

### **Parental Religious Devotion Protects Against Major Delinquency**

Sociologists with the National Study of Youth and Religion, based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, announce the publication of “Linked Lives, Faith, and Behavior: Intergenerational Religious Influence on Adolescent Delinquency” in the June 2003 issue of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. The article suggests that parental religiosity — including the frequency of religious service attendance, the importance of religion in parents’ lives and conservative Protestant affiliation — appears to protect against serious delinquency.

This finding revises previous thinking that parental religiosity only protects against minor delinquency, such as drinking or smoking. The study examines nine indicators that comprise serious delinquency. They are: painting graffiti on another’s property, deliberately damaging another’s property, going into a house or a building to steal something, shoplifting, stealing something worth less than \$50, stealing something worth more than \$50, using or threatening to use a weapon against someone, taking part in a group fight and selling marijuana or other drugs.

The *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, a top-ranked international journal in the field of sociology of religion, is published quarterly. Mark Regnerus, assistant professor of sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, is the author of the article and a co-investigator with the National Study of Youth and Religion.

Other findings in the article include the report that parental religious devotion appears to protect girls more than boys and that in some circumstances it might amplify delinquency among boys when controlling for other important influences such as autonomy and family satisfaction. Teenage boys, it appears, are more likely than girls to join in delinquency rather than shun it when their parents are devoutly religious. The article further notes that children of devout parents who fail to internalize their parents’ practices as their own might be at the greatest risk for increases in delinquency.

The National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health is a nationally representative school-based study of adolescents in grades seven to 12. “Add Health,” as the study is commonly called, is designed to explore health-related behaviors and the causes of these behaviors. Nearly 12,000 respondents were interviewed twice in their homes, with an approximate one-year interval between interviews. An identical number of parents also were interviewed. The first wave of interviews took place in 1995, the second wave in 1996.

The National Study of Youth and Religion is a four-year research project funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. which began in August 2001 and will continue until August 2005. It is the most extensive sociological research project on youth and religion ever undertaken. Dr. Christian S. Smith, Stuart Chapin Distinguished Professor

and associate chair of sociology at UNC-CH, is the principal investigator. 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.