

# Effects of Religious Practice on Crime Rates

Metropolitan areas with high rates of congregational membership and areas with high levels of religious homogeneity tend to have lower homicide and suicide rates than other metropolitan areas.<sup>1)</sup> States with more religious populations tend to have fewer homicides and [fewer suicides](#).<sup>2)</sup> Religious attendance is associated with direct decreases in both minor and major forms of crime and deviance, to an extent unrivalled by government welfare programs.<sup>3)</sup> There is a 57 percent decrease in likelihood to deal drugs and a 39 percent decrease in likelihood to commit a crime among the young, black [inner city population](#) if they attend religious services regularly.<sup>4)</sup>

In a major national survey of adolescents, a 6 percent [reduction in delinquency](#) was associated with a one-point increase on an index that combined adolescents' frequency of religious attendance with their rating of religion's importance.<sup>5)</sup> Each unit increase in a [mother's religious practice](#) is associated with a 9 percent decline in her child's delinquency. The adolescents at lowest risk for delinquency typically have highly religious mothers and are themselves highly religious.<sup>6)</sup>

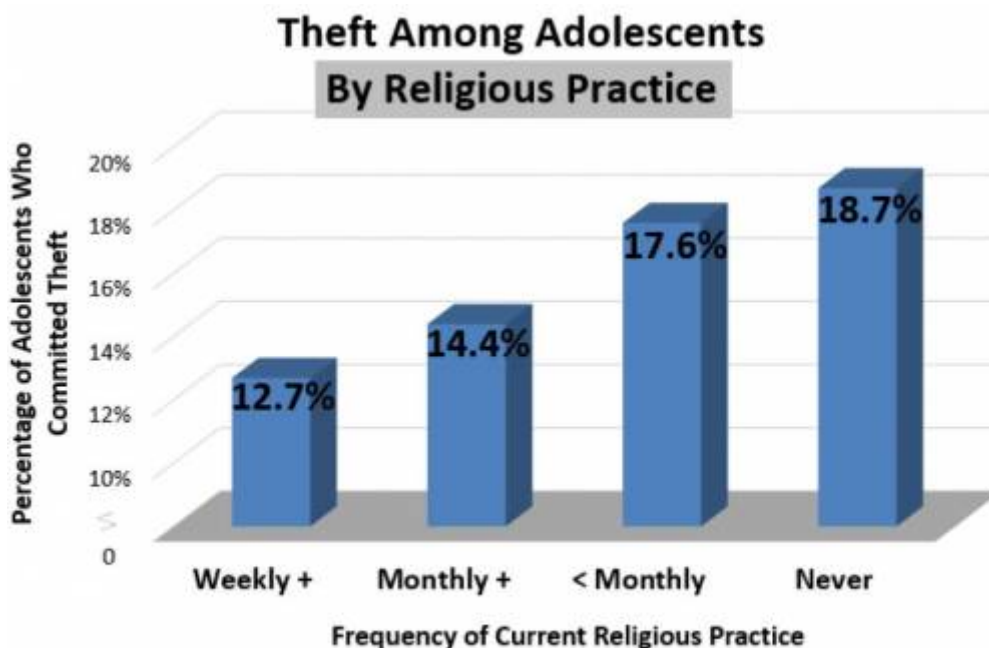
## 1.1 Related American Demographics

Children who attend religious services at least weekly are more likely to have positive social development than those who never attend religious services.<sup>7)</sup> According to the Adolescent Health Survey (Wave I), adolescents who worship at least weekly are less likely to be repeat shoplifters than those who worship less frequently.<sup>8)</sup> (See [Chart](#))



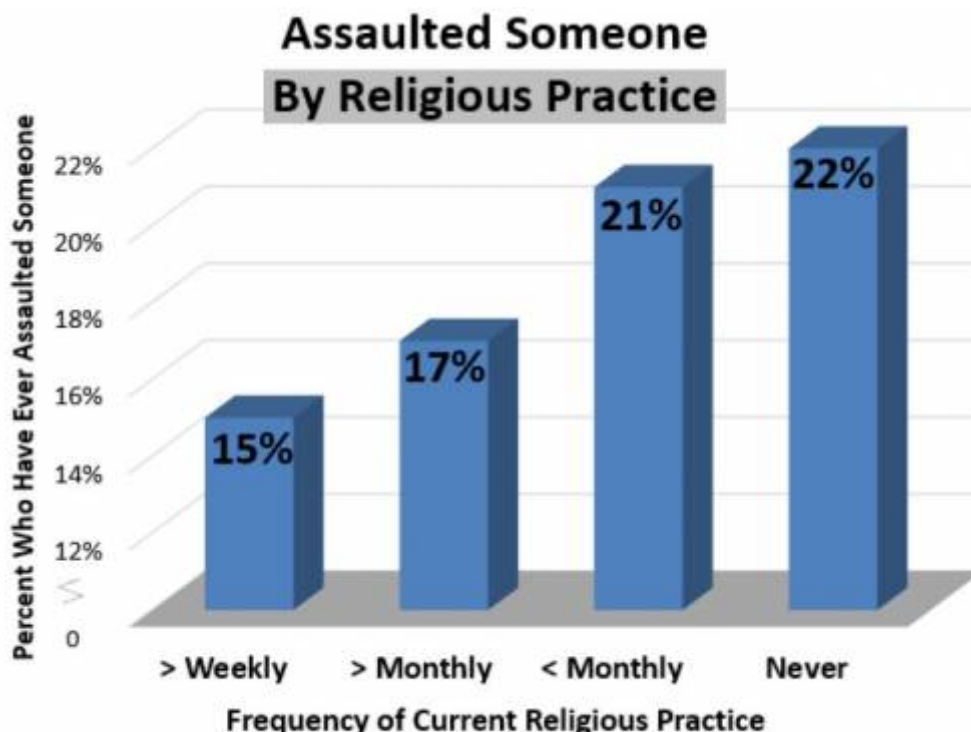
Source: National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Waves I and II.  
Adolescents Grades 7-12.

Similarly, adolescents who worship at least weekly are less likely to steal than those who worship less frequently.<sup>9)</sup> (See [Chart](#)).



Source: National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Adolescents Grades 7-12.

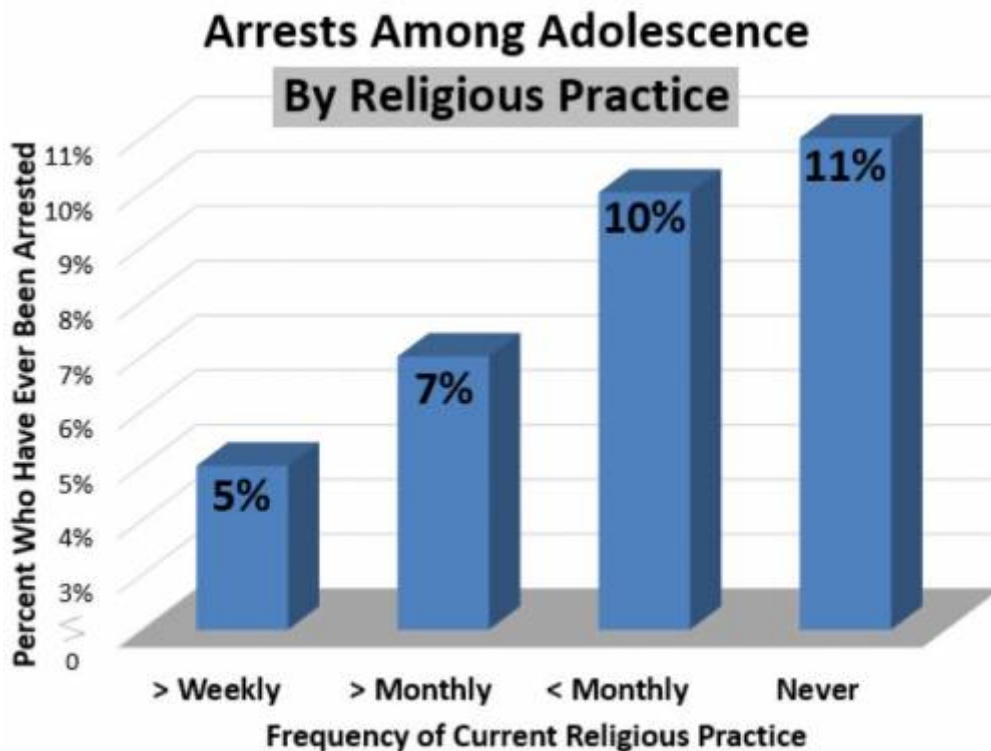
The 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth showed that 15 percent of those who attended religious services at least once per week committed assault, compared to 17 percent of those who attended more than once a month, 21 percent of those who attended less than monthly, and 22 percent of those who never attended.<sup>10)</sup> (See [Chart](#) Below)



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997)

Correspondingly, those who frequently attend religious services are less likely to be arrested. According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, only 5 percent of youths who currently attend weekly religious services have ever been arrested, followed by those who attend one to three times a month (7 percent), those who attend less than once a month (10 percent), and those who never

attend church (11 percent).<sup>11)</sup> (See [Chart](#) Below)



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth

<sup>1)</sup> Robert A. Hummer, Christopher G. Ellison, Richard G. Rogers, Benjamin E. Moulton, and Ron R. Romero, "Religious Involvement and Adult Mortality in the United States: Review and Perspective," *Southern Medical Journal* 97, no. 12 (December 2004): 1224-1225.

<sup>2)</sup> David Lester, "Religiosity and Personal Violence: A Regional Analysis of Suicide and Homicide Rates," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 127, no. 6 (December 1987): 685-686

<sup>3)</sup> , <sup>4)</sup> Byron R. Johnson, David B. Larson, Spencer De Li, and Sung Joon Jang, "Escaping from the Crime of Inner Cities: Church Attendance and Religious Salience Among Disadvantaged Youth," *Justice Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (June 2000): 377-339.

<sup>5)</sup> , <sup>6)</sup> Lisa D. Pearce and Dana L. Haynie, "Intergenerational Religious Dynamics and Adolescent Delinquency," *Social Forces* 82, no. 4 (June 2004): 1553-1572.

<sup>7)</sup> Nicholas Zill and Patrick Fagan, "Children's Positive Social Development and Religious Attendance," The Mapping America Project. Available at <http://www.frc.org/mappingamerica/mapping-america-58-childrens-positive-social-development-and-religious-attendance>. Accessed July 26, 2012.

<sup>8)</sup> 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.

Patrick F. Fagan, "Religious Attendance and Shoplifting," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-10-12-152.pdf>

<sup>9)</sup> 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.

Patrick F. Fagan, "Religious Attendance and Theft," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-22-24-156.pdf>

<sup>10)</sup> Patrick F. Fagan and Scott Talkington, "'Ever Assaulted Someone' by Current Religious Attendance and Structure of Family of Origin," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-106.pdf>

<sup>11)</sup> Patrick F. Fagan and Scott Talkington, "'Ever Been Arrested' by Current Religious Attendance and Structure of Family of Origin," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-102.pdf>.

This entry draws heavily from [95 Social Science Reasons for Religious Worship and Practice](#) and [Why Religion Matters Even More: The Impact of Religious Practice on Social Stability](#).

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