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Current Volume

Volumes

Articles

Special Collections

General Information

About the Journal

Information for Authors

Copyright Information

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The Malawi Religion Project: Data collection and selected analyses

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Abstract

Scholars have recently become increasingly interested in the role religion plays in the responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. Here, we present the Malawi Religion Project (MRP), which provides data to examine the relationship between religion and HIV/AIDS through surveys and in-depth interviews with denominational leaders, congregational leaders and congregation members in three districts of rural Malawi. In the paper, we outline existing perspectives on the religion-HIV/AIDS link describe the MRP's design, implementation and subsequent data; provide initial evidence for a series of general research hypotheses; and describe how these data can be used both to extend explorations of these relationships further and as a model for gathering similar data in other contexts. In particular we highlight the unique possibilities this project provides for analyses that link MRP data to the Malawi Diffusion and Ideational Change Project. These linked data produce a multi-level data set covering individuals, congregations and their communities allowing empirical research on religion, HIV/AIDS risk, related behaviors, attitudes and norms.

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