Religious People Really Do Have More Children

By Alex Berezow — July 20, 2016

A few months ago, the Washington Post ran an article titled, "Stop assuming that families with lots of children are religious." The article supported its case with some data from Pew (2014 Religious Landscape Study), which surveyed 35,000 Americans, and anecdotes about the plight of large secular families that must bear the heavy burden of answering questions from strangers who assume that they're religious.

One of the maternal units was quoted as saying: "People assume. They'll come up and start talking about God to us. Which is a little awkward at times."

Unfortunately for them, new research is about to make their awkward lives even more awkward. A study just published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B concluded that religious people really are more likely to procreate.

The study used two different data sets. The first came from the IPUMS International census, and it included 3.6+ million women of various faiths in 32 countries. The authors discovered that women in marriages that were religiously homogamous (i.e., in which the husband and wife share the same denomination) were likelier to produce more children. Additionally, they were less likely to be childless.
The second data set included 3,146 women in Wisconsin, about 86% of whom were in religiously homogamous marriages. These women showed similar patterns as those in the first data set. Additionally, the authors found a positive (but non-linear) association between how frequently a woman attended religious services and the number of children she had.

Additional analysis revealed a positive (but non-linear) association between the frequency of religious service attendance and the number of children a woman had. This finding is contrary to the counterintuitive notion that higher education diminishes the relationship between homogamy and the number of children. Instead, the authors speculate that factors such as increased marital happiness and stability, lower likelihood of using contraception due to personal preference or religious conviction, and a greater likelihood of holding traditional views of marriage and childbearing likely contribute to religiously homogamous couples who attend services more frequently procreating more often.

The authors note, however, that this correlation does not exist everywhere. In Brazil, for instance, religious homogamy is linked to women having fewer children. For some reason, in this overwhelmingly Catholic country, \textit{Genesis 9:7} \cite{5} does not apply.
