

The State of Religion & Young People 2022: Mental Health—What Faith Leaders Need to Know

Data Collection and Methodology Statement

OVERVIEW

The State of Religion & Young People is Springtide Research Institute's annual compilation of research and learning about the religious and spiritual lives of young people from the previous year. *The State of Religion & Young People 2022: Mental Health—What Faith Leaders Need to Know* is a part of a series of reports and resources about the intersection of faith, religion, and spirituality with young people's mental health. The series and any specific findings are not intended to be a diagnosis of young people in general or in particular. As a sociological research institute, Springtide instead focused our research questions on how organizational structures might support or constrain mental health.

The aims of the study were to discover what organizations could be doing or are doing to foster good mental health for the young people they work with, beyond providing support services for young people in crisis. Survey and interview questions focused on social connection, providing appropriate supports to achieve goals and outcomes relevant to young people, and fostering a sense of purpose through connection to something bigger than oneself, all of which have been shown to support the flourishing of young people.

The data collection strategies outlined below are a part of the overall Data with Heart™ methodology that Springtide employs, which involves listening to young people in multiple informal but important ways throughout our research process. Additionally, Springtide Ambassadors are a group of young people from around the country who meet monthly with us via Zoom to help us stay connected to the emerging and changing lives of young people as well as to provide feedback on research tools, questions, and analysis.

Data Collection Strategy and Sample Construction

Springtide employs an applied research strategy for our studies. We aim to understand immediate issues that young people are facing in order to help determine solutions. Springtide used both qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a thorough understanding of how organizational structures and contexts impact the mental health of young people beginning in November 2021 and concluding in March 2022. We used mixed methods research to uncover the depth within the concepts and to utilize the unique advantages of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Where our quantitative data are representative and provide insight into *what* is happening, our qualitative data allow us to dig into *how* and *why* people make decisions. Mixed methods also enable us to explore more diverse perspectives and intricacies of young people's lived experiences.

A non-probability-based nationally representative sample of young people ages 13 to 25 in the United States was surveyed using the Alchemer platform to recruit panels via opt-in methods and to administer the survey. Springtide asks a core set of demographic and faith questions annually in the survey instrument to give our research team the ability to examine some data longitudinally, but the studies are cross-sectional by design. The data are collected in this way to ensure that we can look at certain demographic and religious measures over time, but our studies focus on a particular point in time. Springtide designs studies to respond to the needs and experiences of young people, so studies are descriptive and observational rather than predictive. When we share cross tabulations of certain demographic groups, we identify that the data are directional, not conclusive, due to smaller sample sizes.

Population Under Study

Springtide Research Institute conducted surveys online using Alchemer to recruit census-balanced panels for age, gender, region, and race according to their representation in the US Census, drawing on panels consisting of more than 100 million individuals globally. For this study, we conducted three waves of the surveys, one in December 2021, another in February 2022, and a final wave in March 2022. A nationally representative sample of young people ages 13 to 25 in the United States was surveyed using the Alchemer platform to recruit panels via opt-in methods and to administer the survey. The first wave was conducted between December 1 and December 15, 2021, with an n=4039. The second wave was conducted between February 15 and March 7, 2022, with an n=1795. The third wave was conducted between March 5 and March 25, 2022, with an n=4003. Total completes for the full study are an n=9837.

Alchemer partners with a third party to provide access to preconfirmed, double-opt-in, recruited respondents. Profiles are regularly managed to ensure that respondents are qualified to take the survey based on the profiling categories that we specify. Alchemer panelists are pulled from a network of leading respondent suppliers. These suppliers have access to over 100 million respondents worldwide in more than 80 countries. Quality-control checks and the Alchemer Data Quarantine Tool are used so that respondents who aren't providing a clean response are detected systematically. Alchemer replaces any unusable data that is found.

Industry-standard validity and quality checks were used, including attention, straight-lining, and ballot-stuffing checks. The sample was weighted for age, gender, region, and race to match the demographics of the country according to US Census categories. Data were coded and analyzed utilizing human coders with quality checks on SPSS.

For interviews, Springtide relied on chain-referral sampling strategies as well as advertising on social media via paid recruitment ads on Facebook and Instagram and unpaid reposts on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The recruitment ads invited young people to participate in a compensated study related to mental health, and specified the criteria for study inclusion, which were age (13 to 25), location (United States), and an interest and willingness to talk about mental health. Respondents were compensated with a \$20 Visa gift card upon study completion.

Survey Methodology

The creation of survey and interview questions is collaborative and involves several stages of ideation and revision involving members of the Research Team, Writing Team, and the Executive Director. We develop questions based on conversations with our Research Advisory Board and our Springtide Ambassadors, literature reviews, preliminary research, empirical observations, and media trends about what is happening with young people in the United States today and what will help organizational leaders better care for the young people in their lives. We pilot portions of surveys and interviews using focus groups of Springtide Ambassadors, ages 13 to 25, before they go into the field. For more information about our survey and interview instruments email info@springtideresearch.org. The surveys from each wave took respondents approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Interview Methodology

A team of Springtide researchers trained in interview methodologies conducted 105 in-depth, 60- to 90-minute interviews for the qualitative research in this report via telephone and online video using Zoom software. Interviews focused on understanding how young people make sense of the role and impact of organizations on their personal mental health and the mental health of Gen Z. Interview respondents were incentivized to participate in the interviews with a \$20 Visa gift card upon completion of the interview and a brief post-interview questionnaire, which gathered demographic information and a self-assessment of mental health. To view the Interview Guide and/or Post-Interview Questionnaire please email info@springtideresearch.org.

Potential interview participants were asked to complete an online consent form before we would schedule the interview time. Participants under 18 were required to have a parent or guardian sign a consent form. At the start of an interview, Springtide interviewers asked respondents for permission to record interviews. If respondents consented, interviewers recorded the interviews either on a hand-held recording device or using the Zoom meeting recording feature. Recorded interviews were uploaded to Enjoy HQ, an online platform for qualitative data analysis, interviewees were assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality, and interviews were transcribed. Springtide researchers coded the interviews thematically using focused coding, a type of coding that identifies significant processes and categories that emerge from the data, to systematically sift through large amounts of data.

The coding process was collaborative and iterative; initial focused codes were discussed among the Research Team and decisions were made collectively about which codes were most analytically important and relevant to the study's research objectives. These became final codes that were used inductively to identify and sort all qualitative data. Interviews were coded separately by two to three researchers trained in data analysis to ensure the validity and reliability of codes.

In addition to the interviews, Springtide hosted a focus group in a ninth-grade religion classroom of 24 students. The focus group was conducted in December 2021 and lasted 90 minutes. Springtide researchers asked students to take time to record their thoughts and to share aloud their responses to questions about mental health in their school environment.

Data collection and data analysis happened simultaneously and reflexively, guided by grounded theory methods that involve writing analytic memos to construct theories that are “grounded” in the data. Trained in grounded theory methods, Springtide researchers independently and collaboratively write successive analytic memos as they collect data. Memos used codes and raw data that describe, compare, and theorize the social phenomena at play. Researchers met weekly to discuss, advance, and refine analyses, as well as make decisions about whether additional data must be collected to better understand or explore emerging patterns. Additional data are collected using theoretical sampling, and the process of focused question development begins all over again. Data collection is closed at the point of “theoretical saturation,” meaning that new data no longer offer different analytic insights or variation.

Methods for Our “Closer Looks”

Springtide takes a “birds-eye view” in our annual reports in order to present as much important information about the state of young people as possible. This means presenting the data in broad strokes to offer readers a general sense of what the social trends are. But Springtide knows that important variations in the data emerge across social locations such as race, age, gender, religious affiliation, and so on. These variations have important implications for the kinds of care that young people want and need. For this reason, we frequently offer “Closer Looks” in our annual reports to see where these important variations occur.

In *The State of Religion & Young People 2022*, one of our “Closer Look” sections features highlights from a report conducted in the summer of 2021 called *The Cultural Bounds of Belonging* [link to the report]. This report focused on the experiences of Hispanic and Latino young people ages 13 to 25, using quantitative and qualitative data. Data were combined from the 2020 to 2022 waves of our nationally representative survey to create a subsample of Hispanic or Latino young people ages 13 to 25 in the United States, totaling 4,594 participants. Springtide researchers conducted 15 in-depth, 60- to 90-minute interviews for this study, following Springtide’s Interview Methodology (see above), in order to understand where, why, and how Hispanic or Latino young people experience belonging. Springtide relied on chain-referral sampling strategies and an unpaid ad on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter for recruitment. The recruitment ad invited young people to participate in a compensated study related to belonging and specified the criteria for study inclusion, which were age (13 to 25), ethnic-racial identity (Hispanic or Latino or Latinx/e), location (United States), and an interest and willingness to talk about belonging related to ethnic-racial identity. Respondents were compensated with a \$20 Visa gift card upon study completion.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include issues common to research of the nature described above, including but not limited to the continually shifting nature of demographic categories and identities relied on for sampling. For example, our non-probability sampling methods for panels rely on US Census demographic categories as noted above. However, those categories, particularly regarding race, are not always reflective of the most recent developments in identity. For this reason, Springtide constructs our own, more rigorous variables for these demographics that conform to common industry practices.

Additionally, despite multiple checks for validation and triangulation, there is always the opportunity for bias, both implicit and explicit, to influence findings. Springtide cultivates and maintains a diverse set of staff and advisors to help mitigate this risk and employs the methodologies above to reduce the opportunity for bias to influence findings.

Also, there are limitations to this study particularly regarding the findings from groups with small sample sizes. Springtide believes it is important to tell as many stories of young people as possible and notes when we are reporting sample sizes that are only directional in nature due to small sample sizes.

Last, we recognize that there are many ways to obtain truth, and relying solely on surveys, interviews, and focus groups will not provide a complete picture. While we believe the methods in this study match the research questions being asked, it is possible that additional methodologies would elicit different information.

Funding

The data collection for *The State of Religion & Young People 2022* was funded entirely by Springtide Research Institute.

Springtide Research Institute endeavors to meet industry-standard practices in research reporting, including those established by the American Association of Public Opinion Research.