

Global survey: Kids doubt God but still put trust in parents

By James D. Davis

Religion Editor

August 9, 2009

More teens in Malawi believe in ghosts than God.

Many youths in India make more money than their parents.

Nearly half of young Russians say they've tried to commit suicide.

These are just a few of the startling insights turned up by OneHope, a mission support organization in Pompano Beach. The organization, which distributes Bible portions to children, is conducting a massive survey of beliefs and behaviors of the world's 2 billion children younger than 18.

The survey results are on a new website, spiritualstateofthechildren.com, set up in observance of International Youth Day on Wednesday. Taking in 22 nations — from Armenia to Mexico to Uganda — the website includes photos, videos and documents. OneHope plans to add 38 more nations by 2011.

The goal of the study is simple, according to Chad Causey, OneHope's vice president for global ministry: Get adults to hear the young.

"You see a lot of demographic research on them, but when do you hear *from* them?" Causey says. "We want to make sure society, and especially the church within society, hears them."

With an international staff of 450 and a budget of \$27 million, OneHope specializes in translating and printing gospel portions for children in culturally sensitive formats. The organization has also produced a computer-generated video, *The GodMan*, which it has shown in 56 countries since 2005. Founded in 1987, OneHope claims to have reached 600 million young people in 125 countries.

The research that became the Spiritual State of the Children began in 2007. Rob Hoskins, president of OneHope, says he became alarmed at the wars, illness, poverty and secularism in many nations, despite intensive missionary work there.

"We didn't understand the depth and magnitude of the problem," Hoskins says. "For many people, Christianity is a cultural name they've put on themselves, but it hasn't affected their core beliefs. We haven't communicated well the all-encompassing nature of the gospel."

Using a task force of 82 professionals and 350 trained volunteers, OneHope talked to kids in secondary schools, and in focus groups as well. They asked about youths' cultural beliefs, their families and peers, their influences, their world views, how they view the opposite sex, how they spend leisure time, and how they regard faith and religion.

Many of the findings have jarred OneHope.

In Free State, in southern Africa, 21 percent have lost at least one parent, largely to AIDS. In Armenia, the first officially Christian nation, only 18 percent of children practice their own personal faith. And in Colombia, 82 percent of the kids spent less than an hour a week talking to parents about something that matters to them.

Another surprise: In Ghana and India, youths may admire their parents, but many don't want marriages like theirs.

Driving the generation gap are the Internet and other new media, the study has found.

"The most shocking thing is how fast we're seeing the divide between children and their elders," Hoskins says. "Global media speed up

everything, including the generation gap."

The work has also found religious gaps, between what teens are taught and what they actually believe.

In Ghana, 91 percent told OneHope that God created the universe, yet 68 percent weren't sure the deity even exists. And in Malawi and Swaziland, nine of 10 students say Jesus is the only way to forgiveness of sins — yet only one-third to two-thirds believe Jesus was a historical person.

"Young people can pick the correct beliefs when asked, but they don't accept them," Causey says.

Yet almost everywhere — Asia, Africa, Latin America, Pacific islands — teens told OneHope that they looked to parents as their primary influence. Not friends or TV or the Internet.

"That's both encouraging and sobering," Causey remarks. "Parents may want to give up, but their opinion matters most to kids."

James D. Davis can be reached at jdavis@Sun-Sentinel.com or 954-356-4730.

Copyright © 2009, [South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#)

<http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/broward/pompano-beach/sfl-children-survey-l080909sbaug09,0,187382,print.story>