

NSYR Completes Personal Interviews Data Collection

The personal interview questionnaire used for the in-depth interviews phase of data collection with U.S. teens by the National Study of Youth and Religion has been released and is available at www.youthandreligion.org, according to sociologists with the project, based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Seventeen researchers conducted 267 in-person interviews in 45 U.S. states. All interviews are complete and transcribed. Analyses of data are ongoing.

“These interviews provide an opportunity for researchers to better unpack the meaning of the survey data,” stated Dr. Christian Smith, Stuart Chapin Distinguished Professor and associate chair of sociology at UNC-CH. “They add context to the phone survey responses and help us to understand the experiences and motives of teens.” Each interview was conducted in person and was digitally recorded. They lasted an average of two hours each. Smith is the principal investigator of the study.



Dots indicate locations of interviews.

Interviewees, selected from the 3,370 telephone survey respondents, were chosen to encompass a wide diversity that included both religious and non-religious teens from many races and economic groups. The purpose of the interviews was to provide extended follow-up discussions about teens’ religious, spiritual, family, and social lives. The questionnaire followed closely and expanded upon the topics that were included on the NSYR telephone survey. Homeschooled teens and those who attend private school were oversampled because these are relatively under-studied portions of the teen population.

“Our interviewers were well-trained project participants who flew and drove all over the country to meet with teen interviewees,” Smith explained. “Conducting so many interviews with such a diversity of U.S. teens was an invaluable part of our data collections. We learned a great deal about the lives of teenagers that a survey alone could not have taught us.”

The National Study of Youth and Religion is funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. More than 3,350 teens along with one of their parents participated in the random-digit-dial telephone study of U.S. parent-teen pairs. The purpose of the project is to research the shape and influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of U.S. adolescents; to identify effective practices in the religious, moral and social formation of the lives of youth; to describe the extent to which youth participate in and benefit from the programs and opportunities that religious communities are offering to their youth; and to foster an informed national discussion about the influence of religion in youth's lives to encourage sustained reflection about and rethinking of our cultural and institutional practices with regard to youth and religion.