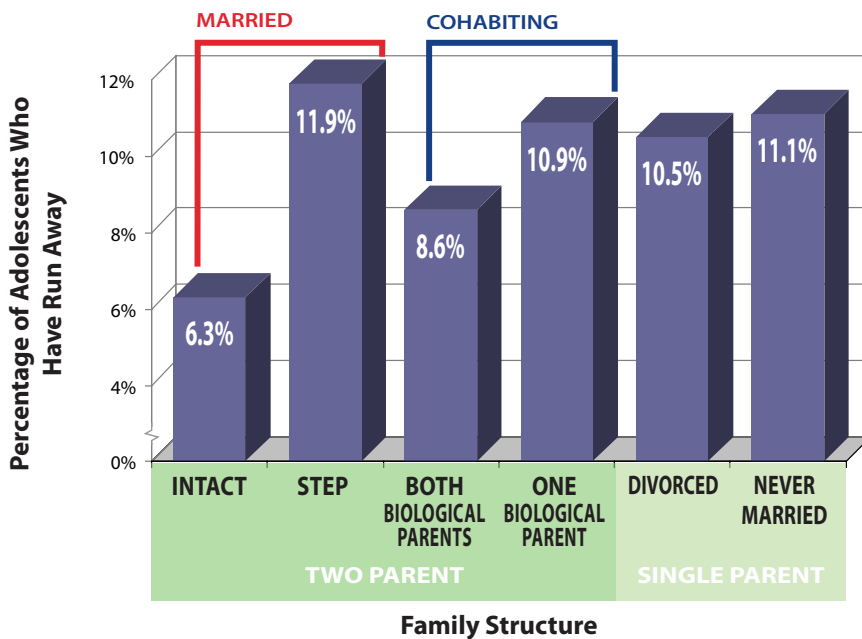




Running Away and Family Structure

Running Away by Family Structure¹



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

Adolescents who live in an intact married family are the least likely to run away from home.

According to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II, six percent of students in Grades 7-12 who live with their married, biological parents have run away from home. By contrast, 12 percent of adolescents who live with a stepparent have run away from home. In between are those who live with two biological cohabiting parents (8.6 percent), those whose parents are divorced (10.5 percent), those who live

with one biological cohabiting parent (10.9 percent), and those who live with a single, never-married parent (11.1 percent).

Other Studies

Several other sources corroborate the direction of these findings. Rebecca Sanchez of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation and colleagues found that “[f]amily structure was a strong predictor of running away. In effect, the more disrupted the family, the greater the likelihood of running away. Youth living with both biological parents were least likely to run away, followed by those with at least one nonbiological parent, those with single mothers, and those in other family structures.”²

Having analyzed a data sample of children from the Canadian province of Ontario, Christopher Kierkus of the State University of New York at Albany and Douglas Baer of University of Victoria reported that school children who lived with both biological parents were much less likely to run away than, in increasing probability, those living with a single parent, those living with a step-parent, and those living with neither biological parent.³

In a study of black male adolescents, H. Elaine Rodney and Robert Mupier of Prairie View A&M University found that “five percent of father-absent adolescents reported that they had run away from home, as opposed to only 0.9% of father-present adolescents.”⁴

When it comes to keeping adolescents at home, the intact married family is most effective.

Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.
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- 1 This chart draws on a large national sample (16,000) from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. This work was done by the author in cooperation with former colleagues at The Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C.
 - 2 Rebecca Polly Sanchez, et al., “Who Runs? A Demographic Profile of Runaway Youth in the United States,” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 39 (2006): 778-781.
 - 3 Christopher A. Kierkus and Douglas Baer, “A Social Control Explanation of the Relationship between Family Structure and Delinquent Behavior,” *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, vol. 44 (2002): 425-458.
 - 4 H. Elaine Rodney and Robert Mupier, “Behavioral Differences between African American Male Adolescents with Biological Fathers and Those without Biological Fathers,” *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 30 (1999): 45-61.



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