

Are children going to religious services?

by Frank Jones

One important decision that parents must make when raising their families concerns the religious or spiritual education of their children. It can also be one of the most contentious, both between parents who may not share the same faith or beliefs about child-rearing, and sometimes between parents and educational authorities.

So what do we know about children's religious observance? Is it true that few Canadian children attend church, Sunday school, or other places of worship? Are children in some faith communities more likely to attend than others? Do children have to sacrifice sports, music lessons, or club activities in order to participate in religious activities?

Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), conducted first in 1994-95, this article addresses some of these questions about the religious observance of children under 12 years.

One in three children attend religious services regularly

Over one-third, 36%, of Canada's children under 12 years of age attended religious services at least once a

CST What you should know about this study

This article is based on data from the 1994-95 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY).¹ The NLSCY is conducted by Statistics Canada every two years on behalf of Human Resources Development Canada. It is designed to develop a clearer understanding of the factors that contribute to a child's development over time.

The 1994-95 NLSCY collected data on more than 22,500 children from newborn to 11 years, living in private households in the ten provinces (excluding Aboriginal children on reserves). Information was gathered about the children and their families in an interview with the "person most knowledgeable" about the child; at school, teachers and principals evaluated the child's scholastic development; and 10- to 11-year-olds were asked about their experiences with family, friends and school. Information will be collected about the same children every two years until they reach adulthood.

Child: a person under the age of 12. Not all data were collected for all children; for example, information about involvement in supervised activities was not captured for children under the age of four.

Person most knowledgeable (PMK): In 98% of cases, the PMK was the child's parent, usually the mother; therefore, this article uses "mother" or "parent" as a synonym for PMK.

Regular attendance: attendance at religious services at least once a month during the year preceding the survey.

1. The 1996-97 NLSCY does not include information about religion and religious observance.

month, and the majority were weekly participants. A further 22% attended less frequently, but did go at least once during the year. The vast majority of children were accompanied by a parent, most often the mother.

Regular attendance (weekly or monthly) varied considerably depending on the child's age, sex, region of residence and religious affiliation. It generally increased until children were eight years old, and then began to stabilize.¹ Girls were somewhat more likely to be regular attendees (38%) than boys (34%). Children living in Atlantic Canada had the highest regular attendance rate, 52%, while those in Quebec had the lowest, 19%.

Religious affiliation accounted for the largest differences in children's regular participation in religious services. The highest weekly attendance occurred among children in the Jehovah's Witness (90%), smaller Christian denominations (64%), and Baptist (60%) communities. Most people would not be surprised at these figures, since many regard these as conservative faith communities. On the other hand, children in what many observers consider the mainline faith communities, such as Anglican and United Church, reported the lowest weekly attendance rates (18%).

Non-attendance tended to be highest in the faith communities where

weekly attendance was lowest. Islam was an exception: a high proportion of Muslim children attended Islamic religious services weekly (44%), but they also recorded the highest rate of non-attendance (39%) during the year preceding the survey.

Mother and family are important factors in child attendance

Because mothers are often most responsible for their children's informal education,² it is not surprising that their education and labour force activity are associated with the child's attendance at religious services.³ What may surprise, though, is the nature of the relationships.

First, regular attendance rates for children increased with the educational attainment of the mother. The rate climbed from 30% for children whose mothers had less than high school graduation, to 40% for those whose mothers had a university degree. This finding would seem to contradict a widespread perception that less well-educated people are more likely to participate regularly in religious services. But the NLSCY results support an earlier study which found that families

	Frequency of attendance			
	Weekly	Monthly	Occasionally	Not at all
	%			
Child	23	13	22	42
Parent attends with child ²	81	77	90	100
... but their attendance varies widely with their religious affiliation				
Roman Catholic	22	18	31	29
United Church	18	18	30	34
Anglican	18	16	30	36
Presbyterian	39	10	23	29
Lutheran	29	18	29	24
Baptist	60	10	12	17
Islam	44	--	--	39
Jehovah's Witness	90	--	--	--
Other ³	64	10	--	16

Note: Sample sizes for children in the Eastern Orthodox, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh faith communities were too small to produce reliable estimates.
 -- Sample too small to yield reliable estimates.
 1. Attends weekly or monthly.
 2. Person most knowledgeable attends at least as often as the child.
 3. Smaller, mainly Christian faith communities.
 Source: Statistics Canada, National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994-95.

1. One study found that children's attitudes to religious education (e.g., Sunday school) change between the ages of 8 and 15, although attitudes to school do not. Francis, L. J. 1987. "The decline in attitudes towards religion among 8- 15-year-olds," *Educational Studies* 13, 2:125-134.
2. R. Bibby argues that the mother is most influential in the child's religious identification. "The persistence of Christian religious identification in Canada," *Canadian Social Trends*, Spring 1997.
3. A study using Australian data suggests that women's lower workforce participation is a more important explanatory factor than their traditional child-rearing role when accounting for women's greater religious observance. De Vaus, D. and I. McAllister. 1987. "Gender differences in religion: a test of the Structural Location Theory," *American Sociological Review* 52, 4: 472-581.

with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to take their children to church, although children from families with lower socioeconomic status tend to hold more positive attitudes towards Christianity.⁴

Second, one might expect that mothers working full-time are less likely to take their children to religious services because of increased time pressures. This finds some support in the data: only about one-third (35%) of children whose mothers worked full-time attended religious services regularly, compared with 43% of children whose mothers worked part-time. The attendance rate of children whose mothers had no paid work at all was almost identical to that for children of full-time working mothers (34%); however, mothers without paid work are more likely to be caring for very young children, who may not be considered old enough to benefit from going to religious services.⁵

4. Francis, L. J., Paul R. Pearson and D. W. Lankshear. 1990. "The relationship between social class and attitude towards Christianity among 10- and 11-year-old children," *Personality and Individual Differences* 11, 10: 1019-1027.

The size and structure of the family also influence the likelihood of attending religious services. Children in families with both biological parents were much more likely to attend regularly (38%) than children in lone-parent families (28%) and step-parent families (31%). The number of children also affects regular attendance, with children from larger families

being much more likely to attend services at least once a month. While

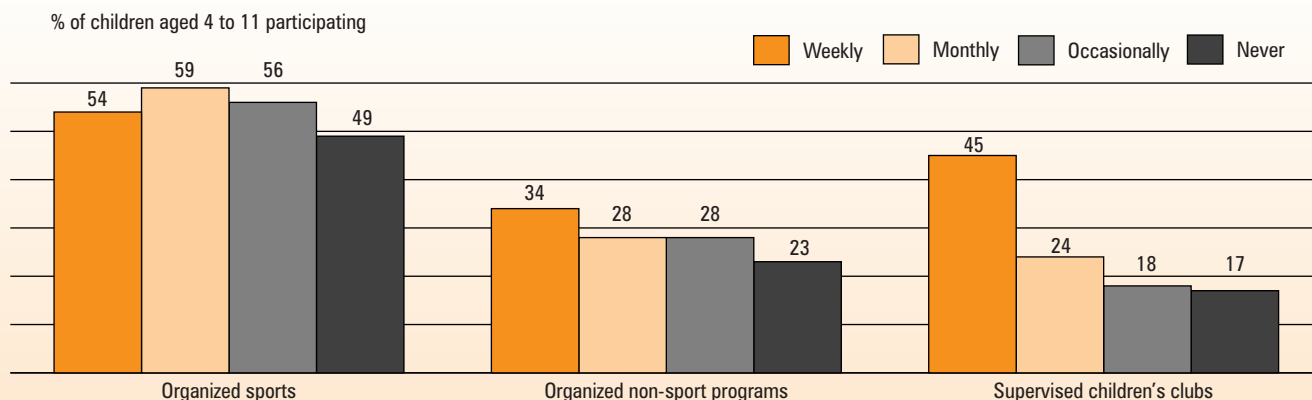
5. An American study in the 1970s found that having pre-school-aged children reduces parental attendance, while having school-aged children increases it. Azzi, C. and R. Ehrenberg. 1975. "Household allocation of time and church attendance," *Journal of Political Economy* 83, 1: 27-56.

CST Regular attendance rates among children increase with the mother's educational attainment

	Child attends religious services		
	Regularly	Occasionally	Not at all
	%		
Education			
Less than high school	30	20	50
High school	34	24	42
Some postsecondary	36	22	42
College	36	22	42
University	40	22	38
Labour force status			
Not in paid labour force	34	20	46
Works part-time	43	20	37
Works full-time	35	24	41

Source: Statistics Canada, National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994-95.

CST Children who attend services regularly are more likely to participate in other supervised activities



Source: Statistics Canada, National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994-95.

24% of children in one-child families attended services, 52% of children in families with four or more children did so. This may simply reflect the fact that large families are more likely to have older children, and that parents who want to take one child to religious services will probably take the whole family.

Does religious attendance reduce children's other activities?

Frequent attendance at religious services does not reduce the likelihood that children aged 4 to 11 will also participate in organized sports, in non-sport programs such as music lessons, or in clubs such as brownies or cubs. In fact the opposite is true: regular attendees were most likely to engage in each of these three types of activities. For example, 54% of children who attended services weekly, and 59% who attended monthly, were enrolled in weekly sports programs, compared with 49% of 4- to 11-year-olds who did not attend religious services at all. The differences are even greater for participation in supervised boys and girls clubs — 45% of weekly attendees and 17% of non-attendees. This finding is not unexpected, since

many parents probably view their children's participation in organized activities as an informal education that teaches values complementary to those learned at home and reiterated in religious services.

Summary

Well over one-third of Canada's children under 12 attend religious services at least once a month. Participation increases with age and the educational attainment of the child's mother. Mothers working in the paid labour force are more likely to bring their children to a place of worship than are mothers who do not work outside the home, and single mothers are less likely to do so than married mothers. And rather than reducing involvement in sports, music lessons, or supervised clubs, attendance at religious services increases the likelihood of being involved in these other activities.



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New immigrants most likely to live in low income for consecutive years

Twenty-one percent of people who immigrated to Canada after 1986 lived in a low-income situation for the four-year period from 1993 to 1996. In contrast, only 4% of Canadian-born residents experienced such an extended period of low income. Members of visible minority groups, many of whom are recent immigrants, also reported high rates of continuous low income: 17% lived in a low income situation for four consecutive years, a rate four times higher than that for people who were not visible minorities (4%). The higher risk for both recent immigrants and visible minorities still existed even after taking into account their age and level of education. Other factors, such as language skills and relevant work experience, have yet to be assessed.

To what extent are Canadians exposed to low income: 1993 to 1996

Statistics Canada
Internet product 75F0002MIE, 99001
www.statcan.ca/english/research/75F0002MIE/99001.pdf



Educational profile of farmers rising

Farmers on the whole are better educated than they were 15 years ago. About 40% of farm operators had some postsecondary education in 1996, with non-university diplomas (24%) being more common than university degrees (15%). This represents a substantial increase over 1981, when 16% of farmers had college or trade/vocational training and 11% had university. Women were more likely to have a postsecondary

education – 30% had college or trade/vocational and 19% had university, compared with 23% and 14% of men, respectively. The preference for non-university schooling may result from several factors, including the time a university education requires away from the farm and the generally more practical approach of college courses. Incidentally, only 19% of farmers with postsecondary education had studied agricultural and biological sciences and technologies. The most popular field of study (23%) was engineering and applied science technologies and trades.

1996 Census of Agriculture-Population linkage database

www.statcan.ca/Daily/english/990426/d990426.htm



Cannabis offences most common drug offence

In 1997, police forces in Canada reported 66,500 drug offences, a rate of 222 offences for every 100,000 population. Among the provinces, British Columbia has consistently reported the highest rate of drug crime since 1982. In 1997, it recorded 426 drug offences per 100,000, while Newfoundland recorded the lowest rate, at 132. In recent years, Newfoundland and Alberta have shown the largest declines in the rate of drug offences, while Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have shown the largest increases.

Cannabis offences accounted for 72% of all drug crime in 1997, up from 58% in 1991. In contrast, cocaine represented 17% of all cases in 1997, down from 28%, and heroin for about 2% of all cases, down marginally from 1991. Overall, 40,800 people, both adults and youths, were charged with a drug offence in 1997. Nine in ten were male. People charged in cocaine and heroin incidents averaged 30 years of age, while those charged with cannabis offences averaged 25 years. Also,

older offenders are more likely to be involved with supply offences.

Juristat: Illicit drugs and crime

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Hospital discharge rates at historic low

Hospitals discharged 3.2 million overnight patients in 1996-97, down from 3.3 million in 1995-96. This represents a 6% drop in the discharge rate (including deaths) to 10,523 discharges for every 100,000 people from 11,165 per 100,000 the previous year. The rate has now reached its lowest level since 1961, when such data were first collected. Declines in discharge rates are due to many factors. More frequent use of ambulatory care and day surgery, the shift from hospital to community-based services, increased emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention, improved medical technologies and treatments, as well as new pharmaceuticals may have reduced the need for hospitalization or surgical intervention.

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Attendance drops for performing arts companies

In 1996-97, attendance at performing arts shows fell almost 13% from 1994-95. Declines were due to losses in three of the four disciplines: audience size was down in opera (-22%), theatre (-17%) and music (-6%), but dance attendance increased 6% to about 1.3 million spectators. Nevertheless, companies declared total revenues up 2% in 1996-97, compared with two

years earlier. Almost half (48%) of total revenues came from ticket sales, subscriptions, licensing and other sources. Another important source of income was revenue from foreign tours, which rose almost 10% from 1994-95, and accounted for almost 7% of earned revenues. However, only theatre companies reported an operating surplus (collectively, \$3.3 million). A deficit was reported by the other three disciplines, with the music companies having the highest operating deficit (collectively, \$1.6 million).

Performing Arts Survey

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Big business ready for the Y2K bug

Almost 100% of Canadian businesses with more than 250 employees say their computer systems will be ready to handle the date change to 2000. A substantial proportion of firms continued preparations throughout the summer; about 67% of all large firms expected to have all critical operational systems ready before September and fully 92% will be prepared by the end of October. Companies in air transportation, finance and insurance, oil and gas producers, manufacturers and distributors, electricity, manufacturing and communications planned to be ready before September, but 57% of large hospitals said they did not expect to finish until September or October. Police and ambulance services in almost all municipalities have taken action, and steps have been taken to prepare water and sewage services in municipalities where computerized systems are essential to service delivery.

National Survey on Preparedness for the Year 2000

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