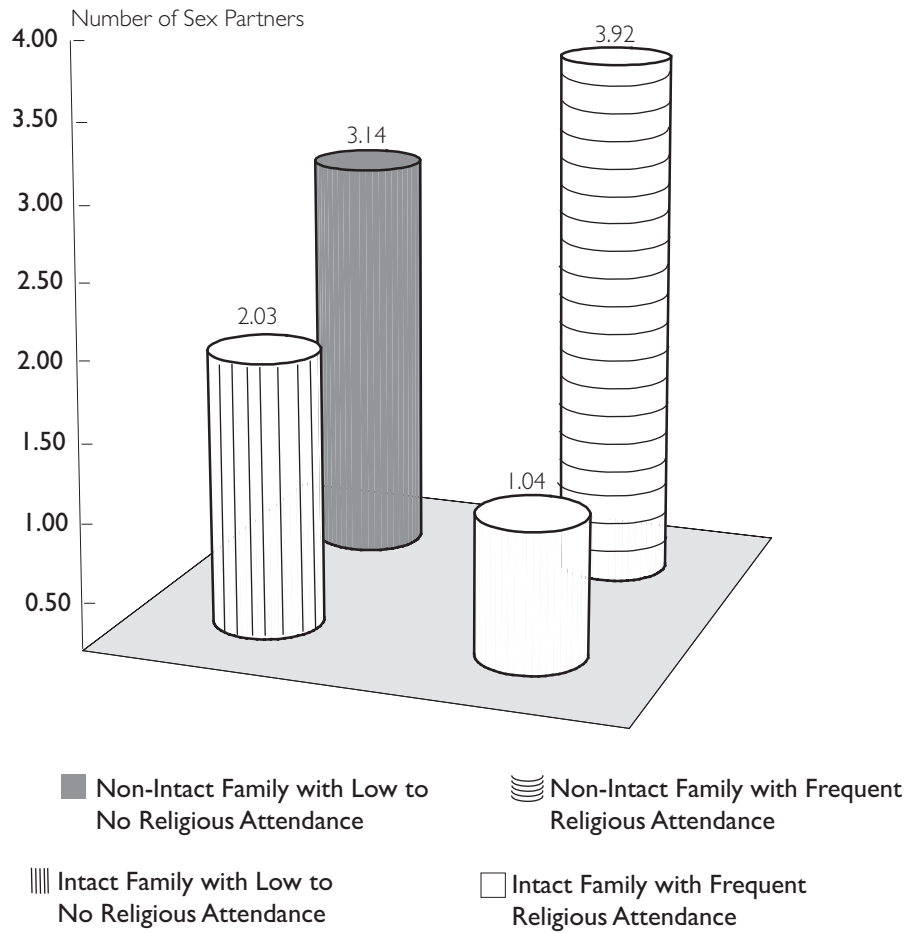
Chart 26   The Heritage Foundation

Girls: Average Number of Sexual Partners, by Category

Number of Sex Partners

1.60

1.40

1.20

1.00

0.80

0.60

0.40

0.20

1.14

1.55

0.47

0.93

◼ Non-Intact Family with Low to
No Religious Attendance

≋ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
Religious Attendance

▥ Intact Family with Low to
No Religious Attendance

☐ Intact Family with Frequent
Religious Attendance
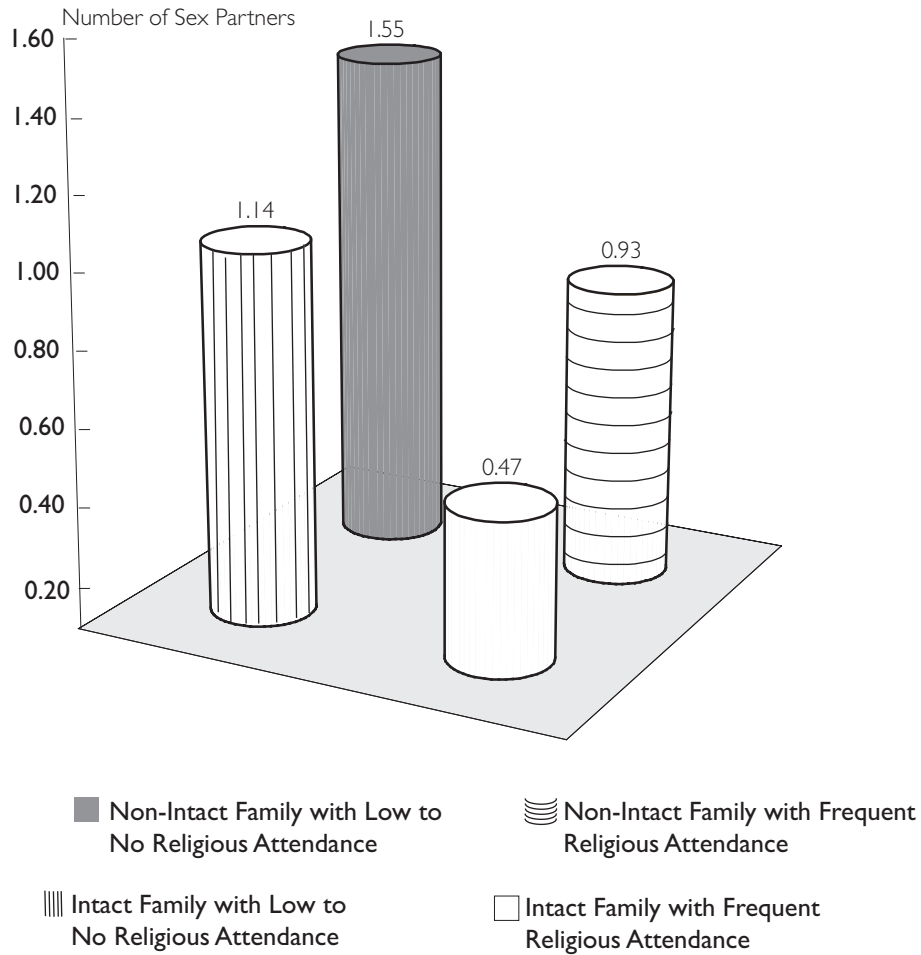
Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

This chart shows the typical pattern. Teenage girls from intact families with frequent religious attendance averaged the fewest sexual partners. Those from non-intact families with low to no religious attendance averaged the most sexual partners.
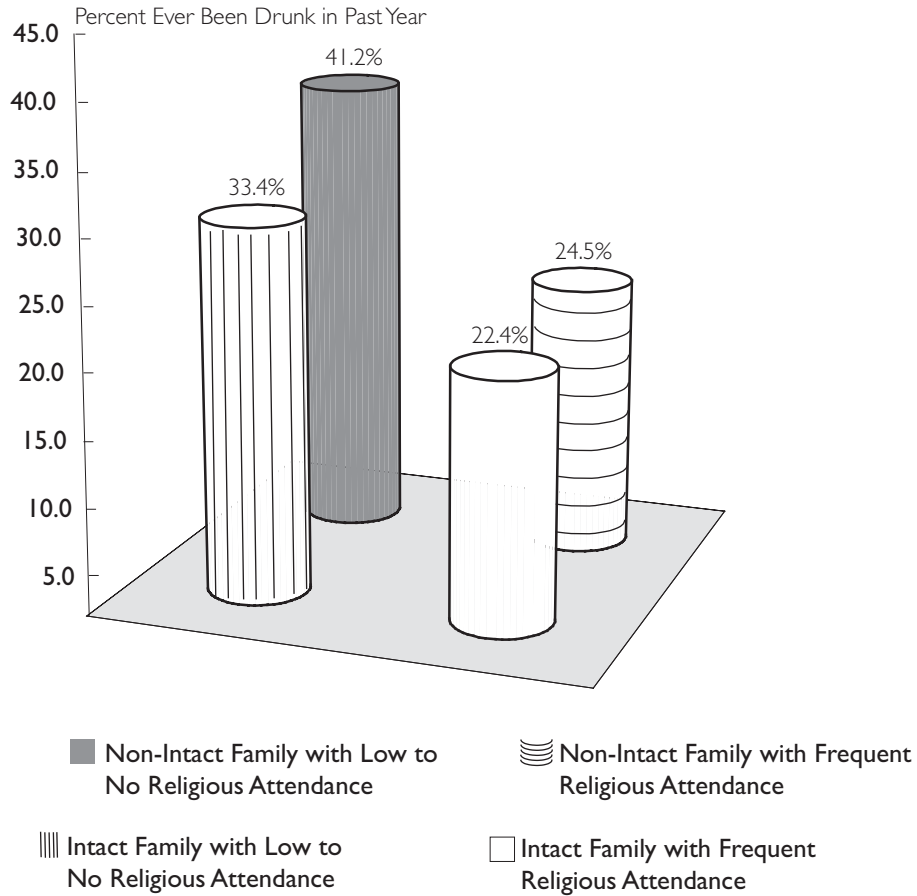
Chart 27   The Heritage Foundation

Boys: Average Number of Sexual Partners, by Category

Number of Sex Partners

4.00

3.92

3.50

3.14

3.00

2.50

2.03

2.00

1.50

1.04

1.00

0.50

■ Non-Intact Family with Low to
No Religious Attendance

≋ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
Religious Attendance

▥ Intact Family with Low to
No Religious Attendance

☐ Intact Family with Frequent
Religious Attendance

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

In this chart the pattern is broken. Those teenage boys with the highest number of sexual partners came from the non-intact family with frequent religious attendance, not from the non-intact family with low to no religious attendance.

Chart 28   The Heritage Foundation

Ever Been Drunk in the Past Year, by Category

Percent Ever Been Drunk in Past Year

45.0

41.2%

40.0

35.0

33.4%

30.0

24.5%

25.0

22.4%

20.0

15.0

10.0

5.0

■ Non-Intact Family with Low to
   No Religious Attendance

≋ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
   Religious Attendance

▥ Intact Family with Low to
   No Religious Attendance

□ Intact Family with Frequent
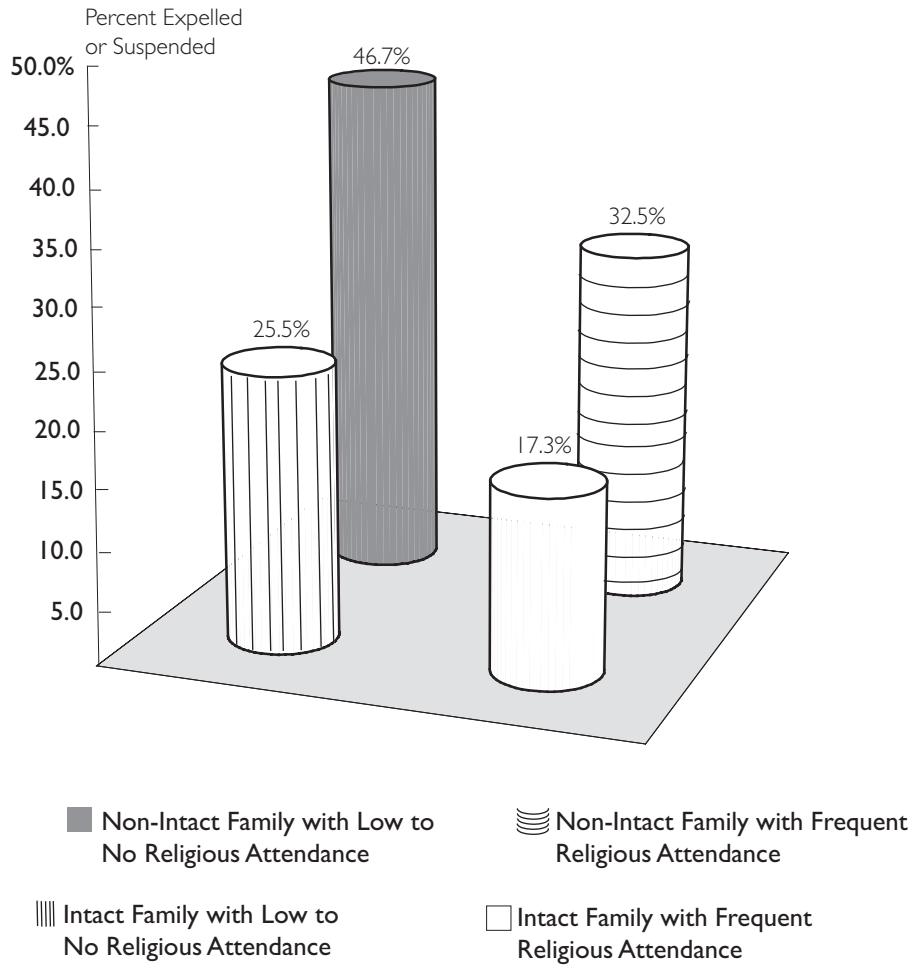   Religious Attendance

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

In the case of teenagers who had been drunk in the past year, the dominant pattern is visible again, though frequency of religious attendance, rather than family structure, seems to have been the stronger influence.
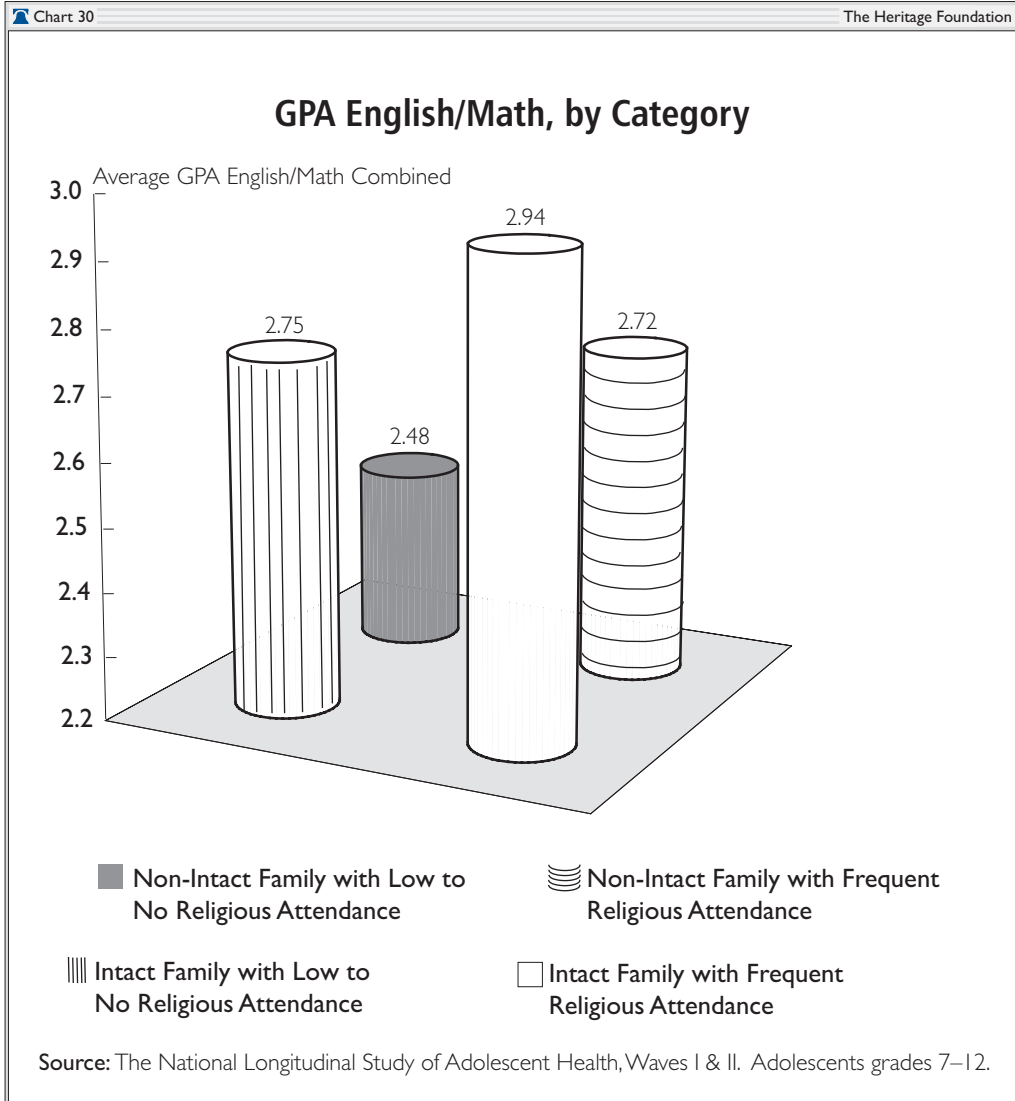
The same high rate of having "ever been drunk" is present in the two low-attendance family groups. Despite both rates being high, teenagers from intact families were less likely to have "ever been drunk" than those from non-intact families.

Chart 29　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　The Heritage Foundation

Ever Expelled or Suspended, by Category

Percent Expelled
or Suspended

50.0%

45.0

40.0

35.0

30.0

25.0

20.0

15.0

10.0

5.0

46.7%

32.5%

25.5%

17.3%

■ Non-Intact Family with Low to
　No Religious Attendance

≋ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
　Religious Attendance

▥ Intact Family with Low to
　No Religious Attendance

□ Intact Family with Frequent
　Religious Attendance

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

Teenagers from intact families with frequent religious attendance were the least likely to have ever been expelled or suspended from school. Teenagers from non-intact families with low to no religious attendance were the most likely.

Chart 30   The Heritage Foundation

GPA English/Math, by Category

Average GPA English/Math Combined

3.0

2.94

2.9

2.8   2.75   2.72

2.7

2.6   2.48

2.5

2.4

2.3

2.2

◼ Non-Intact Family with Low to
   No Religious Attendance

▧ Non-Intact Family with Frequent
   Religious Attendance

▥ Intact Family with Low to
   No Religious Attendance

☐ Intact Family with Frequent
   Religious Attendance

Source: The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I & II. Adolescents grades 7–12.

As this graph illustrates, there are clear differences in grade point average (GPA) scores when frequency of religious attendance and family structure are combined. Teenagers from intact families with frequent religious attendance earned the highest GPA, on average. Those from non-intact families with low to no religious attendance earned the lowest, on average.