

# Keeping Teens Safe: How the Intact Family Buffers Against Teen Substance Use

## Summary

Teens from intact families are less likely to use drugs and alcohol. They are also less likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as binge drinking.

- **Cigarette Use. Teens in intact families are less likely to start smoking.** Compared to peers in intact families, teens of never-married parents as well as those of divorced parents who did not remarry (but not those of divorced parents who later remarried) were more likely to initiate cigarette smoking, controlling for effects of: gender, race/ethnicity, age, family poverty status, quality of parent-child relationship, and number of hours spent with parents.<sup>1</sup>
- **Cigarette Use. Teens in two-parent families report lower levels of smoking.** Compared to peers in single-parent families, middle-school and high-school students in two-parent families reported, on average, lower levels of smoking, even after controlling for the effects of gender, race/ethnicity, and family income.<sup>2</sup>
- **Alcohol Abuse. Teens in two-parent families drink less alcohol.** Compared to peers in single-parent families, middle school and high school students in two-parent families reported lower levels of alcohol use on average, even after controlling for the effects of gender, race/ethnicity, and family income.<sup>3</sup>
- **Alcohol Abuse. Teens in intact families are less likely to abuse alcohol.** Compared to peers living in homes where both parents were present, teens living in families with fathers and stepmothers, mothers only, fathers only, mothers and other relatives, or other relatives only (but not those in families with both parents and other relatives, mothers and stepfathers, mothers and other relatives, or other relatives only) were more likely to report that they had been drunk three or more times in the prior year, adjusting for the effects of gender, age, race/ethnicity, and family income.<sup>4</sup>
- **Alcohol and Marijuana Use. Teens who live in intact families during middle school are less likely to initiate alcohol and marijuana use in high school.** Adolescents who lived in intact families during early adolescence (age 12 to 14) were less likely to initiate alcohol use during late adolescence (age 15 to 18), compared to peers in step-parent families. Similarly, adolescents who lived in intact families during early adolescence (age 12 to 14) were less likely to initiate marijuana use during late adolescence (age 15 to 18) compared to peers in step-parent families, as well as those in single-parent families. This was true taking into account teens' age, race/ethnicity, gender, and their parents' education level.<sup>5</sup>
- **Illicit Drug Use. Teens in intact families are less likely to use illicit drugs.** Compared to

peers living in homes in which both parents were present, those living in families with mothers and step-fathers, fathers and step-mothers, mothers only, fathers only, or other relatives only (but not those in families with both parents and other relatives or those in families with mothers and other relatives) were more likely to have used illicit drugs (other than marijuana) in the past 12 months. This is true even after control for the effects of gender, age, race/ethnicity, and family income.<sup>6</sup>

- **Illicit Drug Use (European teens).** European teens from intact families are less likely to use illicit drugs. Compared to peers who were not living with both biological parents at the time of the survey, youth who were living with both biological parents were less likely to use illicit drugs, controlling for parent-child relationship quality, parental supervision, social class, drug availability in the city, and youth's delinquent behavior.<sup>7</sup>
- **Cocaine Use.** Individuals from intact families are less likely to use cocaine. Compared to peers from intact families, individuals whose parents divorced while growing up and had at least weekly contact with their nonresident parents the year following the divorce were 58 percent more likely to have used cocaine in the year prior to the survey. Individuals whose parents divorced and had at least monthly contact with their nonresident parents in the year following the divorce were 63 percent more likely to have used cocaine in the year prior to the survey. This was true taking into account a host of factors: respondents' race/ethnicity, gender, age, childhood religious affiliation, educational expectations at age 18, maternal educational attainment, alcoholism in the family, whether or not respondents were born in the U.S, and whether or not a family member had a library card growing up.<sup>8</sup>
- **Drug abuse.** Teens in intact families are less likely to abuse drugs. Compared to peers living

in homes where both parents were present, teens living in families with fathers and step-mothers, mothers only, fathers only, mothers and other relatives, or other relatives only (but not those in families with both parents and other relatives, mothers and step-fathers, mothers and other relatives, or other relatives only) were more likely to have abused drugs the past 12 months, adjusting for the effects of gender, age, race/ethnicity, and family income.<sup>9</sup>

- **Behavioral problems.** Teens in intact families are less likely to exhibit behavioral problems. Compared to peers in intact families, teens in blended or divorced single-parent families tended to have higher levels of behavioral problems in the last month, such as using tobacco, beer or wine, hard liquor and/or marijuana, binge drinking, carrying a weapon, physical fighting, and/or engaging in sexual activity. This was true controlling for age, gender, race, maternal educational attainment, parental support and monitoring, peer and neighbor support, and school attachment.<sup>10</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 Chery Amey and Stan Albrecht, "Race and Ethnic Differences in Adolescent Drug Use: The Impact of Family Structure and the Quantity and Quality of Parental Interaction," *Journal of Drug Issues* 28, No. 2 (Spring 1998): 283-298.
- 2 Robert W. Blum and Trisha Beuhring, "The Effects of Race/Ethnicity, Income, and Family Structure on Adolescent Risk Behaviors," *American Journal of Public Health* 90, No. 12 (December 12, 2000): 1879-1884.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 John P. Hoffman and Robert A. Johnson, "A National Portrait of Family Structure and Adolescent Drug Use," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 60, No. 3, (August 1998): 633-645.
- 5 Robert L. Flewelling and Karl E. Bauman, "Family Structure as a Predictor of Initial Substance Use and Sexual Intercourse in Early Adolescence," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 52, No. 1 (February 1990): 171-181.
- 6 Hoffman, "A National Portrait,": 633-645.
- 7 Paul McArdle, "European Adolescent Substance Use: The Roles of Family Structure, Function, and Gender," *Addiction* 97, No. 4 (March 2002): 329-336.

8 Lisa A. Cubbins and Daniel H. Klepinger, "Childhood Family, Ethnicity, and Drug Use over the Life Course," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69, No. 3 (August 2007): 810-830.

9 Hoffman, "A National Portrait," : 633-645.

10 Kathleen B. Rodgers and Hillary A. Rose, "Risk and Resiliency Factors Among Adolescents Who Experience Marital Transitions," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64, No. 4 (November 2002): 1024-1037.



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