



Australian spirituality and wellbeing

2020 Australian Community Survey
Run by NCLS Research

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About Australian Community Surveys

Run by NCLS Research

NCLS Research aims to provide a picture of social attitudes, religion, spirituality, and wellbeing in Australian communities.

The ACS has been run by NCLS Research and partners in 1998, 2002, 2009, 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

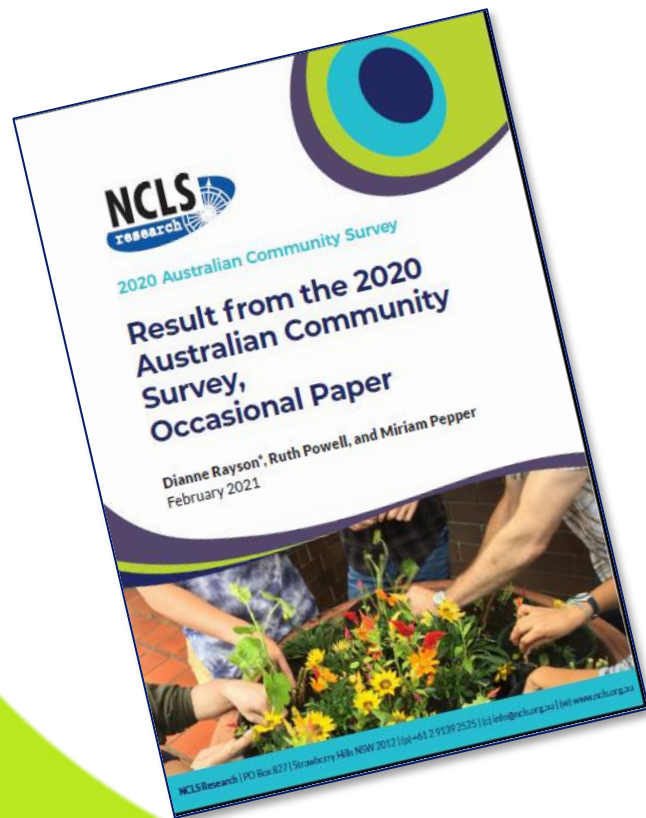
Goals

1. To compare the attitudes of church attenders and the wider community on a range of social issues;
2. To track religiosity trends over time, including religious beliefs, practices and experience;
3. To evaluate how the Australian community views the role of churches in society.



2020 Australian Community Survey

Two reports



This first report from the 2020 ACS provides:

1. A religious and spiritual profile of Australians,
2. Australian wellbeing, stress and support
3. Links between spirituality and wellbeing

A second report covers church engagement in the community

Methodology



The Australian Community Survey is an online survey.

Sample drawn from large online research panel of Australians.

Survey distributed by Online Research Unit (ORU) who meets ISO 20252 and ISO 26362 standards for both market research and panel work.

The Australian sample of around 1,300 persons is representative of the adult population on age, gender and location.

Dataset weighted to reflect the demographic profile of the Australian population aged 18+ on age, gender and education, (according to the 2016 Census).



Part 1: A religious and spiritual profile of Australians



Religious affiliation

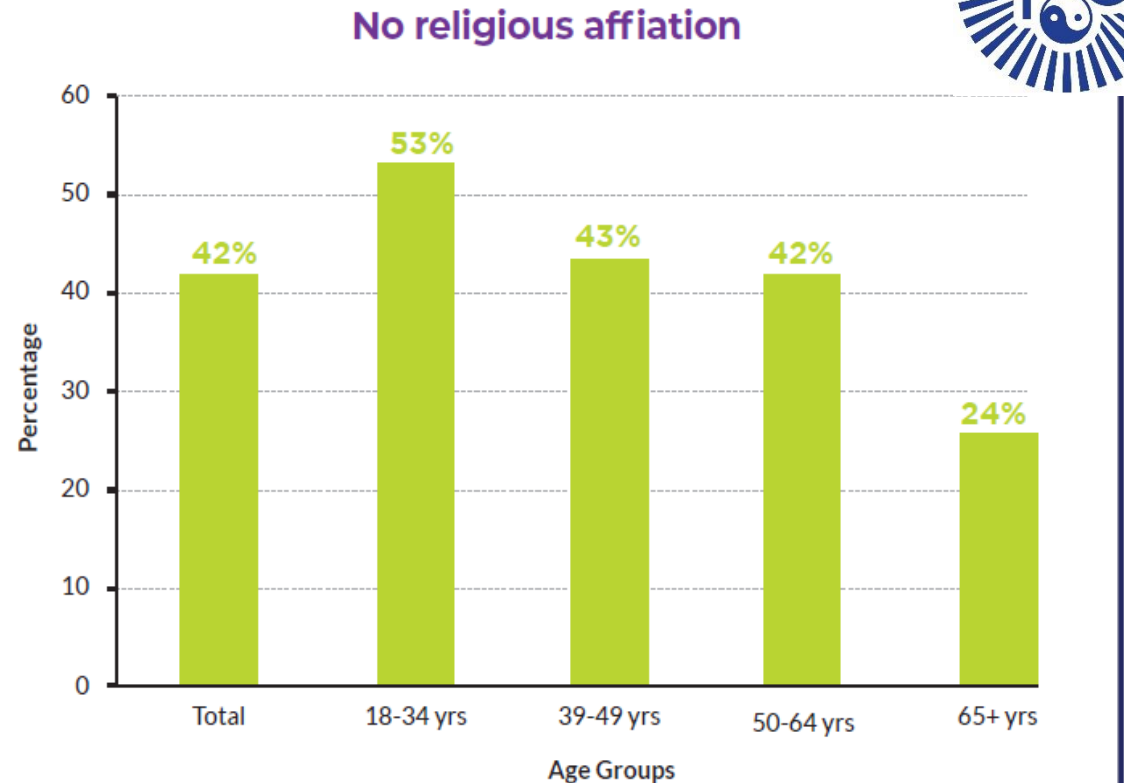
2020 ACS

More than half of young adults have no religious affiliation

2016 Census: Around half of all Australians aged 18+ identified as Christian (53%, including 22% Catholic). 29% chose 'no religion'.



Figure: No religious affiliation by age group



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



Religious belief

Half believe in God, or a higher power.

Around a quarter don't know.

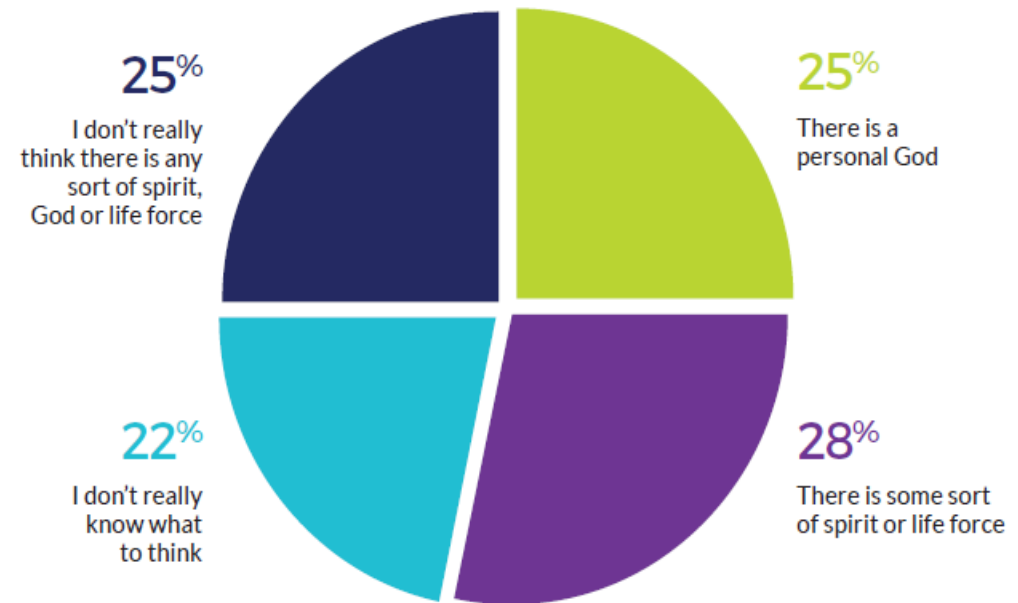
A quarter do not believe

NB. A quarter of those with no religious affiliation believe in God or a life force and a quarter are unsure.



Figure: Belief about God

Which of these statements comes closest to your belief about God?



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)

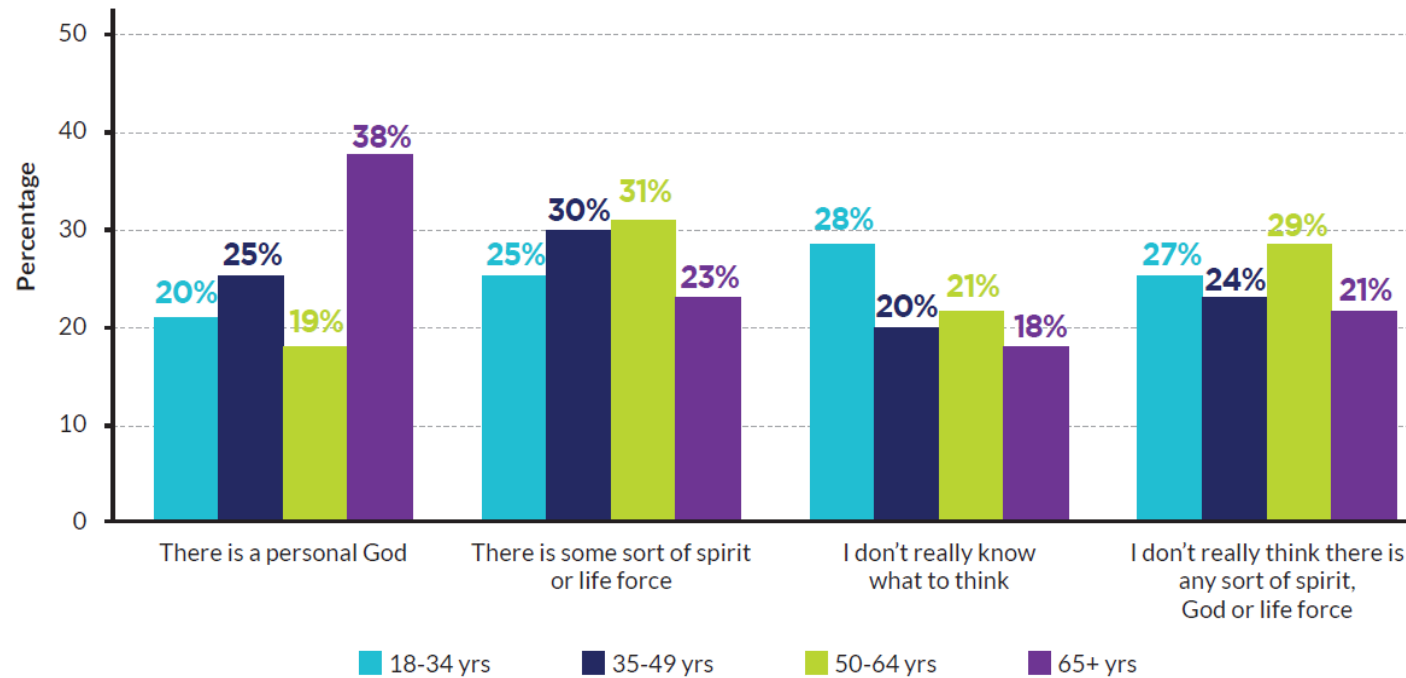


Religious belief and age



Figure: Belief about God by age group

Which of these statements comes closest to your belief about God?



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



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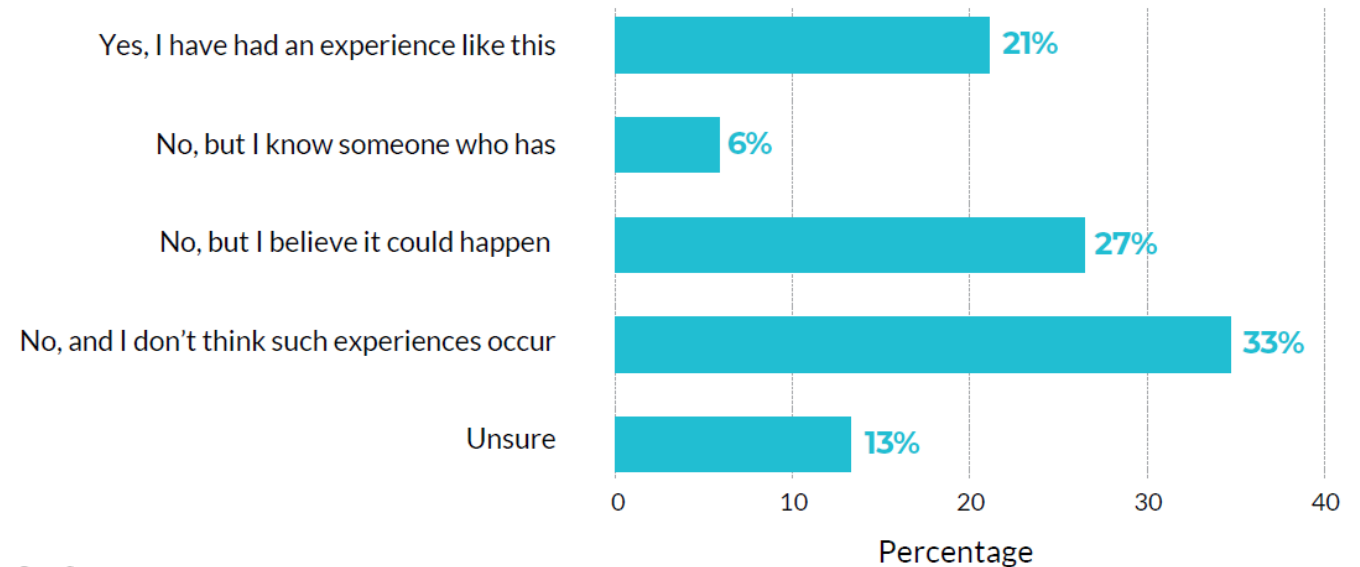
Mystical and supernatural experiences



Around half of Australians have had such an experience, know someone who had, or believe it possible.

Figure: Mystical or supernatural experiences

Have you ever had a mystical or supernatural experience, either positive or negative, about which you have no doubts it was real?



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



Mystical & supernatural experiences by age



Table: Mystical or supernatural experiences by age group

Have you ever had a mystical or supernatural experience, either positive or negative, about which you have no doubts it was real?

	Yes, I have had an experience like this	No, but I know someone who has	No, but I believe it could happen	No, and I don't think such experiences occur	Unsure
	%	%	%	%	%
Female	26	5	29	27	13
Male	15	7	25	39	13
Overall	21	6	27	33	13



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



Prayer and meditation

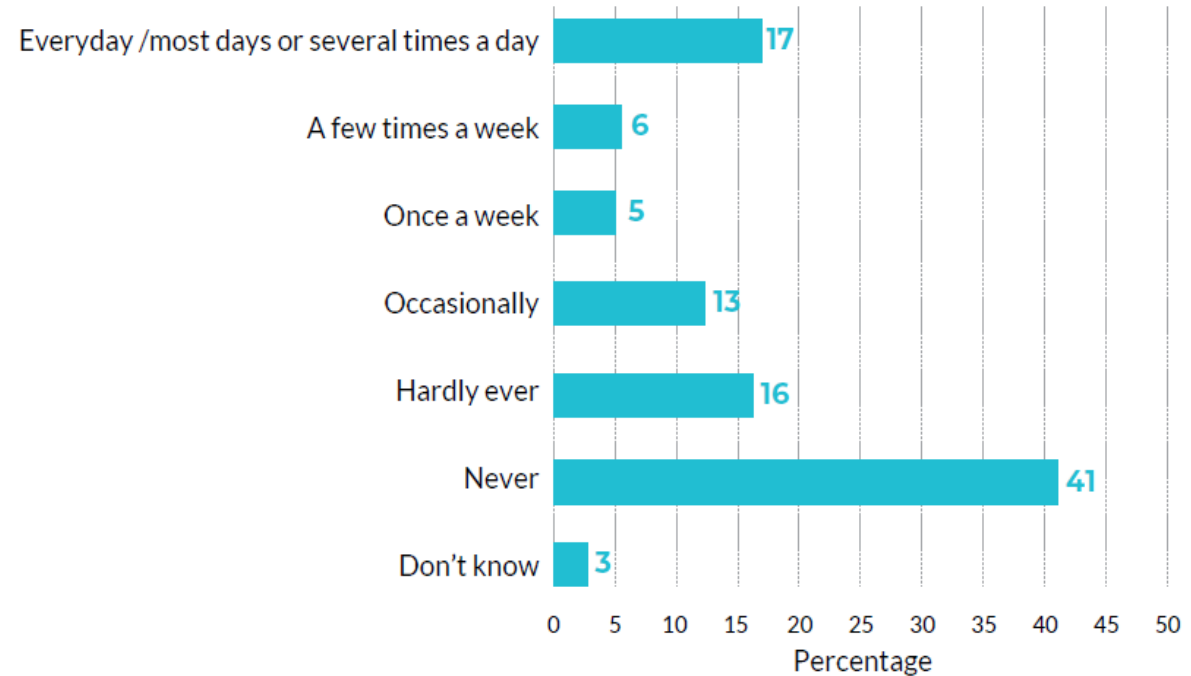


Many
Australians pray
or meditate.

28% do so at
least once a
week.

Figure: Private religious practices - prayer or meditation

How often do you pray or meditate?



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey
run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)

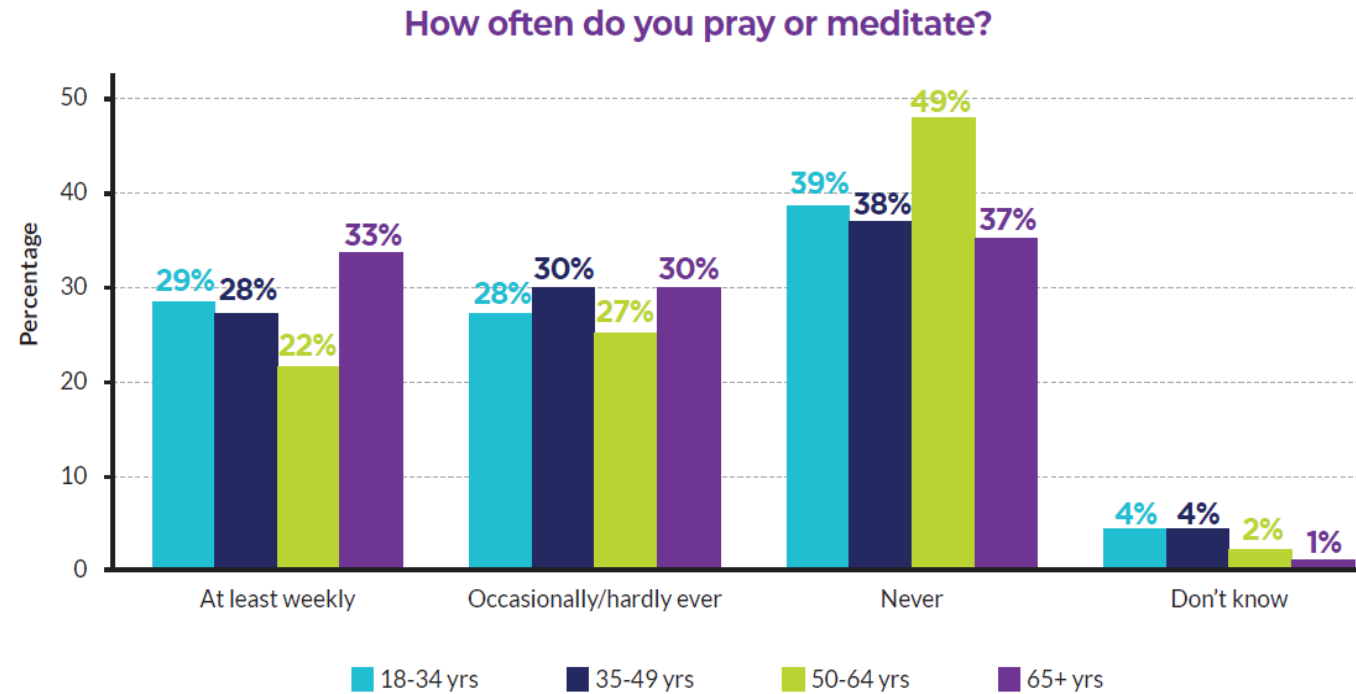


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Prayer and meditation by age

Figure: Private religious practices - prayer or meditation by age group



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



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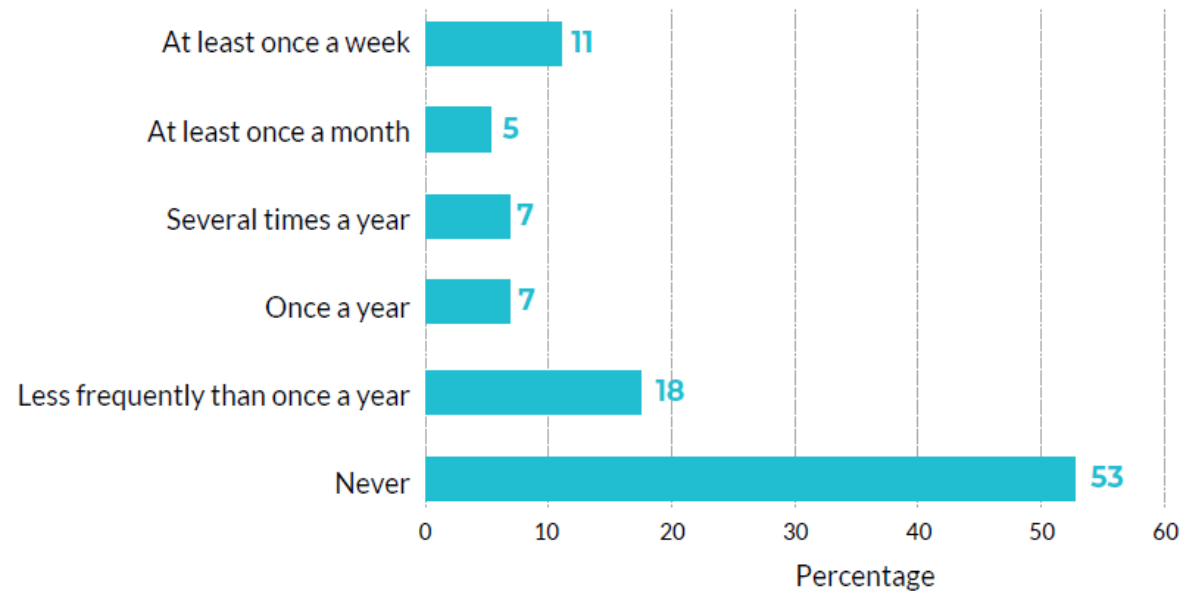
Religious service attendance



16% of Australians attended religious services weekly or monthly during 2020

Figure: Self-reported frequency of religious service attendance

Apart from such special occasions as weddings, funerals, etc., how often do you attend religious services?



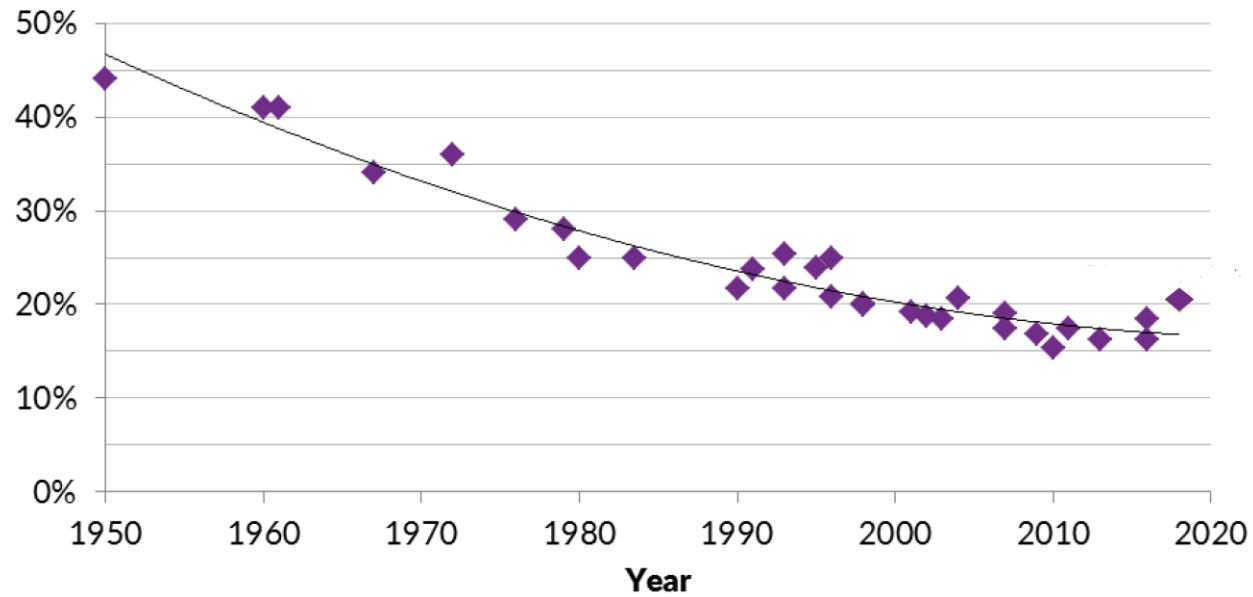
Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



Religious service attendance over time

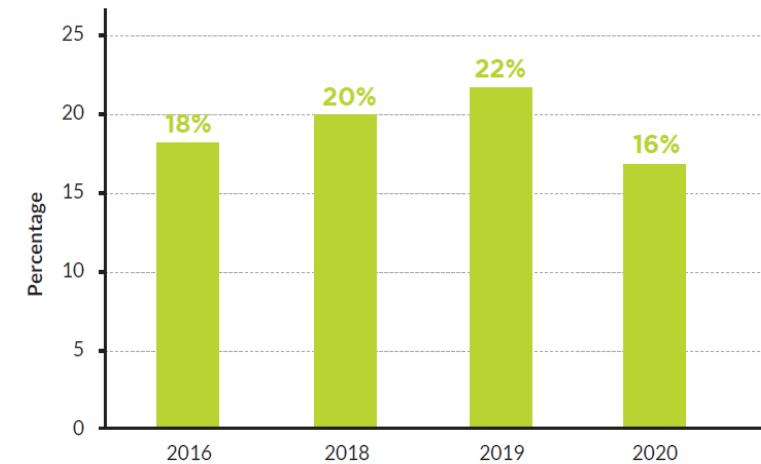


Figure: Self-reported monthly religious service attendance since 1950



Source: Various sample surveys of the Australian population, 1950-2018

Figure: Frequent religious service attendance over time: 2016 to 2020



Source: Australian Community Surveys run by NCLS Research: 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



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Religious service attendance by age



Table: Self-reported frequency of religious service attendance by age

	18-34 yrs	35-49 yrs	50-64 yrs	65+ yrs	Overall
	%	%	%	%	%
Frequent (at least monthly)	17	17	10	21	16
Infrequent (less than monthly)	35	34	24	30	31
Never	48	49	66	49	53



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey
run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



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Online religious service attendance in 2020



During COVID-19, religious service attendance changed as people gathered in online forums.

The 2020 ACS asked "Since March have you attended online religious services?"

No – 80%

Yes – 17%

Weddings, funerals and baptisms online - 3%

Age differences

~ 19% of each age group had tried online religious services, except those aged 50 to 64 years (only 9% went online).

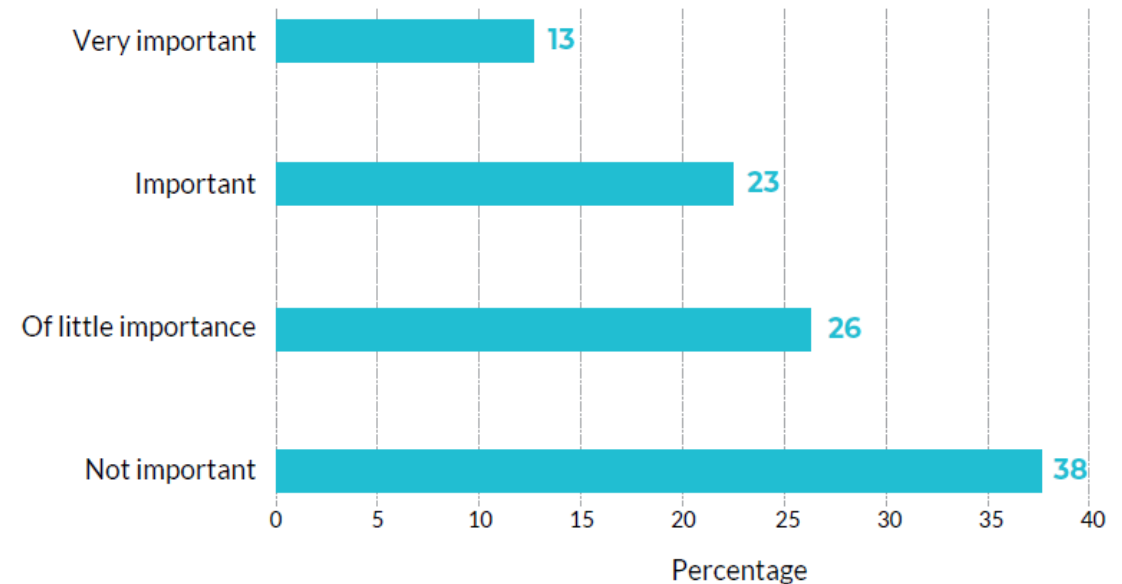
Importance of faith for life decisions



36% of Australians say religious faith or spirituality is important in shaping life decisions.

Figure: The importance of religious faith or spirituality in life's decisions

How important is religious faith or spirituality in shaping your life's decisions, such as career, relationships and lifestyle?



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



Importance of faith for decisions by age



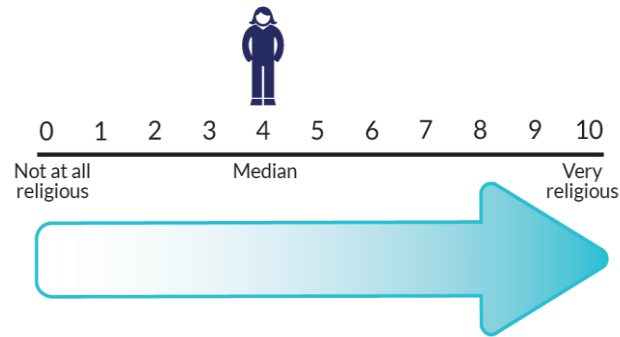
Figure: The importance of religious faith or spirituality in life's decisions by age

	Very important	Important	Of little importance	Not important
	%	%	%	%
18-34 years	10	20	30	40
35-49 years	11	28	25	36
50-64 years	10	20	23	46
65+ years	21	26	23	30
Total	13	23	26	38



Self perceptions. Religious? Spiritual?

To what extent do you see yourself as a religious person?



To what extent do you see yourself as a spiritual person?

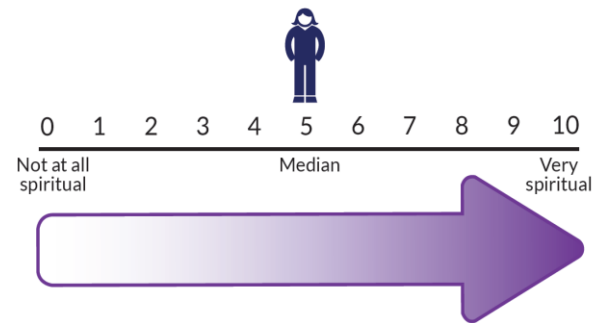
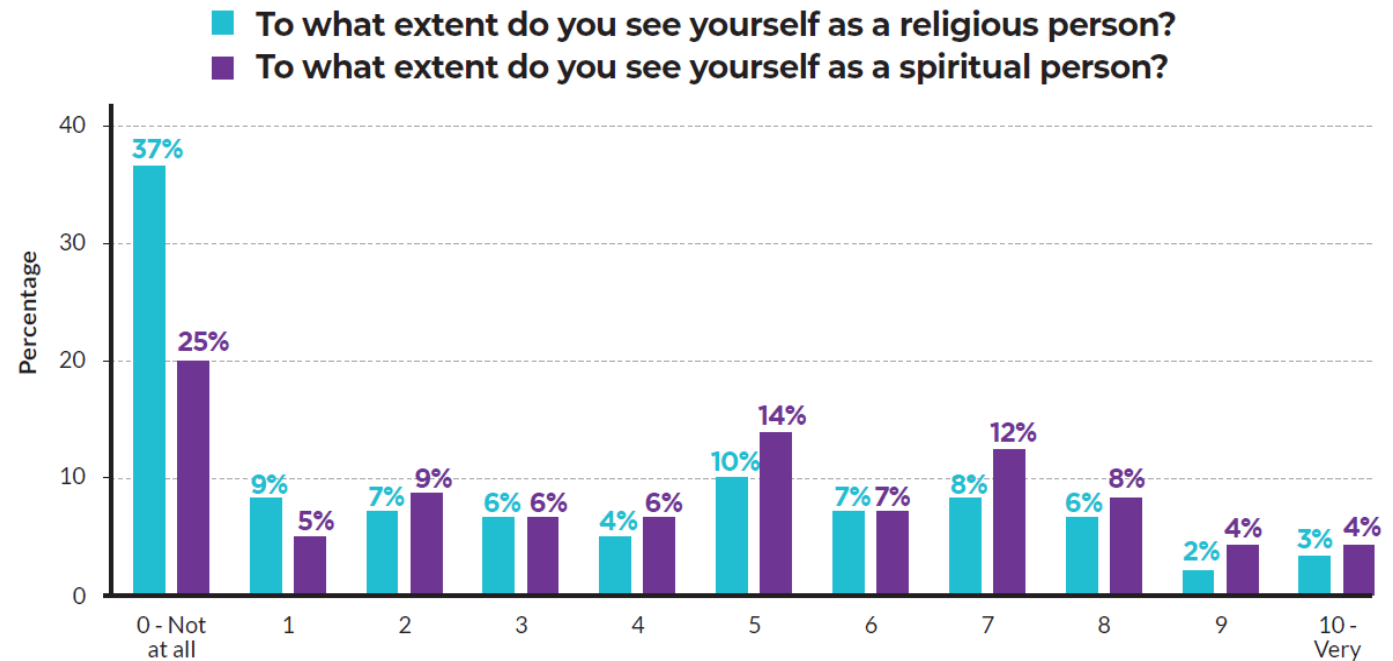


Figure: Religious and spiritual self-perceptions



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



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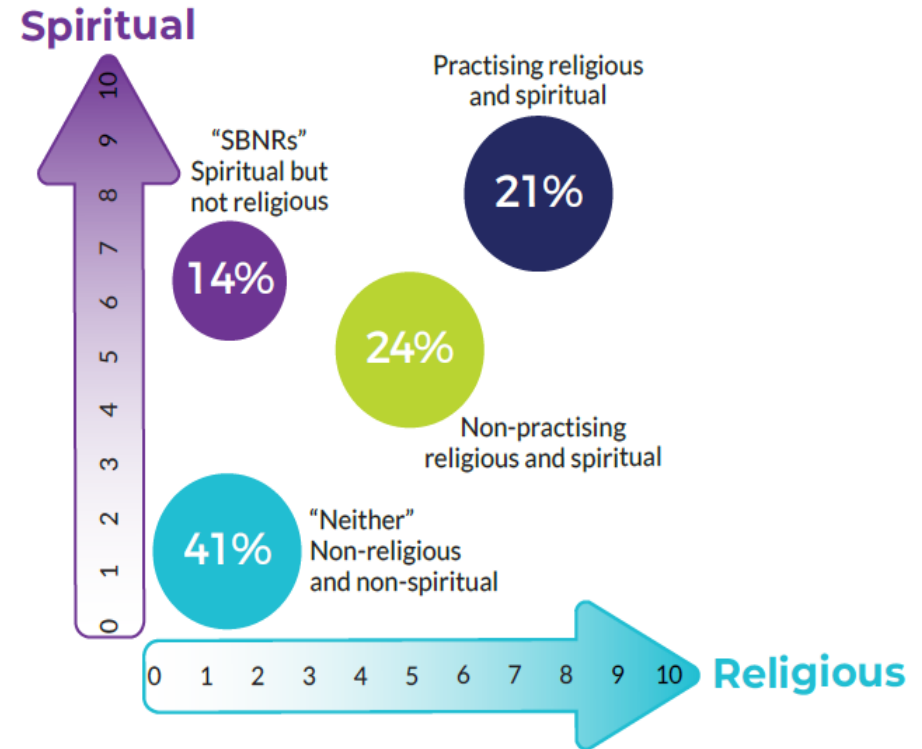


Four clusters of Australians

1. 'Religious and Spiritual'
 - people who are practising
2. 'Moderately religious and spiritual' – non-practising
3. 'Spiritual but not religious', and
4. 'Neither religious nor spiritual'.

*Based on cluster analysis and indicative of four general approaches to religion and spirituality in Australia.

Figure: Religious and spiritual self-perceptions: four clusters



Part 2: Australian wellbeing, stress and support



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey
run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



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Satisfaction with life

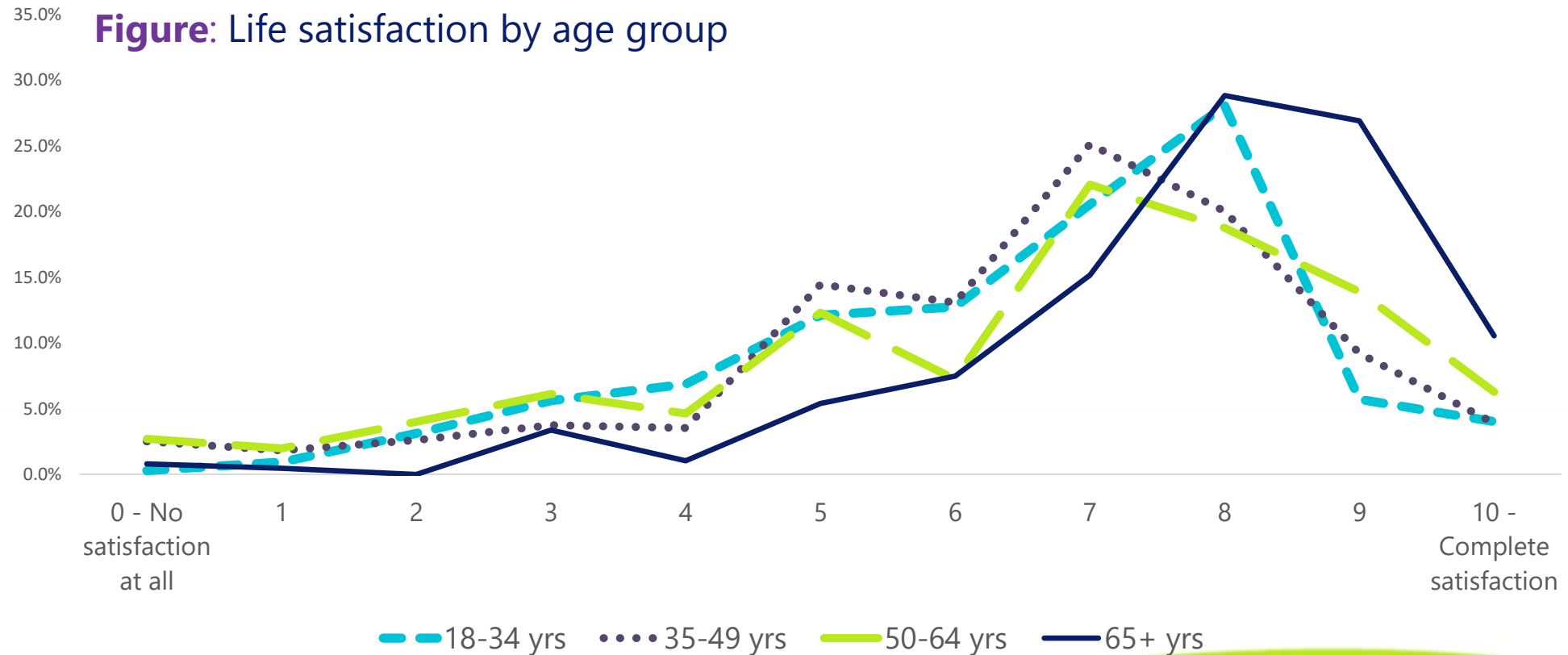


Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole?

Australians are generally satisfied with life

86% scored 5 or higher out of 10 overall

Figure: Life satisfaction by age group



Levels of stress by age

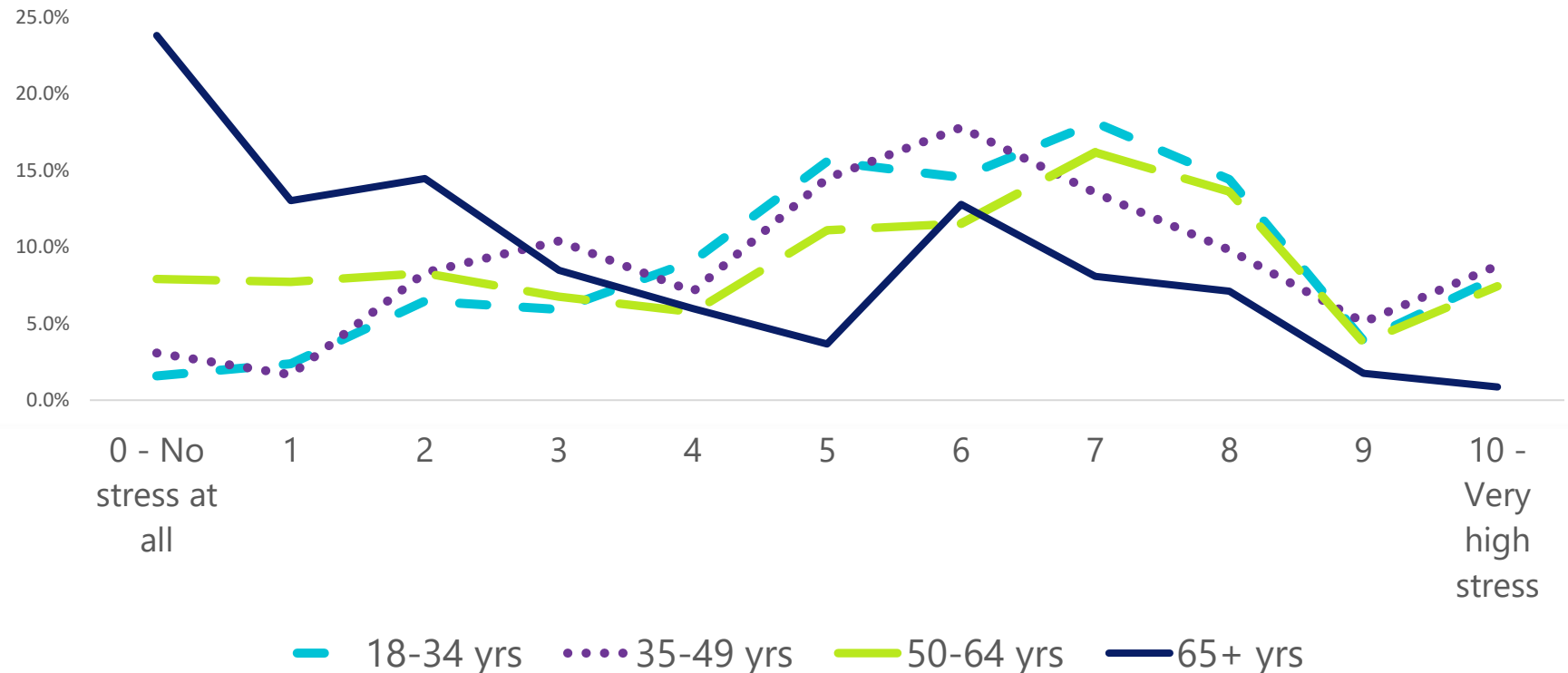
On a scale of 0 to 10, how stressed have you felt in the past month?



Half of
Australians are
moderately
stressed.

Older people were
generally less stressed

Figure: Levels of stress by age group



Sources of stress for Australians

Thinking about the past month (Oct-Nov 2020), have any of the following caused high levels of stress for you or your household?

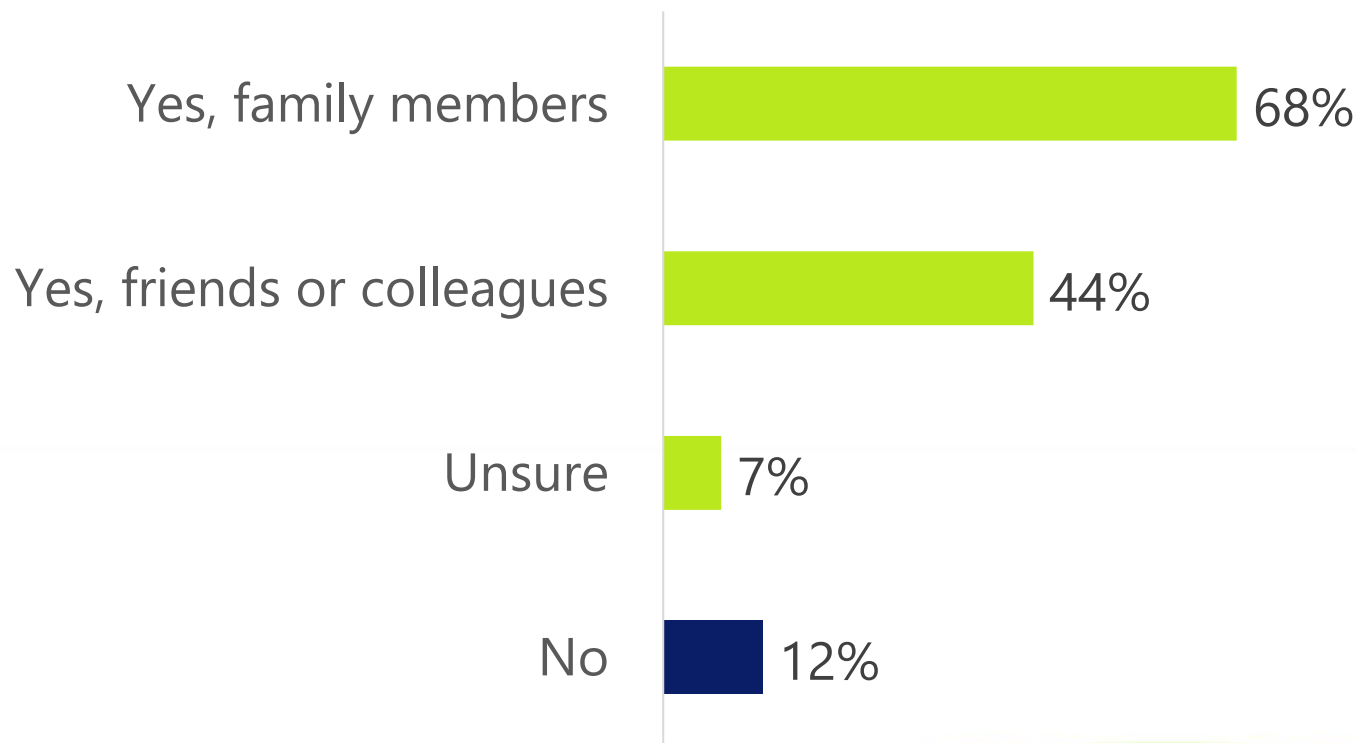
Family relationships	22%
Impact of isolation and social distancing	22%
Safety of self, close family members or friends, due to COVID-19	21%
Possible or actual loss of household income	19%
Being able to access basic needs and services	8%
Children's education	7%
Other	10%
None of the above	38%

Sources of support for Australians

Do you have someone you can call on for help or support?

Most Australians had someone to call on for support.

Figure: Sources of support



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)

Part 3: Links between spirituality and wellbeing



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey
run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



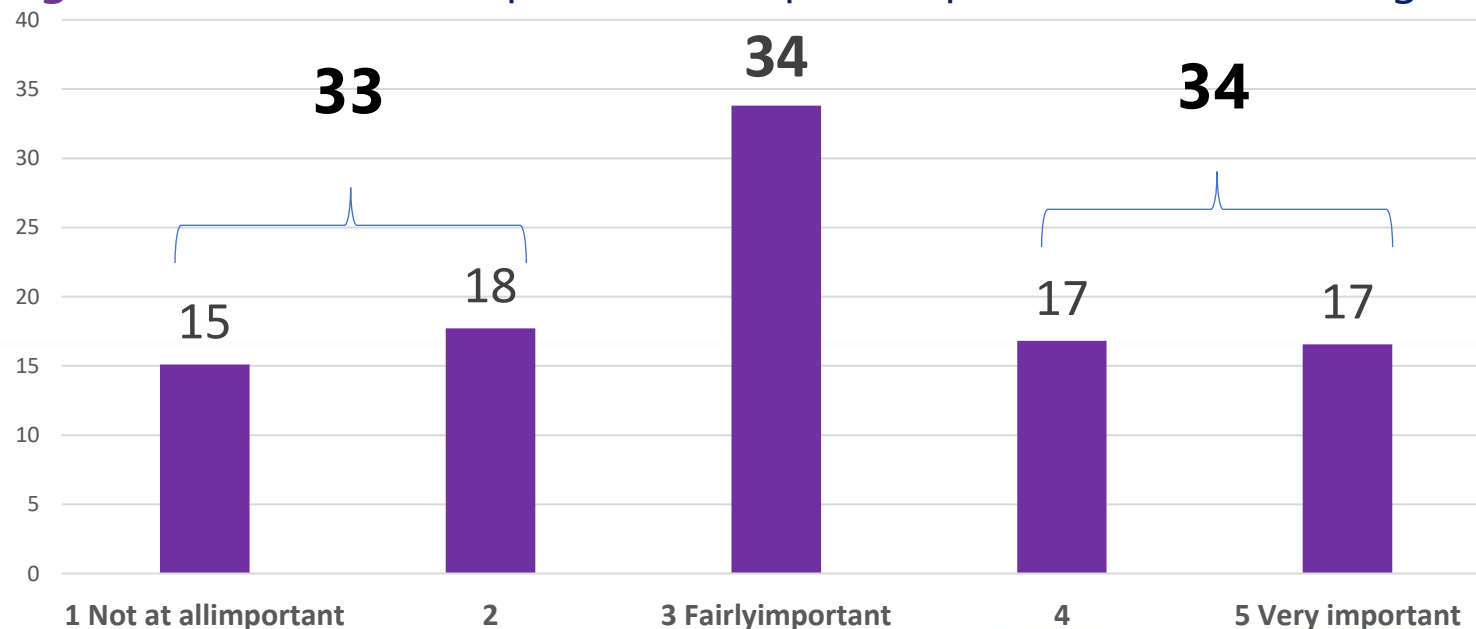
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Spiritual practices in context of crisis

In the context of this year's crises (including bushfires and the global COVID-19 pandemic), how important do you think spiritual practices are to support people's wellbeing?

Two-thirds thought spiritual practices have been important during the bushfires and COVID crises.

Figure 16: Perceived importance of spiritual practices for wellbeing



Spiritual practices that appeal

Whether or not you have used them, which, if any, of these spiritual practices appeal to you?

Table: Spiritual practices that appeal

Spending time in nature or outdoors	57%
Listening to music that moves me or lifts my spirits	47%
Prayer, meditation or mindfulness practices	32%
Attending religious services (or services of worship)	16%
Religious or spiritual reading	13%
Watching or listening to religious/spiritual talks, clips, podcasts etc	10%
Attending small groups for spiritual or social support	9%
Other spiritual practice (please specify)	2%
None of the above	23%

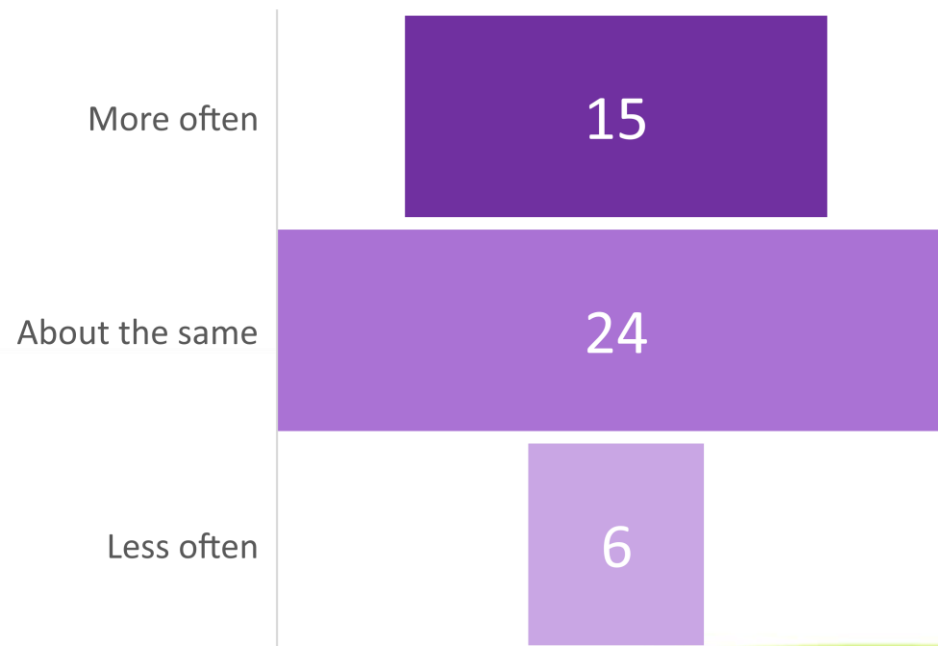
Spiritual practices in 2020 vs 2019

In 2020, have you personally drawn on any spiritual practices? If so, have you done this more often, less often or the same as in 2019?

Figure: Drew on spiritual practices in 2020



Figure : More or less than 2019



Invitations to church

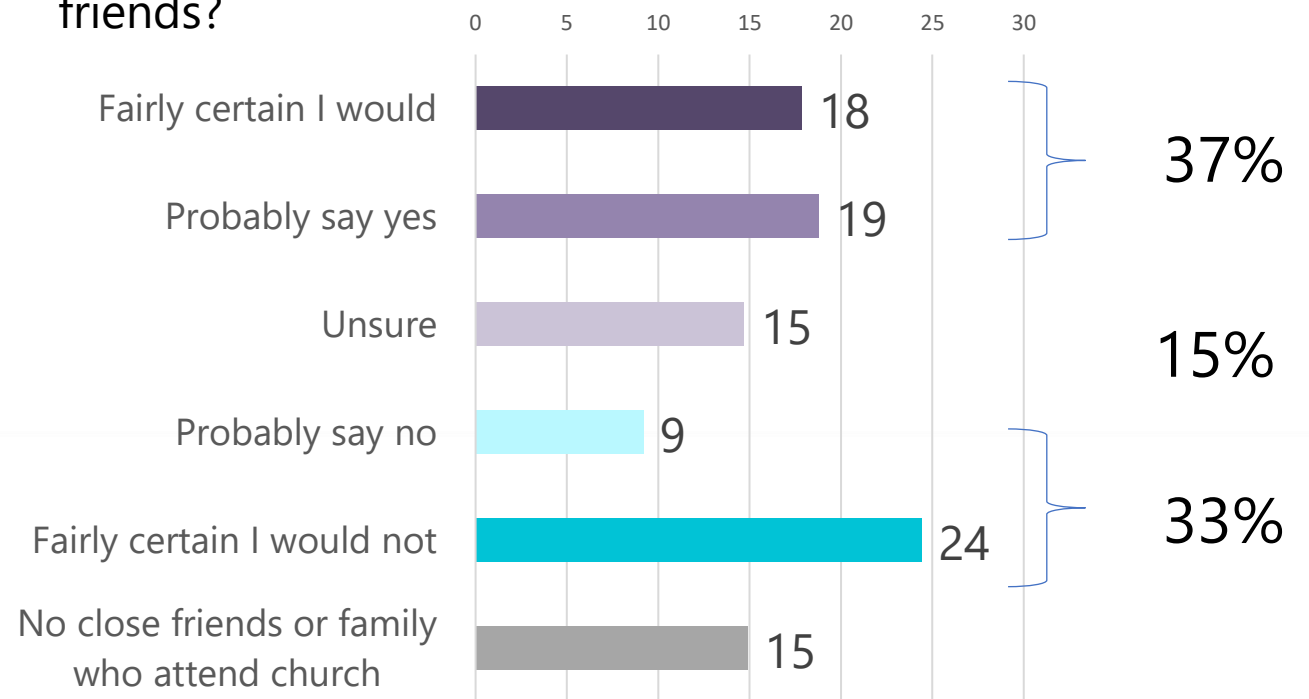
***Would Australians go to church if invited by close friends and family?
(Nov 2020)***

37% say 'yes'

15% are not sure

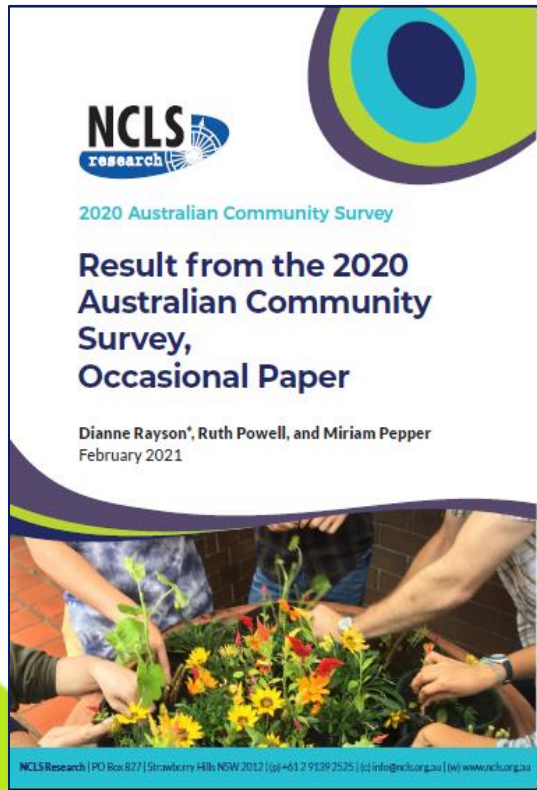
33% say 'no'

Figure: Would you go to church, if invited by family or friends?

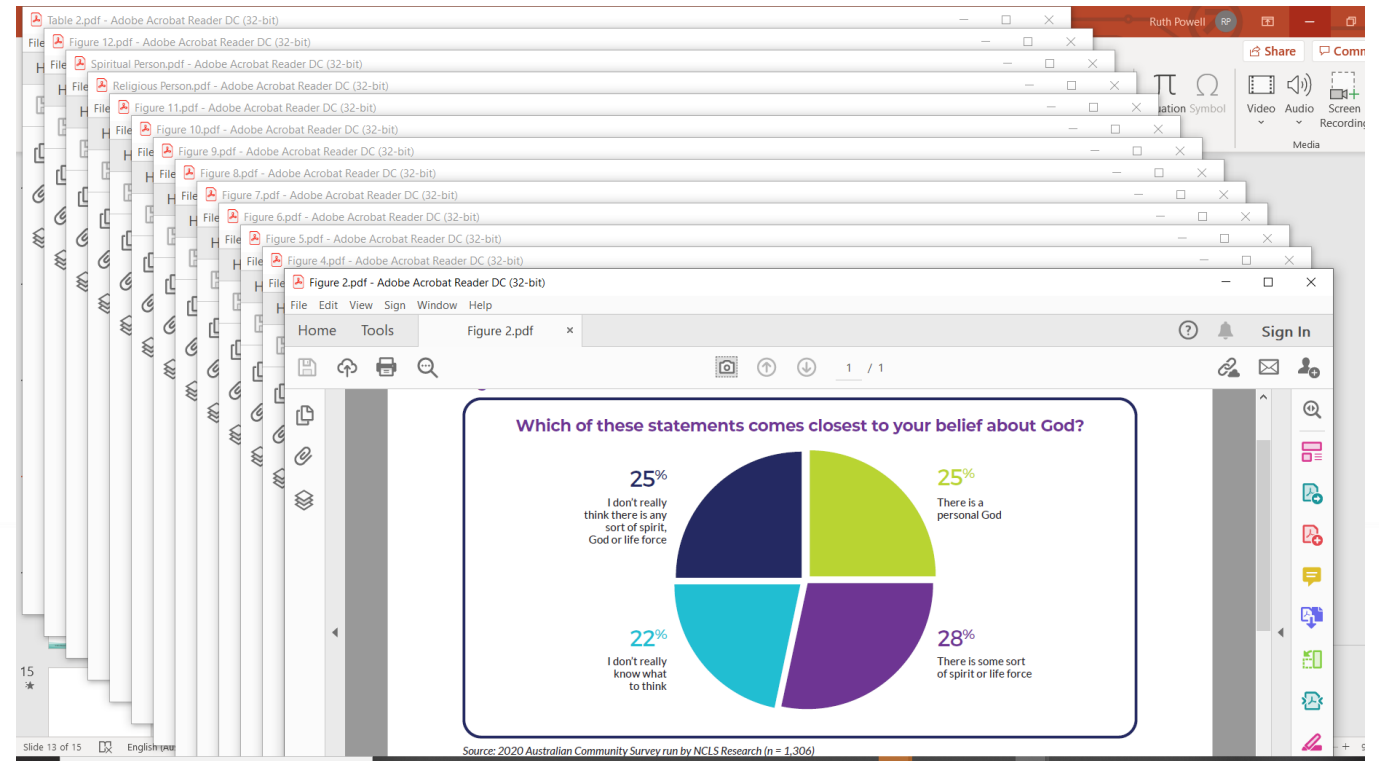


Other Resources

Full reports from 2020 ACS



Individual charts for use in other settings



Source: 2020 Australian Community Survey run by NCLS Research (n = 1,306)



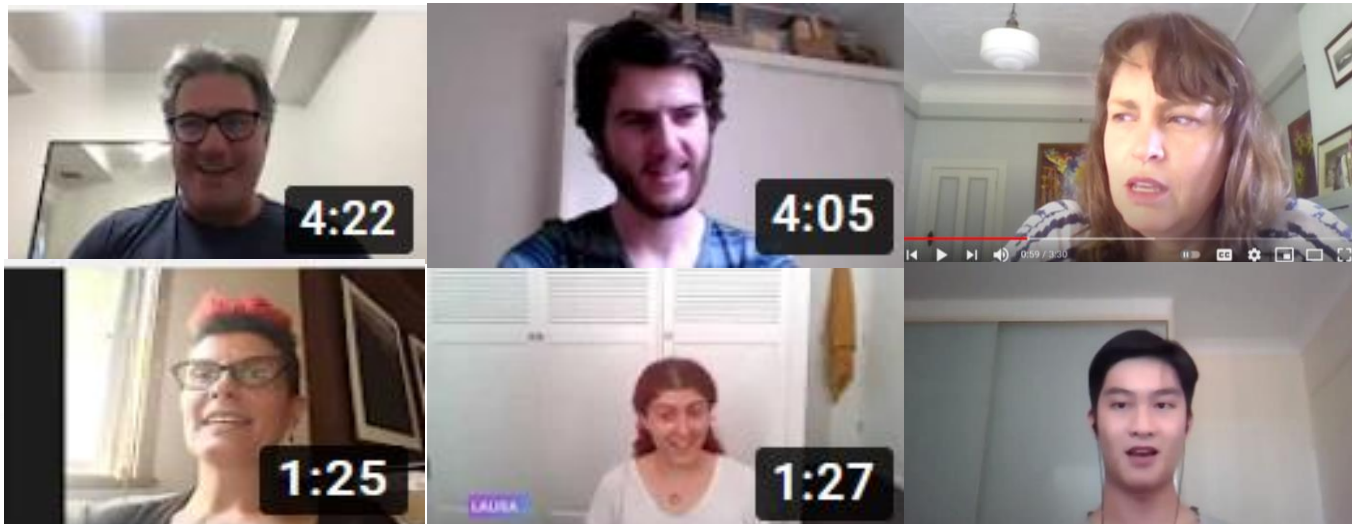
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Community Vox Pop Video Resources

Simple Zoom videos with 6 Australians who do not attend church

Short format ~ 1 to 2 mins

Long format ~ 5 mins



Christian and Church- What comes to mind?

Spiritual Practices- are they important and what types appeal most?

Would you go to church if invited?

NCLS Research - 2020 Australian Community Survey playlist

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbVaclELzmrhqkeJNnGQ9yg2mzreSGemD>

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Powell, R. (2021). *Australian spirituality and wellbeing: 2020 Australian Community Survey*. Presentation. March 2021. Sydney, Australia: NCLS Research.

Data Sources:

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