Young Adults, Religion, and Volunteering

You don’t often hear people say a lot of positive things about young adults, but many today spend a substantial portion of their time doing volunteer work. While some do volunteer work through their religious organization or youth groups, others take the initiative to volunteer on their own. Some young adults volunteer exclusively for their religious groups, while others donate their time to non-religious causes. In this learning module, we explore the often complex relationship between religion, young adults, and volunteerism. In this learning module, we use the National Survey of Youth and Religion to explore these and other questions.

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

Begin by clicking on “Data Archive” in the toolbar, and “browse alphabetically” to locate the National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 3 (2007-2008). Once you find the correct file, select it.

You should now see a summary, or description, of the study. Let’s see what we can find out about this study from its description. Read through the summary and answer the following questions:

1. How many young adults were interviewed in the National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 3 (2007-2008)? (Hint: People are referred to as “cases”.)

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2. Who conducted this study? (Hint: Look under “Principal Investigators”.)

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Now, let’s explore what this data might be able to tell us about the volunteer behavior of adolescents in the US.

3. Find the variable named VOLUNTER (variable #167). What does this question ask?

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While it appears that few young adults perform community service regularly or even occasionally, under half of young adults said they had not done any community service in the last year.

Now, let’s see how young adults’ answer to this question might have varied by religion. Locate the blue link marked, “Analyze results” directly below the question and click on it.

On this page you will see tables that show how different types of young adults perform different amounts of community service. Scroll down to the bottom of the page where there is a table marked “Religion (I-Religion).”

4. Which religious category (Evangelical Protestant, Mainline Protestant, etc.) is most likely to perform community service regularly?

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When people think of young adults volunteering, they often imagine young adults working through religious youth groups or organizations. However, this is not always the case. Go back and locate the variable VOLREL (#169).

This question asks how much of the community service performed by young adults was done through a religious organization. A breakdown of the results is shown below (Note: young adults who did not answer this question are not included in the table).

5. As a percentage, how many young adults did at least a little of their community service through a religious organization? (Note: you will have to do some adding to answer this question.)

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6. How many did not perform any community service through a religion?

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While we often equate community service with volunteer work, the two may not always be the same thing. Locate the variable VOLREQ (variable #170). Look over the question that was asked and analyze the responses given. Then answer the following questions:

7. What percentage of young adults in the study performed all of their community service because a school, juvenile justice system or parent required them to? Was the number higher, lower, or about the same as you expected?

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8. What percent of young adults had no mandatory community service? How does this compare with the young adults who performed all of their community service because they were required to?

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So far we’ve looked at young adults who are encouraged by their parents to perform community service, young adults who volunteer through their church, and young adults whose “volunteer” work isn’t exactly voluntary. To conclude this learning module, we will look at one final type of community service. We’ll look at the number of young adults who say they have served someone in need directly (not through an organization).

9. Before we analyze the data, what percent of students do you expect said they performed “a lot” of direct community service?

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Now, return to the codebook page and locate the variable HELPED (variable #171). This variable asks young adults to report the amount of community service they performed directly to people in need, rather than through an organization.
10. What percentage of young adults said that they performed “a lot” of their community service directly (and not through an organization)? Was this more or less than you thought?

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11. How do you think that young adults’ response to this question varies by religious tradition? In other words, in what religious tradition do you think young adults will be most likely to say they perform “a lot” of direct community service?

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To find out if you are correct, click on the “Analyze results” link directly below the survey question and scroll down to the I-Religion table.

12. Complete the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Evangelical Protestant</th>
<th>Mainline Protestant</th>
<th>Black Protestant</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Not Religious</th>
<th>Other religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lot</td>
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<td>Some</td>
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<td>A little</td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
13. In which religious tradition were young adults most likely to perform direct community service “a lot”? Were you correct?

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