

Sociologists Find Stronger Relationships Between Mothers and Fathers In Religiously Active Families

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

Youth with both a mother figure and a father figure living in the household were asked questions about the relationship between their parents such as whether their mothers and fathers express love for each other, compromise with each other, insult each other, and other indicators of the quality of the parental relationship. The responses to these questions indicate that family religious involvement is strongly associated with the quality of the relationship between the mothers and fathers of the youth respondents.

According to Christian Smith, principal investigator of the National Study of Youth and Religion, “This report examines associations between three dimensions of family religious involvement and the quality of the relationship between teens’ mothers and fathers. All 12 of the family relationship variables examined for this report were significantly related to some dimension of family religious involvement, after controlling for the possible effects of eight control variables.” The report is available for free download as a PDF at www.youthandreligion.org.

Smith is Stuart Chapin Distinguished 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. The three measures of family religious involvement examined were the number of days per week the family does something religious, parental worship service attendance and parental prayer. The report uses data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997).

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.