

**0249**

## **The Teenage Religion and Values Survey in England and Wales: an overview**

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### **Background**

The Teenage Religion and Values Survey, established in the 1990s, generated a valuable and unique source of information about the place of religion in the lives of young people throughout England and Wales at the close of the twentieth century. Drawing on a large sample of 33,982 young people, the survey was able to profile the range of religious traditions visible within England and Wales, including representatives from the major world faiths (e.g. Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and Sikhs), the smaller Christian denominations (e.g. Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians), and other sects (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses). Some findings from this survey were published in two books, *The Values Debate* (Francis, 2001a) and *Urban Hope and Spiritual Health* (Francis and Robbins, 2005). Other key findings however, have been distributed across a range of edited volumes or specialist journals, including *British Journal of Religious Education*, *Implicit Religion*, *International Journal of Education and Religion*, *Marriage and Family Review*, *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, *Religious Education*, and *Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion*.

### **Research Questions**

The aim of the present study is to discuss the methodological issues involved in creating a survey of this scale, to draw together some of the disparate output, and then to assess what has been achieved by such an undertaking. This discussion and evaluation is intended to prepare the ground for undertaking a new study of similar scope during the first decades of the twenty-first century.

### **Methods**

Quantitative. A 24 page questionnaire was distributed to a total of 33,982 year nine and year ten pupils throughout England and Wales.

### **Frame**

#### Assessing the survey

In order to contextualise and evaluate the Teenage Religion and Values Survey five issues are discussed and analysed: the way in which the values map was generated by qualitative research and then translated into a quantitative study; the rationale underpinning the models of measurement used in the quantitative study; the personality and individual differences approach to modelling the relationship between religion and values; the dimensional approach to conceptualising and accessing religiosity; and the nature of the sampling employed to gather the data.

In terms of the dimensional approach to studying religion, the Teenage Religions and Values project operationalised five dimensions: self-assigned religious affiliation; self-reported attendance at public centres of worship; self-reported personal prayer; religious belief; and God images.

#### Listening to the findings

The series of studies published from the Teenage Religion and Values project are organised and evaluated within four main themes.

The first theme concerns the relationship between the different dimensions of religion and a range of value areas. For example, building on the interest shown in religious affiliation as a socially significant indicator by the 2001 Census for England and Wales, the Teenage Religion and Values project demonstrated the power of this variable to predict individual differences across a range of areas. For example, in terms of personal values 50% of young people who belonged to no faith group reported that their life had a sense of purpose, compared with 51% of Sikhs, 61% of Christians, 62% of Hindus, 64% of Jews, and 68% of Muslims. In terms of family values, 47% of young people who belonged to no faith group found it helpful to talk about their problems with their mother, compared with 45% of Sikhs, 40% of Hindus, 52% of Muslims, 53% of Christians, and 71% of Jews.

The second theme concerns the distinctive profile of pupils with a religious character. In terms of Anglican schools, the data demonstrated that Anglicans attending Anglican schools recorded higher levels of personal dissatisfaction ( $F = 14.0, p < .001$ ), higher levels of religious values ( $F = 8.6, p < .01$ ), and comparable levels of moral values ( $F = 1.1, p < NS$ ), in comparison with Anglicans attending non-denominational schools. Non-affiliates attending Anglican schools recorded higher levels of personal dissatisfaction ( $F = 8.9, p < .01$ ), lower levels of moral values ( $F = 28.2, p < .001$ ), and comparable levels of religious values ( $F = 0.3, p < NS$ ), in comparison with non-affiliates attending non-denominational schools. In terms of Catholic schools, the data drew attention to four distinct communities of faith within the Catholic school as defined by pupils who were active Catholics (who attend church every Sunday), sliding Catholics (who attend church some Sundays but less often than weekly), lapsed Catholics (who never attend church on Sunday), and non-Catholics (who have not been baptised in the Catholic Church).

The third theme concerns the ways in which this remarkable database has been employed to illuminate a series of issues of theoretical and practical significance among young people. For example, detailed studies have been offered on the influence of religion on attitudes toward smoking (Robbins, 2005), on attitudes toward religious education and school assemblies (Kay and Francis, 2001), on attitudes toward science (Astley, 2005), on attitudes toward abortion (Francis, 2004), and on suicidal ideation (Kay and Francis, 2006). More complex multi-variate analyses have been employed to identify and isolate the influence of bible reading on purpose in life and attitude tow

### **Research findings**

The paper concludes by scoping the potential for building a new study on the foundations of the Teenage Religion and Values project capable of monitoring the changes that are occurring in the field of religion and values among young people.