

Effects of Religious Practice on Sexual Behavior

1. Teen Sexual Activity

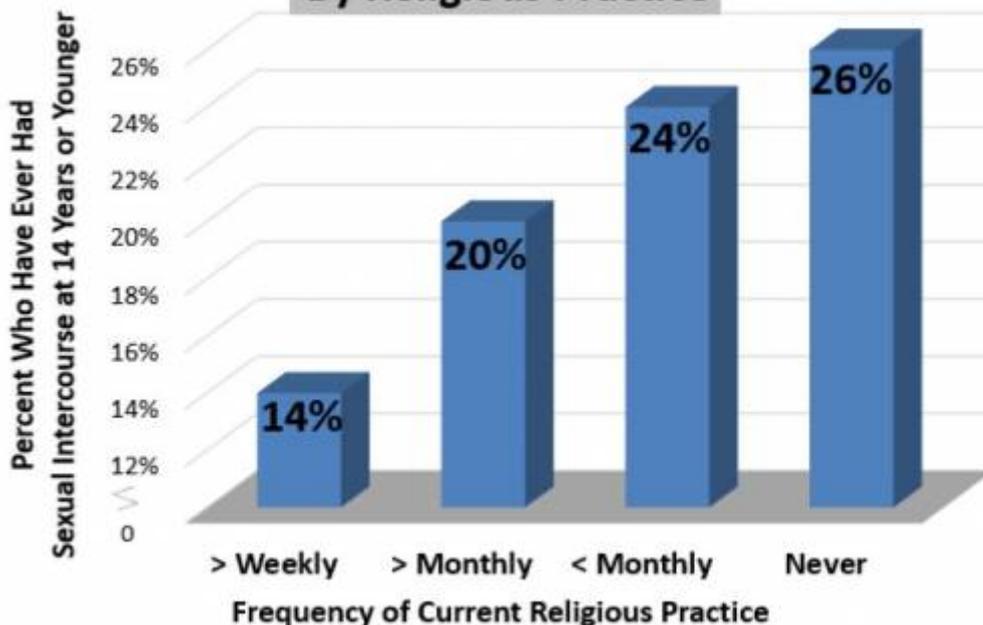
Greater levels of community religious practice are correlated with lower levels of teen sexual activity.¹⁾ Traditional values and religious beliefs are among the most common factors cited by teens as their reason for remaining sexually abstinent, second only to fear (e.g., fear of an unwanted pregnancy, a sexually transmitted disease, or parental discipline).²⁾ Youth who attend religious services more frequently have less permissive attitudes toward sexual activity and less sexual experience than peers who attend religious services less frequently.³⁾ An analysis of National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health found that each increase in religiosity on their scale⁴⁾ reduced the odds of becoming sexually active by 16 percent for girls and by 12 percent for boys.⁵⁾

In a 2002 review of the academic literature on the effects of religion, 97 percent of the studies reported significant correlations between increased religious involvement and a lower likelihood of promiscuous sexual behaviors. Individuals with higher levels of religious commitment and those who regularly attended religious services were generally much less likely to engage in premarital sex or extramarital affairs or to have multiple sexual partners.⁶⁾

1.1 Related American Demographics

According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 14 percent of adolescents who currently attend weekly religious services had sexual intercourse at 14 years of age or younger, compared to those who attend church one to three times a month (20 percent), less than monthly (24 percent), and those who never attend church (26 percent).⁷⁾ (See [Chart](#))

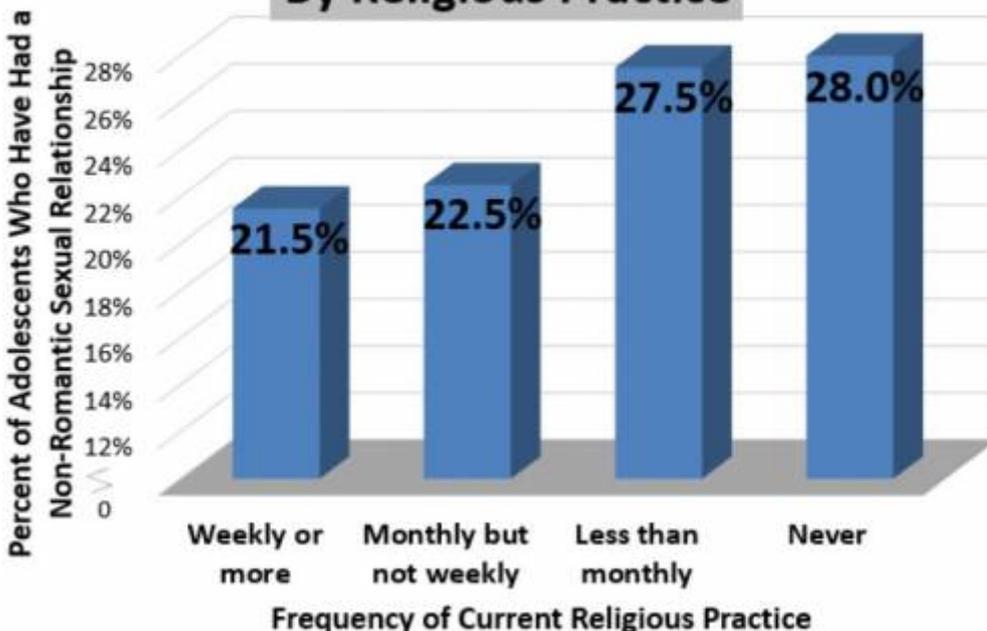
Sexual Intercourse at 14 Years of Age or Younger By Religious Practice



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997)

The likelihood that an adolescent has had a non-romantic sexual relationship decreases as the adolescent’s religious involvement increases. According to the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, teens who attended religious services weekly or more within the past year were less likely to have had nonromantic sexual intercourse (21.5 percent) than those who attended monthly but not weekly (22.5 percent), less than monthly (27.5 percent), or never (28.0 percent).⁸⁾ (See [Chart](#) Below)

Non-Romantic Sexual Relationship By Religious Practice



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Wave I

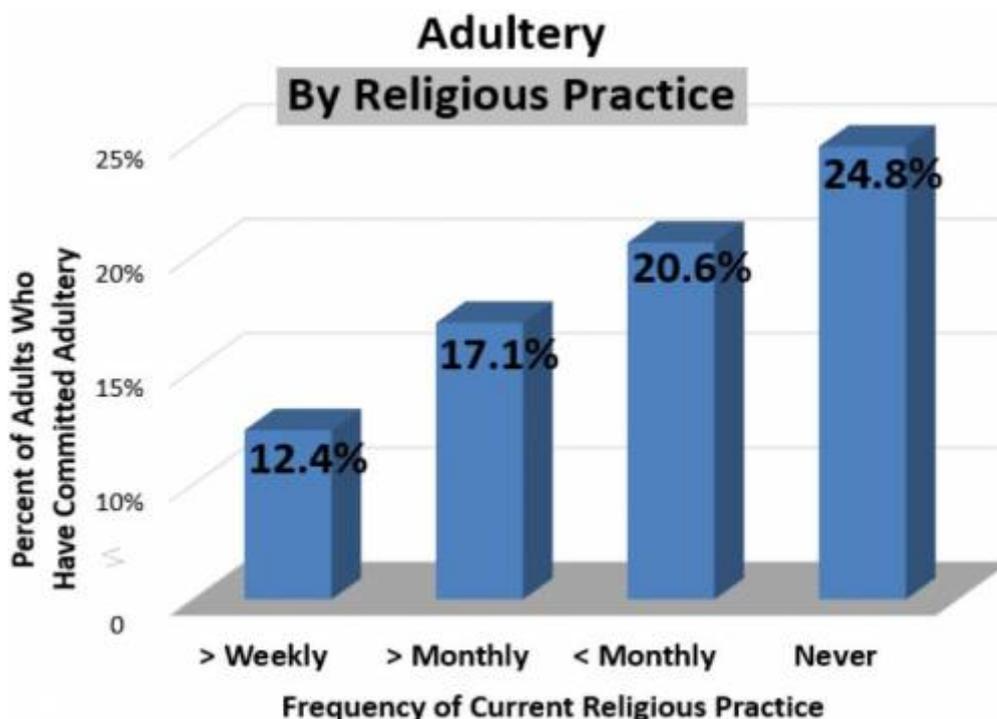
2. Non-Marital and Extra-Marital Sex

Men and women who are religious are more likely to have less permissive sexual attitudes, and they are influenced by religion more than any other variable when it comes to their sexual choices.⁹⁾ Individuals who attend religious services more often are less likely to have a positive view of extramarital sexual relationships.¹⁰⁾

Those with higher levels of religious commitment and who regularly attend religious services are much less likely to engage in premarital sex or [extramarital affairs](#) or to have multiple sexual partners.¹¹⁾ Among both conservative and mainline Protestants, religious affiliation and religious attendance consistently predict negative attitudes toward divorce and premarital sexual intercourse.¹²⁾

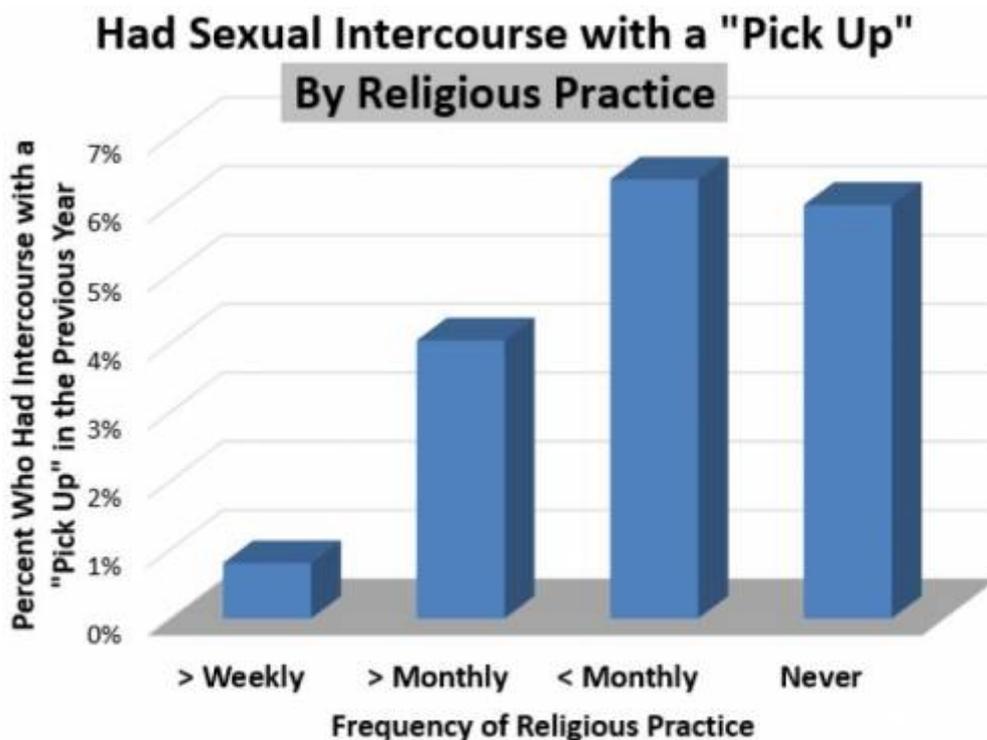
2.1 Related American Demographics

According to the General Social Surveys (GSS), among adults currently or previously married, 12.4 percent who worship once a week or more had had sexual relations with someone other than their spouse, followed by 17.1 percent of those who worship between one and three times a month, 20.6 percent of those who worship less than once a month, and 24.8 percent of those who never attend religious services.¹³⁾ (See [Chart](#))



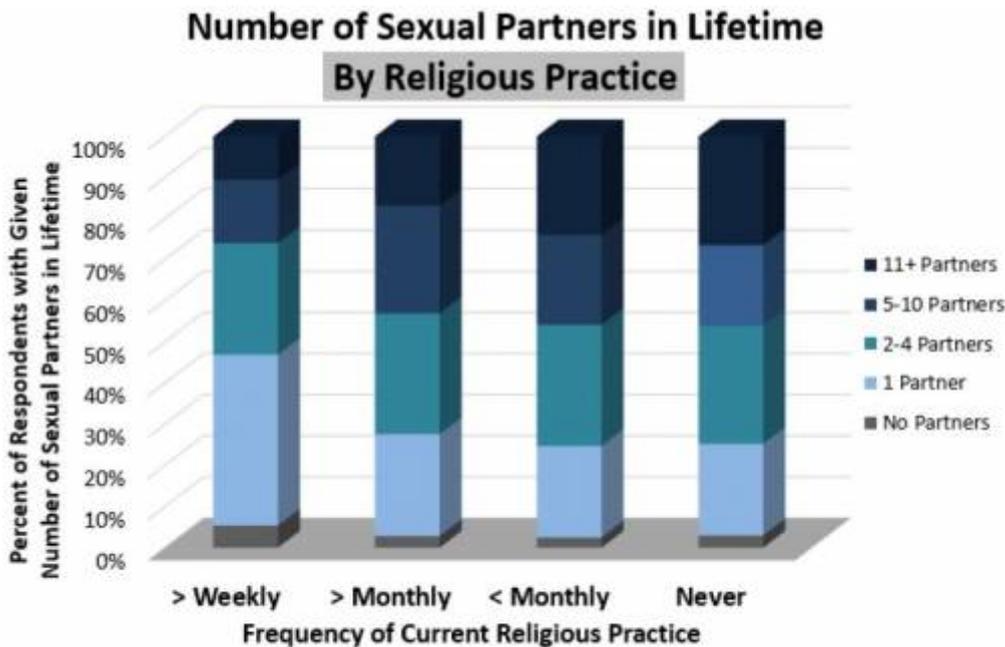
Source: General Social Survey, 1972-2006

Similarly, the National Health and Social Life Survey shows that, of adults aged 18 to 59, those who worship weekly are far less likely to have had intercourse with a “pick-up” in the previous year (.8 percent) than those who worship less than weekly but at least monthly (4 percent), those who never worship (6 percent), and those who worship less than monthly (6.4 percent).¹⁴⁾ (See [Chart](#))



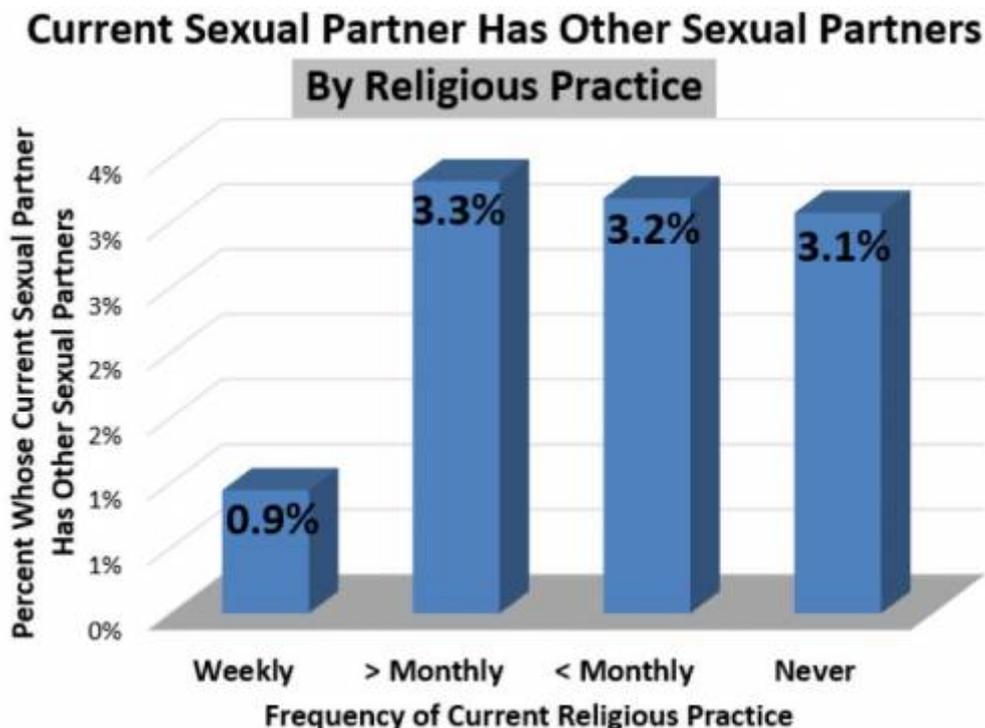
Source: National Health and Social Life Survey, 1992

The National Health Survey also shows that those who worship weekly are most likely to have been [monogamous](#)/abstinent during their life. Approximately 42 percent of those who worship weekly had only one lifetime sexual partner, and 5.4 percent had no lifetime sexual partners (a combined 46.9 percent of monogamous/abstinent persons). Among those who worship less than weekly but at least monthly, 24.7 percent had only one lifetime sexual partner, and 2.9 percent had no lifetime sexual partners (a combined 27.6 percent of monogamous/abstinent persons); among those who never worship, 22.2 percent had only one lifetime sexual partner and 3 percent had no lifetime sexual partners (a combined 25.3 percent of monogamous/abstinent persons); and among those who worship less than monthly, 22.2 percent had only one lifetime sexual partner and 2.5 percent had no lifetime sexual partners (a combined 24.8 percent of monogamous/abstinent persons).¹⁵⁾ (See [Chart Below](#))



Source: National Health and Social Life Survey (1992)

According to the National Health and Social Life Survey, those who worship weekly are least likely to have a current sexual partner who has other sexual partners (.9 percent), followed by those who never worship (3.1 percent), those who worship less than monthly (3.2 percent), and those who worship less than weekly but at least monthly (3.3 percent).¹⁶⁾ (See [Chart Below](#))



Source: National Health and Social Life Survey, 1992

3. Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing

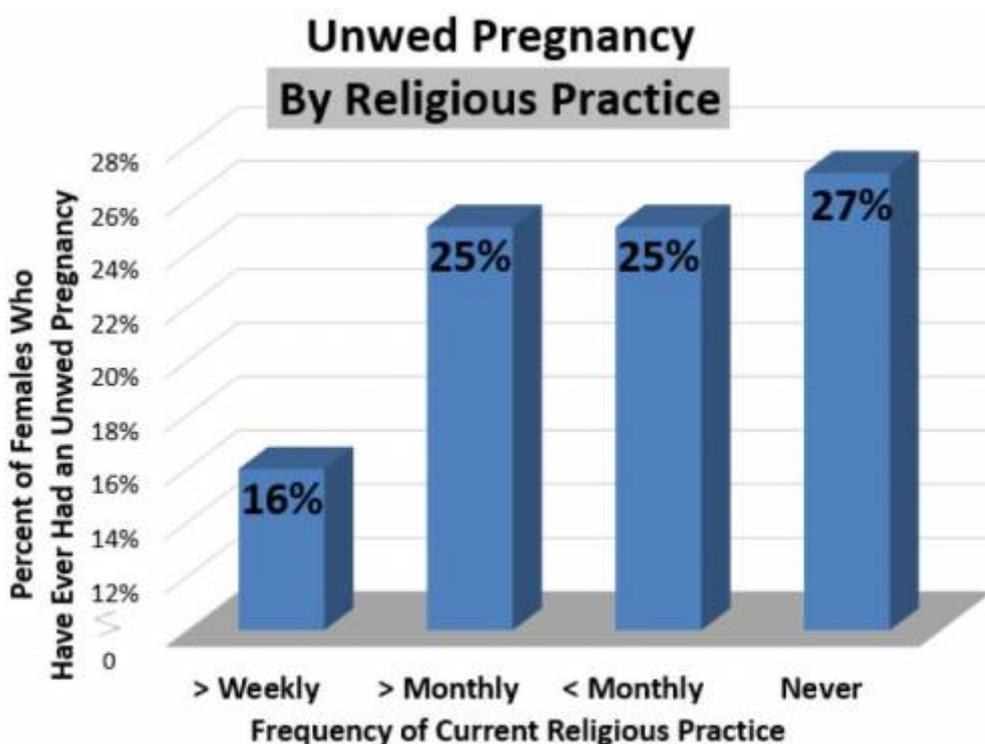
Thirty-seven percent of births now occur [out of wedlock](#),¹⁷⁾ with an increasing number born to cohabiting parents.¹⁸⁾ However, given the findings on the relationship between religious practice, non-

marital sex, attitudes, and behavior, it is not surprising that regular religious practice is one of the most powerful factors in preventing out-of-wedlock births. Rates of such births are markedly higher among young women who do not have a religious affiliation than among peers who do.

The level of young women’s religious commitment also makes a significant difference. Compared with those who viewed themselves as being “very religious,” those who were “not at all religious” were far more likely to bear a child out of wedlock (among whites, three times as likely; among Hispanics, 2.5 times as likely; and among blacks, twice as likely).¹⁹⁾ At the state aggregate level, the same phenomenon occurs. States with higher rates of religious attendance have lower rates of [teenage pregnancy](#).²⁰⁾

3.1 Related American Demographics

Examining current religious attendance, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth showed that 16 percent of females who worshiped at least weekly have had an unwed pregnancy, followed by those who attended religious services between one and three times a month (25 percent), those who attended religious services less than once monthly (25 percent), and those who never attend religious services (27 percent).²¹⁾ (See [Chart](#) Below)



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997)

4. Cohabitation

Women who attend weekly are one-third less likely to cohabit than those who attend less than once a month.²²⁾ Similarly, churchgoing adults tend to cease regular religious practice when they begin to cohabit.²³⁾ Those who attended religious services infrequently as adolescents and considered religion to be of low importance are more likely to cohabit as young adults.²⁴⁾ Children whose mothers

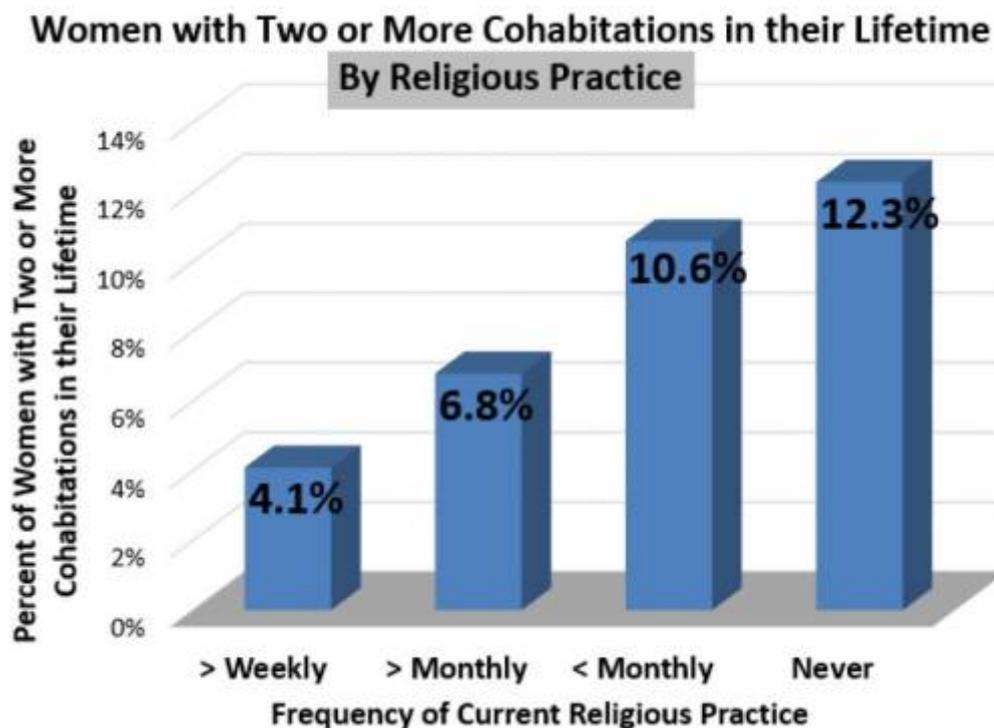
frequently attended religious services are 50 percent less likely to cohabit than their peers whose mothers were not actively religious.²⁵⁾

Studies consistently suggest that **cohabitation** is associated with an increased likelihood of divorce. For example, Paul Amato, confirming earlier indications,²⁶⁾ reported that couples who had lived together before marriage were 59 percent more likely to divorce than those who did not.²⁷⁾

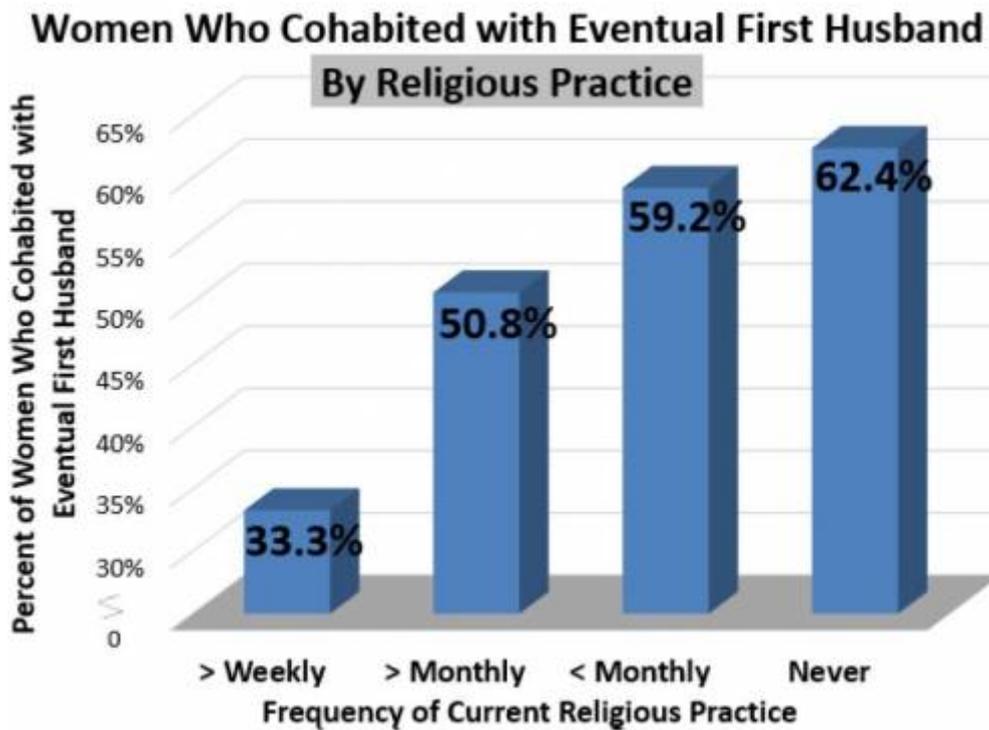
Repeated studies confirm the finding that those who attended religious services infrequently and those who, as adolescents, considered religion to be of low importance are more likely to cohabit as young adults.²⁸⁾ Compared with peers who attended religious services several times a week, young women who never attended were seven times more likely to cohabit.

4.1 Related American Demographics

According to the National Survey of Family Growth, 4.1 percent of women who worship at least weekly have had two or more cohabitations in their lifetime, followed by those who attend religious services between one and three times a month (6.8 percent), those who worship less than once a month (10.6 percent), and those who never attend religious services (12.3 percent).²⁹⁾ (See [Chart](#))



The same survey showed that 33.3 percent of women who worshipped at least weekly **cohabited with their eventual first husband**, followed by those who attended religious services at least monthly (50.8 percent), those who attended religious services less than once a month (59.2 percent), and those who never attended religious services (62.4 percent).³⁰⁾ (See [Chart](#) Below)



Source: National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle 6 (2002)

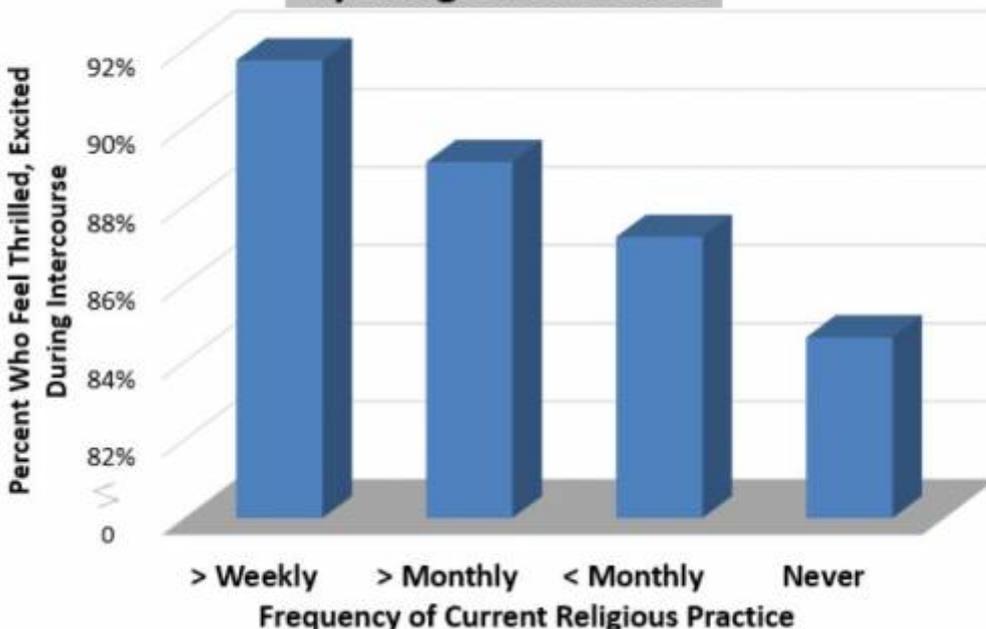
5. Sexual Satisfaction

Those who attend religious services more frequently are more likely to be happy in their sexual relationship. Very religious women report greater satisfaction in sexual intercourse with their husbands than do moderately religious or non-religious women.³¹⁾

5.1 Related American Demographics

The 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey shows that, of adults aged 18 to 59, those in intact marriages who worship weekly were most likely to say they felt thrilled and excited during intercourse with their current sexual partner. Almost 92 percent of adults who worship weekly reported feeling thrilled and excited, compared to only about 85 percent who never worship.³²⁾ (See [Chart](#))

Feels Thrilled, Excited During Sexual Intercourse By Religious Practice



Source: National Health and Social Life Survey, 1992

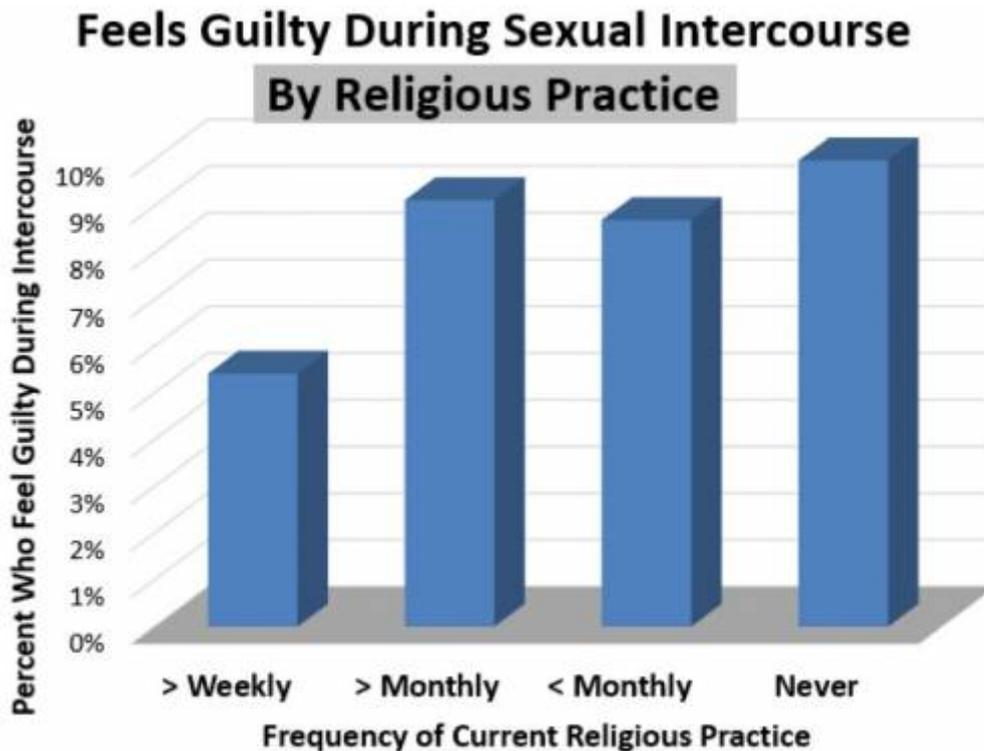
Similarly, those who worshiped weekly were most likely to report that they extremely enjoyed intercourse with their current sexual partner (86.3 percent), followed by those who worshiped less than weekly but at least monthly (82.9 percent), those who never worshiped (79 percent), and those who worshiped less than monthly (77.4 percent).³³⁾ (See [Chart](#))

Enjoyment of Sexual Intercourse By Religious Practice



Source: National Health and Social Life Survey, 1992

Religious attendance also effects negative emotions within intercourse. Those who worship weekly were least likely to feel guilty during intercourse with their current sexual partner (5.4 percent), followed by those who worship less than monthly (8.7 percent), those who worship less than weekly but at least monthly (9.1 percent), and those who never worship (10 percent).³⁴⁾ (See [Chart Below](#))



Source: National Health and Social Life Survey, 1992

- ¹⁾ John O.G. Billy, "Contextual Effects on the Sexual Behavior of Adolescent Women," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 56, no. 2 (May 1994): 387-404.
- ²⁾ Lynn Blinn-Pike, "Why Abstinent Adolescents Report They Have Not Had Sex: Understanding Sexually Resilient Youth," *Family Relations* 48, no. 3 (July 1999): 295-301.
- ³⁾ Arland Thornton, "Religious Participation and Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Attitudes," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 51, no. 3 (August 1989): 641-653.
- ⁴⁾ In this study, religiosity was a composite score between 3 and 12 representing an individual's religious attendance, participation in religious youth activities, and self-rated importance of religion.
- ⁵⁾ Sharon Scales Rostosky, Mark D. Regnerus, and Margaret Laurie Comer Wright, "Coital Debut: The Role of Religiosity and Sex Attitudes in the Add Health Survey," *Journal of Sex Research* 40, no. 4 (November 2003): 358-367.
- ⁶⁾ Byron R. Johnson, Ralph Brett Tompkins, and Derek Webb, "Objective Hope—Assessing the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Organizations: A Systematic Review of the Literature," Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society (2002). Available at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/crrucs_objective_hope.pdf Accessed June 30, 2005.
- ⁷⁾ Patrick F. Fagan and Scott Talkington, "'Ever Had Intercourse at 14 Years of Age or Younger' by Current Religious Attendance and Structure of Family of Origin," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-103.pdf>
- ⁸⁾ The National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health) is a congressionally-mandated longitudinal survey of American adolescents. Add Health drew a random sample of adolescents aged 13-19 in 1995 from junior high and high schools (Wave I) and has followed them in successive waves in 2001 (Wave III) and 2009 (Wave IV). Respondents were asked: "Not counting romantic relationships, have you ever had a sexual relationship with anyone?" Patrick F. Fagan and Rev. Paul Sullins, "Non-Romantic Sexual Relationship by Family Structure and Religious Worship," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-143.pdf>
- ⁹⁾ Lisa D. Wade, "Relationship Dissolution as a Life Stage Transition: Effects on Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64, no. 4 (November 2002): 898-914.

Sharon Scales Rostosky, Mark D. Regnerus, and Margaret Laurie Comer Wright, "Coital Debut: The Role of Religiosity and Sex Attitudes in the Add Health Survey," *Journal of Sex Research* 40, no. 4 (November 2003): 358-367.

¹⁰⁾ Gerbert Kraaykamp, "Trends and Countertrends in Sexual Permissiveness: Three Decades of Attitude Change in the Netherlands: 1965-1995," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64, no. 1 (February 2002): 225- 239

¹¹⁾ Byron R. Johnson, Ralph Brett Tompkins, and Derek Webb *Objective Hope—Assessing the Effectiveness of Faith-Based Organizations: A Systematic Review of the Literature*, Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, (2002). Available at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/pdf/crrucs_objective_hope.pdf Accessed September 6, 2012.

¹²⁾ W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 81.

¹³⁾ This chart draws on data collected by the General Social Surveys, 1972-2006. From 1972 to 1993, the sample size averaged 1,500 each year. No GSS was conducted in 1979, 1981, or 1992. Since 1994, the GSS has been conducted only in even-numbered years and uses two samples per GSS that total approximately 3,000. In 2006, a third sample was added for a total sample size of 4,510. Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, "Adultery by Religious Attendance," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-73-75-173.pdf>

¹⁴⁾ Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, "'Had Intercourse with a 'Pick-Up' in Previous Years' by Marital Status and Religious Attendance," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-120.pdf>

¹⁵⁾ Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, "'Number of Sexual Partners in Lifetime' by Marital Status and Religious Attendance," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-122.pdf>

¹⁶⁾ Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, "'Current Sexual Partner Has Other Sexual Partners' by Marital Status and Religious Attendance," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-131.pdf>

¹⁷⁾ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, "Births: Preliminary Data for 2005," reviewed November 21, 2006, at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/hestats.htm#ref01>. Accessed at December 13, 2006.

¹⁸⁾ Maureen Waller, "High Hopes: Unmarried Parents' Expectations About Marriage," *Children and Youth Services Review* 23, no. 6 (December 2001): 457-484.

¹⁹⁾ Allan F. Abrahamse, *Beyond Stereotypes: Who Becomes a Single Teenage Mother?* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1988), 37-50.

²⁰⁾ Michael J. Donahue, "Aggregate Religiousness and Teenage Fertility Revisited: Reanalyses of Data from the Guttmacher Institute," presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Chicago, October 30, 1988.

²¹⁾ Patrick F. Fagan and Scott Talkington, "'Ever Had an Unwed Pregnancy' by Current Religious Attendance and Structure of Family Origin," Mapping America Project. Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-101.pdf>

²²⁾ , ²³⁾ , ²⁵⁾ Arland Thornton, W.G. Axinn, and D.H. Hill, "Reciprocal Effects of Religiosity, Cohabitation, and Marriage," *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 3 (November 1992): 628-651.

²⁴⁾ Kazuo Yamaguchi, "Dynamic Relationships Between Premarital Cohabitation and Illicit Drug Use: An Event-History Analysis of Role Selection and Role Socialization," *American Sociological Review* 50, no. 4 (August 1985): 530-546

²⁶⁾ Larry L. Bumpass, James A. Sweet, and Andrew Cherlin, "The Role of Cohabitation in Declining Rates of Marriage," *National Survey of Families and Households Working Paper no. 5*, (1989): 913-927.

²⁷⁾ Paul R. Amato, "Explaining the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce," *Journal of Marriage and*

Family 58, no. 3 (August 1996): 628–640.

²⁸⁾ Kazuo Yamaguchi, “Dynamic Relationships Between Premarital Cohabitation and Illicit Drug Use: An Event-History Analysis of Role Selection and Role Socialization,” *American Sociological Review* 50, no. 4 (August 1985): 530–546.

²⁹⁾ These charts draw on data collected by the National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle 6 (2002). The sample consists of 7,643 women between the ages of 14 and 44 who are statistically representative of all U.S. women.

Patrick F. Fagan and Paul Sullins, “‘Women (aged 14-44) with Two or More Cohabitations in Lifetime’ by Current Religious Attendance and Structure of Family of Origin,” Mapping America Project.

Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-94.pdf>

³⁰⁾ These charts draw on data collected by the National Survey of Family Growth, Cycle 6 (2002). The sample consists of women between the ages of 14 and 44 and numbers 7,643.

Patrick F. Fagan and Paul Sullins, “‘Women Who Cohabited with Eventual First Husband’ by Current Religious Attendance and Structure of Family of Origin,” Mapping America Project. Available at

<http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-97.pdf>

³¹⁾ Carol Tavris and Susan Sadd, *The Redbook Report on Female Sexuality* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977).

³²⁾ Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, “Feels Thrilled, Excited During Intercourse with Current Partner,” *Mapping America* 116 (2012). Available at <http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-116.pdf> Accessed September 21, 2012.

³³⁾ Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, “‘Degree to Which Respondent Enjoys Intercourse with Current Sexual Partner’ by Marital Status and Religious Attendance,” Mapping America Project. Available at

<http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-124.pdf>

³⁴⁾ Patrick F. Fagan and Althea Nagai, “‘Feels Guilty During Intercourse with Current Sexual Partner’ by Marital Status and Religious Attendance,” Mapping America Project. Available at

<http://marri.us/wp-content/uploads/MA-117.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](#).

From:

<http://dokuwiki.marripedia.org/> - **Marripedia**

Permanent link:

http://dokuwiki.marripedia.org/effects_of_religious_practice_on_sexual_behavior

Last update: **2017/06/02 08:31**

