

Delinquent acts less likely for youths from religious-centered, two-parent homes

June 25 2009, By Marc Ransford

(PhysOrg.com) -- A committed two-adult household with strong religious values may reduce the likelihood that youths will commit acts such as assault, vandalism and theft throughout adolescence and into early adulthood, says a new study from Ball State University.

Richard Petts, assistant professor of sociology, examined data from the National Longitudinal Survey of [Youth](#) to determine patterns of delinquency among about 2,500 youths, finding that family and religion work together to counteract errant behavior.

"During adolescence, individuals begin to search for a personal identity and try to assert their independence," Petts said. "Parents play a key role in influencing their children's development, especially in providing social support and social control.

"Two parents may be better able than other family structures to provide the support and control necessary to deter youths from becoming delinquent. Moreover, parents who argue less frequently with their children may be better able to exert social control over them, preventing their children from becoming involved in delinquent behavior early in adolescence."

Petts points out that religion also may enhance family processes that reduce delinquency.

"The combination of [religion](#) and supportive parenting practices may

help increase youths' feelings of social support during an often difficult life-course stage," he said. "Moreover, placing these interactions within a religious context may act as a strong mechanism of social control, deterring youths from becoming delinquent later in adolescence."

The social integration and control that religious institutions provide can compensate for a lack of support that some youths may experience in their home environments, Petts said.

"Family and Religious Characteristics' Influence on Delinquency Trajectories from Adolescence to Young Adulthood," was published in the June issue of the [American Sociological Review](#).

Provided by Ball State University

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