

Children of divorced parents more likely to switch, pull away from religions, study finds

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Adults whose parents were divorced are more likely to switch religions or disassociate themselves from institutional religions altogether—but growing up in a single-parent family does not have any effect on private religious life, including praying, according to a study by a Baylor University sociologist.

The findings also suggest that being a child of divorced parents is not in itself as important a factor in a person's religious life as previous research has indicated, according to Jeremy Uecker, Ph.D., an assistant professor of sociology in Baylor's College of Arts & Sciences and lead author of the study, which appears in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

"You have to take into account the context," Uecker said. "People who are less religious are more likely to get divorced. And if the parents are of different religions or differing levels of religiosity from one another, they also are more likely to divorce. So if we ignore that, we're overstating the effects of divorce itself on religious outcomes."

The main reason parental divorce affects religious outcomes, Uecker argues, is that children are separated from one of their parents, and [parents](#) are usually considered the primary source of religious training for children.

Other factors after the divorce also may influence children during their formative years and ultimately, affect their [religious](#) outcome as [adults](#), he said.

A parent who has been divorced may feel stigmatized or uncomfortable in some congregations and less likely to attend than previously. Typically, a child of divorce stays with his or her mother, who may become depressed or angry with God, and "that may rub off on the child," Uecker said. The child "may have thought the marriage was ordained by God. When it ends, that could rock their world and have lasting effects."

Even logistical difficulty in getting to church could be a factor, Uecker said.

The study by Uecker and co-researcher Christopher G. Ellison, Ph.D., a professor in the department of sociology at the University of Texas in San Antonio, is a quantitative analysis of data from 3,346 respondents ages 18 to 87, taken from the General Social Surveys done in 1991, 1998 and 2008. In the surveys, done by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, respondents were asked about their religiosity and birth family structure at age 16.

Provided by Baylor University

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