

New study shows teenagers' significantly high suicide risk linked to their spiritual beliefs and social media experience

For Immediate Release (Lincoln, NE) —The Center for Bible Engagement at Back to the Bible in partnership with Our Daily Bread Ministries recently conducted a study to explore the correlations between religion and spirituality, social media use, and mental health among teenagers. No other published studies have addressed these issues in one comprehensive survey. The random sample included over 4700 teens, ages 14 to 17, in nine countries. Some of their significant findings were:

- In the United States and the United Kingdom, destructive thoughts, a lack of self-forgiveness and loneliness were noticeably more common compared to rates in other countries.
- Rates of "destructive thoughts" risk factor for suicidality are particularly high in the United Kingdom and the United States, affecting 1 out of 5 males and more than 1 out of 4 females. Among youth identifying as transgender or gender non-conforming, rates are even higher at 31%.
- Destructive thoughts also correlate with many spiritual beliefs. Rates of destructive thoughts are more common among teens who express that they don't believe in anything spiritual, are uncertain about their beliefs, or believe they sin, but don't believe in Jesus.
- A multivariate analysis predicting risk of destructive thoughts revealed increased risk associated with location (US or UK), gender (female or transgender/non-conforming), a lack of spiritual beliefs, uncertainty about spiritual beliefs, believing in God but without a relationship with Jesus, and experiencing negative effects of social media.
- Additional findings suggest that spiritual uncertainty or the lack of belief in a spiritual existence, combined with strong social media influence that generates negative feelings, may leave teens more vulnerable to destructive thoughts.

Arnie Cole, Director of Research and Development of The Center for Bible Engagement, says this study shows some ominous signs both parents and church leaders need to address.

"As one of the first studies to consider the relationships among spirituality, social media, and mental health, the data deepened our understanding of the inner world of today's teens," says Cole. "We also provide some beginning evidence of factors that increase or lower their risk of destructive thoughts including engaging the Bible and limiting social media usage. Our goal is to develop with our partners a suite of bible engagement/spiritual growth tools that include a teen spiritual fitness assessment that could predict self-destructive behavior ranging from suicide to homicide. Not only to predict but recommend spiritual fitness activities to prevent it."

For the complete study, visit <https://www.centerforbibleengagement.org/2023-teen-mental-health-research>. This study was made possible by donations from the Git-R-Done Foundation, the Green Family, Our Daily Bread Ministries and Back to the Bible donors.

About the Center for Bible Engagement:

The Center for Bible Engagement (CBE) began in 2003 as a research division of Back to the Bible and has become a major world center addressing Bible engagement and spiritual growth. The CBE goes beyond simply usage statistics to consider attitudes and behaviors that significantly impact spiritual growth and a person's relationship with God. Our passion is developing methods, tools, and resources that will engage people with the Bible and fuel life transformation. Since 2,005, the CBE has surveyed more than 750,000 people around the world about their spiritual lives and that number continues to grow each year. The CBE has partnered with churches and para church organizations such as Our Daily Bread, the Nazarene Denomination, Charlotte Awake, American Bible Society, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, the Jamaica Broilers Foundation, McLean Bible Church, Hope Media, Light FM-Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, National Religious Broadcasters, African Strategic Discipleship Movement, Engage Art, International Care Ministries among others in order to build an empirical understanding of life transformation through a relationship with Christ and engaging scripture. For more information visit centerforbibleengagement.org.

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