

Sociologists Find That Religiously Active Families Tend to Have Stronger Family Relationships

Sociologists with the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, have found that religiously involved U.S. families of early adolescents, those ages 12 to 14, are more likely to have significantly stronger family relationships than families that are not religiously active. The findings were released in the report *Family Religious Involvement and the Quality of Family Relationships for Early Adolescents*.

According to Christian Smith, principal investigator of the National Study of Youth and Religion, “The report demonstrates that youth from families who are heavily involved (five to seven days per week) in some form of religious activity during the week (such as attending church, praying or reading scriptures together) are significantly more likely than youth whose families do not engage in religious activities throughout the week to have stronger relationships with their mothers and fathers, to participate in family activities such as eating dinner together and to not run away from home.” Smith is professor and associate chair of sociology at UNC-CH. He co-authored the report with Phillip Kim, a Ph.D. graduate student in sociology at UNC-CH.

Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997), the report examines associations between three dimensions of family religious involvement (the number of days per week the family does something religious, parental worship service attendance and parental prayer) and the quality of family relationships, Smith explained. “Out of the 27 family relationship outcome variables we examined for this report,” he added, “all were significantly related to some dimension of family religious involvement, after controlling for the possible effects of eight control variables.”

The National Study of Youth and Religion is a four-year research project funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. It began in August 2001 and will continue until August 2005. The purpose of the project is to research the shape and influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of American adolescents; to identify effective practices in the religious, moral and social formation of the lives of youth; to describe the extent to which youth participate in and benefit from the programs and opportunities that religious communities are offering to their youth; and to foster an informed national discussion about the influence of religion in youth’s lives to encourage

sustained reflection about and rethinking of our cultural and institutional practices with regard to youth and religion.

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997) is a nationally representative survey documenting the transition from school to work of youth living in the United States who were between 12 and 16 years old as of Dec. 31, 1996. The analyses for this report focused on early adolescents, ages 12 to 14 years old. Reports of religious behavior are based on the parent surveys, where the questions were asked: "In a typical week, how many days from 0 to 7 do you do something religious as a family such as go to church, pray or read the scriptures together?" "In the past 12 months, how often have you attended a worship service (like church or synagogue service or mass)?" and "I pray more than once a day" (True/False). Reports about parental relationships are based on the youth surveys.