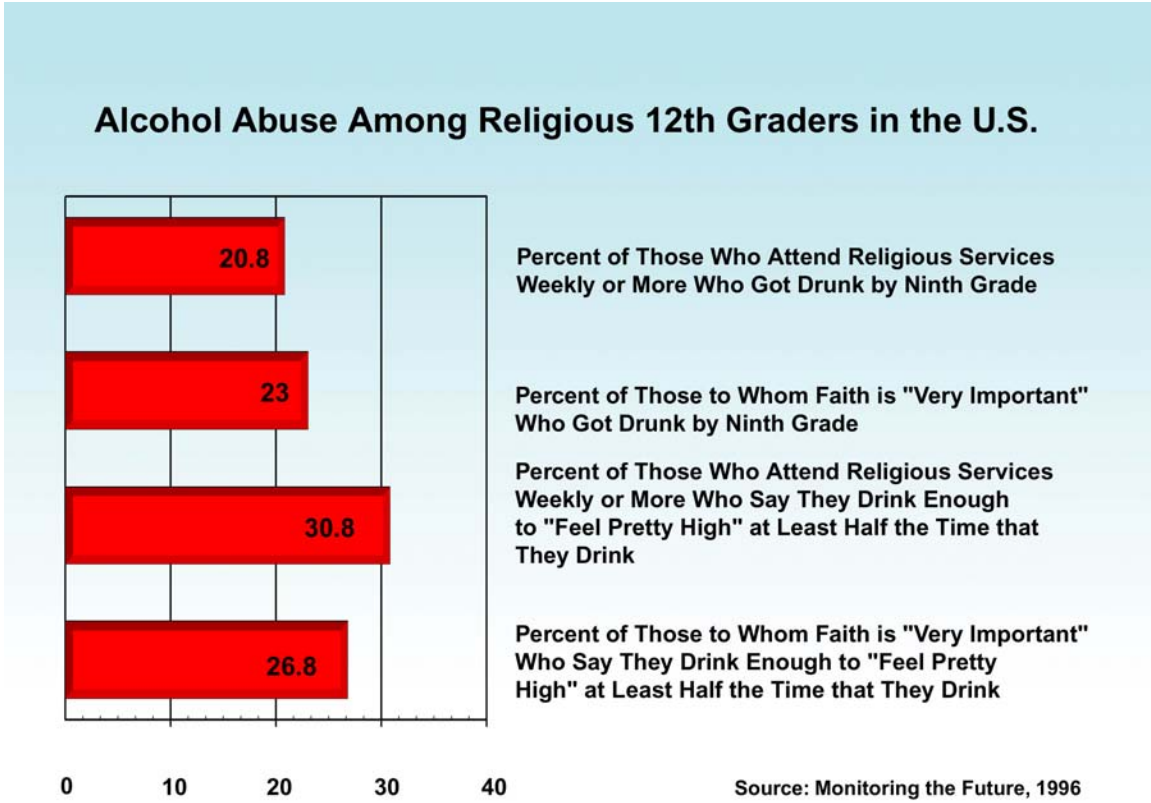


**Significant numbers of religiously active teenagers are involved in serious risk behaviors involving alcohol and drugs.**

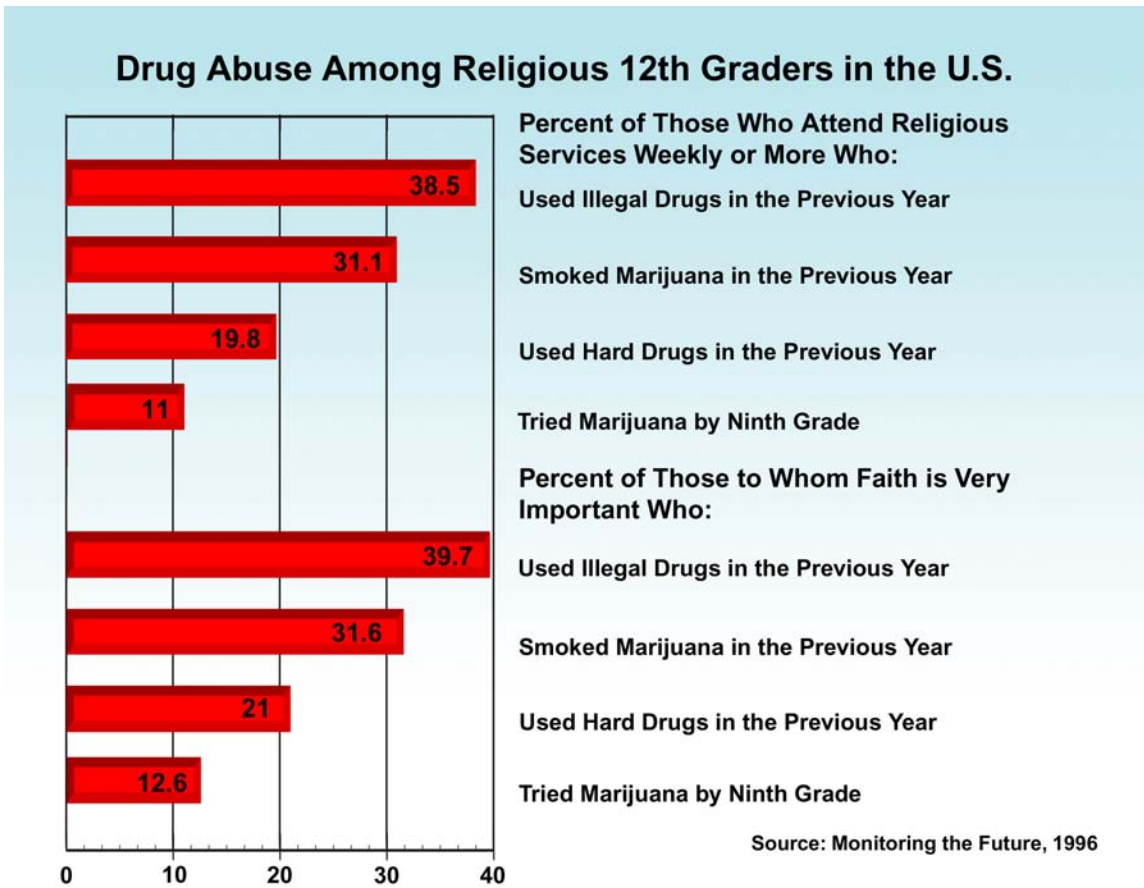
While research indicates that religiously active teens are significantly *less* likely than non-religious teens to engage in risk behaviors, significant numbers —between 20 percent and 40 percent— of religiously active teenagers *are* involved in serious risk behaviors involving alcohol and drugs. Religion in the lives of youth does mitigate such negative outcomes, but by no means does it eliminate them.

According to Christian Smith, principal investigator of the National Study of Youth and Religion, these findings highlight important information that potentially could be overlooked. “Research often reveals positive associations between religion and good teen outcomes, but this perspective puts the same data in a different light, showing that all is not well among religiously active teens,” he said. “These findings are not contradictory; they simply look at the numbers from a different angle and see somewhat different things.” These findings expand upon data released in the report *Religion and American Adolescent Delinquency, Risk Behaviors and Constructive Social Activities*. The report uses data from Monitoring the Future (MTF), a nationally representative survey of U.S. high school students.

When it comes to alcohol abuse, for example, nearly 21 percent of U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> graders who attend religious services weekly or more had gotten drunk by the ninth grade. Twenty-three percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders who say their faith is “very important” in their lives had done the same. Of U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> graders who attend religious services weekly or more, 31 percent of them drink enough alcohol to “feel pretty high” at least half of the time that they drink, as do 27 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders who say that their faith is “very important” in their lives.



When it comes to drugs, nearly 39 percent of U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> graders who attend religious services weekly or more had used illegal drugs in the previous year, 31 percent had smoked marijuana in the previous year and 20 percent had used hard drugs in the previous year. For those who said their faith was “very important” in their lives, nearly 40 percent had used illegal drugs, 32 percent had smoked marijuana and 21 percent had used hard drugs in the previous year. Furthermore, 11 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders who attend religious services weekly or more and roughly 13 percent of those who say religious faith is “very important” in their lives had tried marijuana or hashish by the ninth grade.



Some of these cases could involve youth who had before the survey become more religiously active and subsequently reduced their alcohol and drug consumption. But the relative stability of youth religious practices means the vast majority of these youth likely were getting drunk and taking drugs while they were also religiously very active. The numbers are most certainly significantly lower for teenagers below the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. And research shows that they are significantly higher — by 15 percent to 25 percent — for non-religious 12<sup>th</sup> graders. Even so, parents, religious communities, and other youth-serving organizations should take note that, of the most religiously active 12<sup>th</sup> graders in the U.S., about 20 percent to 30 percent are drinking early and excessively and 20 percent to 40 percent are taking drugs.

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 U.S. 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 Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey is administered to eighth, 10th and 12th graders since 1975. This analysis focused on 12th graders. By design, MTF data does not include school dropouts and home-schooled youth. The questions regarding religion analyzed here are 1) "How often do you attend religious services?" and 2) "How important is religion in your life?"*

*Bachman, Jerald G., Lloyd D. Johnston, and Patrick M. O'Malley. MONITORING THE FUTURE: A CONTINUING STUDY OF AMERICAN YOUTH (12TH-GRADE SURVEY), 1996 [Computer file]. Conducted by University of Michigan, Survey Research Center. ICPSR ed. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [producer and distributor], 1999. The original collector of the data, ICPSR, and the relevant funding agency bear no responsibility for use of the data or for interpretations or inferences based upon such uses.*