

Attitudes versus Behaviors: Religion and Helping Others

One of the things social researchers are concerned with when measuring human behavior is making sure the measures we use are valid. That is, do the questions we ask measure what they are supposed to measure? For example, the 2004 General Social Survey asked individuals:

There are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. As far as you are concerned personally on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is not at all important and 7 is very important, how important is it to help people in America who are worse off than yourself?

Does this question tell us whether a person actually does anything to help others worse off? No. It simply tells us their *attitude* about the importance of helping those worse off. So this question does not measure helping *behavior* even if it asks about helping behavior. Sometimes we assume that attitudes and behaviors are the same, but often they are not.

We can use data from the 2004 General Social Survey at the Association of Religion Data Archives (www.thearda.com) to explore the differences between attitudes and behaviors.

If you find yourself lost at any point, look to the instructions on the right.

Open your web browser and go to the homepage for the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA).

Begin by finding the 2004 General Social Survey in the Data Archive section of the ARDA.

Click on the “Search” tab and type in the word “help.”

This will bring up questions from the 2004 General Social Survey that has the word “help” in it. Look through these and find question #486 with the name OTHSHELP (note: You may need to expand the search results to find this question).

Open your web browser.

Go to www.thearda.com

Click on “Data Archive” in the toolbar.

Find “General Social Surveys” and the 2004 file.

Click on the “Search” tab. Search for the word “help.”

Scroll down to question #486.

1. What was the question asked of individuals in OTHSHELP?

2. What were the possible answers individuals could give to this question?

3. Is this a measure of an attitude of behavior?

Analyze the results for OTHSHELP.

4. What **percentage** of people fit into the following categories (note: you'll have to do some adding)?

Strongly agree or agree: _____

Neither agree nor disagree: _____

Disagree or strongly disagree: _____

5. In general, what do most Americans seem to think about helping others?

Click on “Analyze Results” under the question OTHSHELP.

Let's take a look at how religiosity impacts whether or not individuals believe that people should be willing to help those who are less fortunate. Scroll down and you will see a series of tables. These tables include two measures of religiosity. The first is religious affiliation (I-RELIGION) and the second is church attendance (I-ATTEND).

6. Out of Protestants, Catholics, Others, and Nones (i.e. no affiliation), which group do you predict will be more likely to **disagree** that people should be willing to help those that are less fortunate?

7. Fill in the following table:

	Protestant	Catholic	Other	None
Str. Agree & Agree	_____	_____	_____	_____
Neither	_____	_____	_____	_____
Str. Disagree & Disagree	_____	_____	_____	_____

8. Which religious group is more likely to **disagree** that people should be willing to help those who are less fortunate?

9. Does this support your hypothesis in #6?

10. What about church attendance? Fill in the following table:

	Never	< 1 A Month	< 1 A Week	Weekly +
Str. Agree & Agree	_____	_____	_____	_____
Neither	_____	_____	_____	_____
Str. Disagree & Disagree	_____	_____	_____	_____

11. Describe how church attendance is related to a person’s agreement or disagreement with helping the less fortunate.

12. Does the impact of church attendance differ from the impact of religious affiliation? Describe similarities or differences:

Ok. Let’s look at a different measure for helping others. Go back to and search for the word “Charity.” In your search results, find question #477 named VOLCHRTY.

Click on the “Search” tab and search for the word “Charity.”

13. What does this question ask?

14. What were the possible answers for VOLCHRTY?

15. Is this a measure of an attitude or behavior?

Analyze the results for VOLCHRTY.

16. What percentage of people fit into the following categories:

Weekly or more: _____
Once/Month: _____
1-3 times/year: _____
Never: _____

17. What do most Americans do about helping others?

Click on “Analyze Results” below the question VOLCHRTY.

Take a look at how religion affects VOLCHRTY.

Fill in the following table:

	Protestant	Catholic	Other	None
Weekly +	_____	_____	_____	_____
Once/Mnth	_____	_____	_____	_____
1-3/Year	_____	_____	_____	_____
Never	_____	_____	_____	_____

18. Which religious group is more likely to have volunteered for a charity in the last 12 months?

19. Now look at the impact of church attendance. Fill in the following table:

	Never	<1 A Mnth	< 1 A Week	Weekly +
Weekly +	_____	_____	_____	_____
Once/Mnth	_____	_____	_____	_____
1-3/Year	_____	_____	_____	_____
Never	_____	_____	_____	_____

20. Describe how church attendance is related to VOLCHRTY:

Scroll down to tables below pie chart.

Now, you have looked at two different measures concerning helping others. Look back at your results for OTHSHELP and VOLCHRTY.

21. Are there any differences between what most Americans **believe** about helping others versus what most Americans **do** to help others?

22. Does this tell us anything about the difference between attitudes and behaviors?
