

Religion and Age

It is often assumed that older people are more religious than young people. However, as we have seen in other learning modules, there are multiple ways to measure someone's religiosity and people are often more religious in some areas than in others. In this learning module we will explore the relationship between age and different forms of religiosity. Specifically, we will use data from the *Religion and Public Life Survey, 2010* to explore this topic.

Open your web browser and go to the homepage for the Association of Religion Data Archives (located at www.theARDA.com).

Next, locate the *Religion and Public Life Survey, 2010* on the ARDA website. For assistance locating a data file on the ARDA, click [here](#).

Once you have located and selected this data file, you should see a summary page for the survey. Each of the datasets on the ARDA have a summary page that describes the purpose of the survey, the number of people surveyed, the date when the survey was conducted, and how the data was gathered. This information is useful to researchers, religious leaders, and others who use the ARDA. Using the information included on the summary page for the *Religion and Public Life Survey, 2010* to answer the following questions:

1. Briefly list some of the topics explored in this survey.

2. How many questions were asked in the *Religion and Public Life Survey, 2010*? (Hint: How many variables are included according to the summary information?)



Now that we have become more familiar with the *Religion and Public Life Survey, 2010*, let's take a look at some of the individual survey questions and responses.

Click on the "Codebook" tab and use Control+F to find the question about attendance of religious services (ATTEND).

3. What is the question being asked here?

4. What are the possible responses to this question?

Now, click on the "Analyze results" link below the question. This will take you to a page with several tables that show how responses to this question break down by such social characteristics as age, gender, and education.

5. Take a close look at how church attendance varies by age, and complete the following table:

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 +
More than once a week (%)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Never (%)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

6. Overall, do older people attend church more or less often than younger people?

Now that we have examined how religious behaviors can vary by age, let's go back to the codebook and examine some patterns in religious beliefs. Locate the variable (CONGRESS).

7. Which age category is most likely to agree with the statement mentioned in the question? (Hint: Click on the "Analyze Results" link below the survey question.) Which age category is least likely?

Finally, we will examine how important respondents feel that religion is in their own life.

8. Locate the variable about how important religion is in one's life (IMPRELIG), and complete the following table:

	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Very important						
Not at all important						

9. On the whole, are older people more or less likely to report that religion is important in their lives? Why do you think this is?

10. In this module we have seen that on the whole, people in the United States tend to become more religious as they age, both in their behaviors and in their beliefs. Why do you think this might be the case?

So far we have been looking at individual-level data, but now let's examine data at the congregational level. Access QuickStats on U.S. Congregations by going to 'Quickstats/Quicklists' on the main menu bar on www.theARDA.com. Find the topics under Membership and select 'Percent Under 35'.

11. What question was asked to gather this data? Who was asked?

12. Which religious tradition has the most congregations with at least 50% of their members under the age of 35? (Hint: Look at 'Percent Under 35 by Religious Tradition' and compare data for the 50% or more row.)

13. Look at how the age distribution of congregations has changed over time (Hint: Look at 'Percent Under 35 by Year of Survey'). Compare the results from 1998 to 2012. Do congregations seem to be getting younger or older? Why?
