

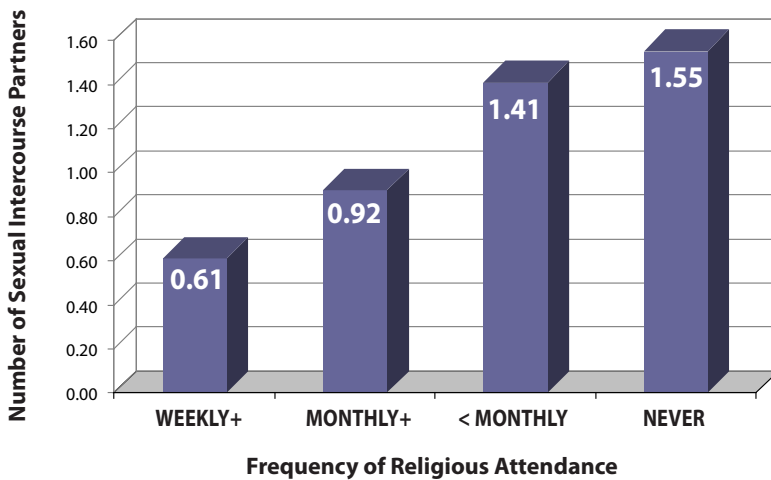


Mapping America™

Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 4

Religious Attendance and Number of Sexual Intercourse Partners—Adolescent Girls

Sexual Intercourse Partners for Girls by Religious Attendance ¹



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

¹This 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.

Adolescent girls who worship at least weekly have the fewest sexual intercourse partners in high school.

Female students in Grades 7-12 who worship at least weekly have an average of 0.61 sexual intercourse partners, while those who worship one to three times a month have an average of 0.92, or 50 percent higher, according to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II. The average jumps significantly for students who attend a few times a year (1.41), 130 percent higher, or never (1.55), 150 percent higher.

Other Studies

Many other studies corroborate the direction of these findings.² Lisa J. Crockett of the University of Nebraska and her colleagues report that the longer a girl keeps her virginity, the more likely she is to be attending church frequently.³

Robert H. Durant of the Medical College of Georgia and colleagues report that Hispanic girls with no religious affiliation or infrequent religious attendance are significantly more likely to be sexually active than those who are more religious.⁴

Examining female and male adolescent sexual practices, Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas at Austin finds a big difference between those who attend and never attend church.⁵

Regnerus also finds significant differences in values: 83 percent of adolescents who attend church more than once a week support waiting until marriage to have sex. Two-thirds of adolescents who attend church weekly also support waiting, while only 49 percent of those who attend two to three times a month, and 35 percent of those who never attend, support waiting until marriage for sexual intercourse.⁶

A study by Karin L. Brewster of the University of North Carolina and colleagues reveals the larger significance that religious attitudes and practices of a community can have on the sexual behavior of female adolescents. She finds that the likelihood of female adolescents' sexual activity is inversely related to their community's percentage of religious believers. Also, concerning non-black adolescent females, the likelihood of nonmarital sexual activity goes down as the percentage of church members in the community rises.⁷

The more often female adolescents attend church the more likely they are to remain virgins longer. Maybe abstinence until marriage will become common again, but it seems a more frequent worship of God must precede that welcome day.

Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.

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

3 Lisa J. Crockett, C. Raymond Bingham, Joanne S. Chopak, and Judith R. Vicary, "Timing of First Sexual Intercourse: The Role of Social Control, Social Learning, and Problem Behavior," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 25 (1996): 89-111.

4 Robert H. Durant, Robert Pendergast, and Carolyn Seymore, "Sexual Behavior among Hispanic Female Adolescents in the United States," *Pediatrics* 85 (1990): 1051-1058.

5 Mark D. Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex and Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2007): 127.

6 *Ibid.*, 87.

7 John O. G. Billy, Karin L. Brewster, and William R. Grady, "Contextual Effects on the Sexual Behavior of Adolescent Women," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 56 (1994): 387-404.



FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL
801 G STREET NW
WASHINGTON DC 20001
800-225-4008
WWW.FRC.ORG

Mapping America
Editor: Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D.
Managing Editor: Michael Leaser

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