

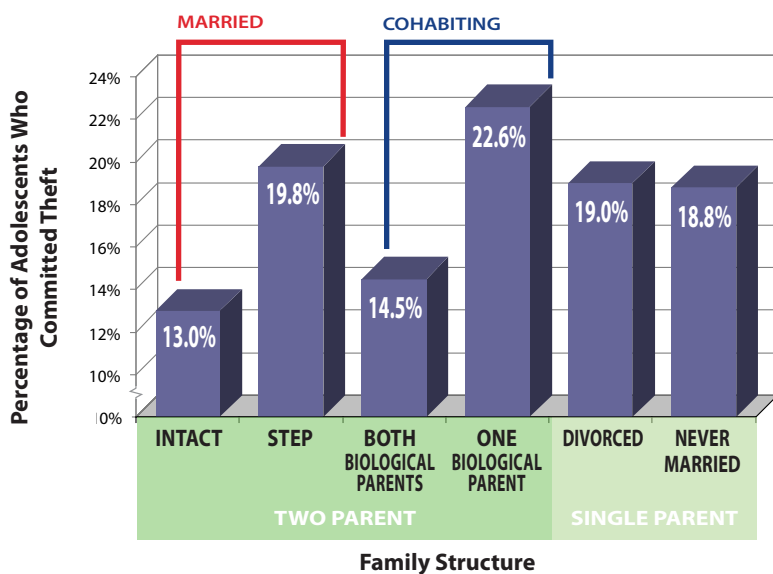


# Mapping America™

Marriage, Religion, and the Common Good – Number 23

## Family Structure and Theft

Theft by Family Structure<sup>1</sup>



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

Adolescents who live in an intact married family are less likely to steal than those living in step-families, those whose parents are divorced, or those raised by cohabiting parents.

According to a confidential survey conducted as part of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II, 13 percent of children who live in an intact married family admit to having stolen at least \$50 worth of goods.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, 19 percent of children whose parents never married or are divorced have stolen as much, as have 20 percent of those living with a step-parent, 15 percent

of those living with cohabiting biological parents, and 23 percent of those living with one cohabiting biological parent.

### Other Studies

Several other studies corroborate these findings. Amy Anderson of Pennsylvania State University found that children living in one-parent households were more likely to commit property crimes than those living in two-parent households.<sup>3</sup>

George Thomas of the Research Institute on Addictions and colleagues also reported that adolescents living with both biological parents have the lowest delinquency levels.<sup>4</sup>

In a study of adolescents in the United Kingdom, Patrick Miller and Martin Plant of the University of the West of England found that children living in single-parent households were more prone to vandalism and theft.<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to raising adolescents who don't steal, in general, married parents do the job better.

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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 The data indicate those adolescents who have stolen more than \$50 worth of goods.
  - 3 Amy L. Anderson, "Individual and Contextual Influences on Delinquency: The Role of the Single-Parent Family," *Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 30 (2002): 575-587. The four measures for property crime included: stolen or tried to steal something worth less than US\$50; stolen or tried to steal something worth more than US\$50; entered or tried to enter a building to steal something; and stolen or attempted to steal a motor vehicle.
  - 4 George Thomas, et al., "The Effects of Single-Mother Families and Nonresident Fathers on Delinquency and Substance Abuse in Black and White Adolescents," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 58 (1996): 884-894. The delinquency measures included stealing, assault, gang fighting, credit card or check forgery, breaking into a house or car, engaging in sexual relations, taking money from a family member without his or her knowledge, pushing or hitting a parent, and throwing something at a family member.
  - 5 Patrick Miller and Martin Plant, "The Family, Peer Influences and Substance Use: Findings from a Study of UK Teenagers," *Journal of Substance Use*, vol. 8 (2003): 19-26.



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