

THE ORTHODOX FAMILY IN AMERICA AT HOME AND IN CHURCH: A STUDY OF FAMILIES IN THE GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA CENTER FOR FAMILY CARE

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OVERVIEW OF MAJOR FINDINGS:

(1) Parishioner and Parish demographics

- Of 646 parishioners surveyed, 61.5% reported being a regular parish member
- On average, parishioners reported having about 2 children per household (M=1.8, SD=1.0)
- 296 parishioners (45.8% of sample) have children ages 14-18 living with them at home
 - 85.1% of these 296 parishioners report that their children ages 14-18 accompany their families to church “Always” or “Almost Always”
 - 50.0% report that their children are involved in the life of their parish “To a Great Extent” (this pattern differs significantly by how often the family attends church, with lower rates of children’s involvement associated with lower family church attendance)
- Priests report the following averages pertaining to parish characteristics:
 - 361 contributing members
 - 967 individuals associated with the life of the parish
 - 268 people attending liturgy on a given Sunday
 - 28.2% of those attending typical Sunday liturgy are aged 18 or under

(2) Religious Practices at Church and Home (N=646)

- Greater church attendance is almost always associated with greater attention given to spiritual and religious practices at home and at church
- On average, parishioners talk to their children about their faith, and pray together before meals, more than once a week
- The least common practices are reading scripture together with children, reading Christian magazines, and listening to Christian radio programs – parishioners report these activities as occurring 2 to 3 times a month, on average

(3) Main stressors experienced (N=644)

- The top 5 stressors experienced by parishioners (N=644) over the past year include:
 - Death of a close friend or relative (37.1%)
 - Becoming a parent (18.9%)
 - Unexpected serious or chronic illness (17.1%)
 - Caring for elderly parents (13.4%)
 - Periods of depression or hopelessness (11.8%)
- 52.5% of parishioners (N=644) report having had “tremendous” or “above average” stress levels over the past year
- For those reporting a “tremendous” amount of stress in the past year (21.6%), the most frequent stressors include:
 - Abuse in the family (66.7% of those reporting tremendous stress)
 - Separation or divorce (63.6% of those reporting tremendous stress)
 - Severe financial problems (61.2% of those reporting tremendous stress)
 - Raising a child in the absence of a spouse (60.6% of those reporting tremendous stress)
 - Serious marital conflict (52.9% of those reporting tremendous stress)
- The church was *most* supportive to parishioners experiencing the following stressors:
 - Getting married
 - Becoming a parent
 - Death of a close friend or relative
 - An extramarital affair
 - Separation or divorce
 - Unexpected serious or chronic illness
 - Moving to a new area or community
- The church was *least* supportive to parishioners experiencing the following stressors:
 - Family or friend leaving the church
 - Dealing with an unplanned pregnancy
 - Children getting into serious trouble
 - Unemployment
 - Harassment on the job
 - Periods of depression or hopelessness (this is the 5th highest reported stressor)
 - Dealing with addictions

(4) Availability of parish supports (N=650 parishioners; N=92 priests)

- The most commonly available parish supports include:
 - Premarital counseling (66.6%)
 - Family social activities (55.5%)
 - Ministry for elderly or homebound (45.4%)
 - Family religious education (37.9%)
 - Parish Youth Camp (25.7%)
- The least commonly available parish supports include:

- Support for domestic violence victims (5.3%)
 - Substance abuse programs (5.5%)
 - Support for single-parent families (5.8%)
 - Sex education programs (7.8%)
 - Adult classes on parenting (8.5%)
- The greatest unmet needs in parishes include:
 - Religious education for families (41.1%; priests and parishioners agreed)
 - Adult classes on parenting (37.1%; priests believe this is a stronger need than parishioners)
 - Weekend family retreats (35.3%; priests and parishioners agreed)
 - Sex education programs (33.3%; priests believe this is a stronger need than parishioners)
 - Marriage enrichment programs (31.7%; priests and parishioners agreed)

(5) *Interest in workshops and knowledge of current supports (N=644)*

Parishioners are *most* interested in the following workshop topics:

- (1) Learning how to live the Orthodox faith
- (2) Raising children with strong morals
- (3) Parenting teenagers
- (4) Praying as a family at home and church
- (5) Supporting aging parents

70.4% of parishioners indicated “definitely yes” or “probably yes” to the question, “Are you comfortable seeking guidance from your priest?”

- However, 53.7% of those who stated “definitely yes” or “rather yes” to the statement, “Church is the center of social life,” also indicated they were unsure or negative about seeking guidance from their priest.

63.3% of parishioners stated they would prefer an Orthodox Christian counselor if they were to seek counseling; 19.4% would prefer a Christian counselor, but not necessarily Orthodox, and 17.3% stated that religious affiliation would not matter.

(6) *Significant predictors of increased religious and spiritual practices at home and at church*

Controlling for demographic and other variables (such as level of comfort seeking guidance from priest; # of children at home; converted to Orthodoxy; extent to which church was a part of family life as a child; and positive ratings of the parish in general):

- Increased life stressors predict lesser attention given to spiritual practices at home and church.
- However, controlling for these stressors, increased support from parishes increases the likelihood that parishioners will pay more attention to spiritual and religious practices, underscoring the importance of receiving support from parishes when under stress.