

Death and Mourning

In what ways do people mourn the deaths of those they love? How often do they think about their own deaths? How are approaches to death and mourning related to religious beliefs and other characteristics such as age?

This learning module uses the Southern Focus Poll Combined Sample, 1997 to explore these and other questions.

First, open the website for the ARDA webpage.

The SOUTHERN FOCUS POLL COMBINED SAMPLE, 1997, which combines samples of Southerners and non-Southerners, includes questions about a variety of topics including sports and politics. The poll also includes a series of questions about death and mourning which will be used in this exercise.

Find the combined Southern Focus Poll sample for 1997 and open it.

You should now see a description of the study. Read through the description and answer the following questions.

1. What is the size of the sample?

2. What was the target population for this poll?

3. How does this population differ from the entire population of the country? List at least two likely differences between the two populations.

Connect to the internet and open your web browser (e.g., Internet Explorer or Netscape).

Go to the ARDA website at www.thearda.com.

From the ARDA homepage, click on "Browse Files" (located in the menu on the left).

Under the heading "Title," scroll through the list of available databases until you find SOUTHERN FOCUS POLL COMBINED SAMPLE, 1997.

Highlight this file and click on the "View File" button.

4. What is the goal of the Southern Focus Poll? (Why was it conducted?)
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You can look at the questions that were asked in the 1997 Southern Focus Poll, as well as the responses given for each question, by opening the codebook for the dataset.

5. Find the question FAMDIED (variable 83). What percentage of respondents report that a close friend or family member has died in the past year?
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Click on the “Codebook” tab, located under the survey name (next to the “Details” tab).

Scroll through the questions until you find FAMDIED (variable number 83).

6. Find the variable RELIG (variable 17). What percentage of respondents never attend religious services?
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The ARDA can also be used to perform simple analyses of the variables that are included in the datasets. By using the “Analyze results” tool, you can compare the responses to each question for different groups of people.

Use the “Analyze results” tool to explore respondents’ experiences of death and mourning.

Perform the “Analyze” function on variable 82, CEMETERY. Use the results of this analysis to answer the following questions.

Scroll through the list of variables in the codebook.

Click on “Analyze results,” located underneath the variable description.

Scroll past the pie chart until you see a series of tables. The first table simply gives rates of response for the variable that you have selected. Each subsequent table breaks those rates down on the basis of a different demographic characteristic.

7. Record the number and percentage of respondents who report that they have not visited a cemetery in the past year.
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8. Record the number and percentage of respondents who have visited a cemetery five or more times in the past year.

9. Now, find the table that compares responses for members of different religious groups. Which religious group's members report visiting a cemetery most often? Least often?

10. Scroll through the tables for this variable. What relationships do you see between the frequency of visiting cemeteries and other variables?

The survey also asks respondents a series of four questions about wakes and funerals. Find this series of variables and use them to answer the questions below.

11. List the variable number and name for each of the four variables dealing with wakes and funerals.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

Click on the "Search" tab, located next to the "Codebook" tab.

Enter an appropriate search term (such as "funeral") in the "Search" text box.

Scroll through the list of variables to find the set of variables that you are looking for.

Click on the variable name.

12. Note that two of these questions are asked only of respondents who report having attended a funeral service at someone's home. Use the "Analyze results" feature for these variables to report the number and percentage of *all* respondents in the study (not the percentage of respondents answering the question) who answered "yes" to each question. (Recall the sample size that you recorded in Question 1.)

1) Body of deceased present:

2) Open casket:

13. Develop a hypothesis regarding the relationship between religious affiliation and one's experiences with attending funerals or wakes in a private home. Which religious groups do you expect to be most likely to attend wakes in a private home, attend wakes with a body present, and/or attend wakes with an open casket, and why? Which groups do you expect to be least likely, and why?

14. For each of the three variables, find the "Analyze results" table that reports responses by religious affiliation. Which groups seem to have the most experience with attending wakes in private homes? The least experience?

15. Were your hypotheses supported?

16. Analyze the relationships between each of the variables below and the death and mourning issues that we have discussed in this learning module. How is each variable related to the death and mourning variables analyzed in this module, or to other death and mourning variables included in the dataset?

1) Age:

2) Sex:

3) Race:

4) Educational Level:

17. What have you learned in this exercise about the relationship between religiosity and death and mourning?

Optional Questions

- O-1. Find the question that asks respondents how often they think about their own deaths. Perform an analysis of this variable and report your findings below. (How often do respondents think about their own deaths, on average? How are other variables related to the frequency of thinking about one's own death?)

- O-2. Collapse the responses to the variable in question O-1 into three categories: rarely (1 or 2), sometimes (3, 4, 5, or 6), or often (7, 8, 9, or 10). Create a table below which displays 1) the overall frequency and percentage of respondents falling into each collapsed category, and 2) the frequency and percentage of respondents in each religious group who fall into each of the collapsed categories.

O-3. What questions about death and mourning experiences that were left unanswered by the exercises above? List at least three other possible variables about death and mourning that the researchers could have included.

O-4. Use the search box to search other datasets available on the ARDA for questions dealing with death or mourning. Below, write the name of the dataset, the variable number, and the question asked for at least two of the variables that you have found.
