

What do Australians do in bed 4.6 times a week?



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Read books for pleasure. 10.5 million Australians spend 85 million hours reading 33 million books a week for pleasure. They spend on average more than eight hours a week reading and refer to an average of 3.4 books each. Reading in bed is the most characteristic situation, and more popular among females, those under 45 years, those with tertiary education, and higher socio-economic status. Holidays are a further typical reading for pleasure situation for working people and surprisingly few people read books travelling to and from work.

These are just some of the key findings of the ACNielsen telephone survey research focussing on reading of books for pleasure by those over 18 years undertaken in June this year for the Books Alive! project. The research findings will inform further activities of Books Alive! aimed at seeing the group of people market researchers describe as 'reluctant or lapsed' readers buying, borrowing and reading more books; reading and literacy valued by all Australians; more kids reading and more adults sharing books with their children.

Of those who had read in the previous week, thirty-four per cent of books were bought new or second hand or as gifts and forty-five per cent borrowed — mostly from libraries (twenty per cent), ten per cent were received as a gift and nineteen per cent had been in the house for a long time.

The main challenges to reading more are time pressures of work, children and studies. Those people who were busy with their work and family life showed a particular desire for increased involvement in reading for their own pleasure. Parents' attitudes count — three out of four parents had read to their children in the preceding week, while parents who do not like reading were much less likely to read to their children than those who liked reading.

Frequent readers (sixty-seven per cent) are more likely to be females (seventy-four per cent), over 65 years (seventy-four per cent), tertiary educated, and of upper socio-economic status (seventy-two per cent), love reading and have lots of books at home. Non-readers are more likely to be male, under thirty years, not highly educated, of lower socio-economic status, and living in a rural area. They tend to have fewer books in the home, and most do not enjoy reading.

Frequent library use for borrowing books for pleasure shows a strong bias to those over 65, but library use

is well below average among those aged between 30 and 44, and in rural locations. This is consistent with other library use research. Those who really like reading tend to have more books in their home, and be library members. Fifty-seven per cent of all Australians are members of a public library. One in three of these had not been to a library in the previous six months. Library borrowing is stable — one in four library borrowers reduced their borrowing activity over the last twelve months, and one in four increased their borrowing. While the main reasons for reduced borrowing were the lack of time and pressures of work, family and study, specific barriers or disincentives were dissatisfaction with the books available, a preference for new books, and the lack of access to a library. Among those who borrowed books for pleasure in the preceding month the average number of books borrowed was eight. Fifty-six per cent found it easy to find a suitable book, fifteen per cent very easy, while twenty-six per cent found it hard or very hard. Fifty-eight per cent of library members rated the range of books available as good or very good. Only three out of ten parents of young children had borrowed books for pleasure for their child in the preceding month, whereas three out of four parents with children under thirteen years stated that their child used the school library as a source of leisure reading.

This is only a snapshot of the valuable data gathered through this survey and qualitative research conducted prior to the survey. Over the next few months the reference group will analyse ACNielsen's full report and develop a detailed action plan.

Books Alive! is administered by the Australia Council and is part of the Book Industry Assistance Plan, a \$240 million package funded by the Federal Government over four years. The overriding goal of Books Alive! is to promote the intrinsic value of books, reading and literacy (particularly for children) and the books of Australian writers. The reference group includes representatives from library, publisher, author, bookseller and literacy representative bodies and government. The research report is available from the Australia Council website <http://www.ozco.gov.au>, by calling 02 9215 9189 or e-mail m.joel@ozco.gov.au.

United States terrorist attacks

Following the tragic events of 11 September in the United States the American Library Association (ALA) expressed its condolences and deepest sympathies to the families and friends of those affected and urged the public to access information at libraries of all kinds in the days ahead. ALA president John W Berry said librarians can assist the public by providing free information and information services. The Association is also stressing the important role libraries can play in building respect for and understanding of cultural diversity within the community. ■

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about *your* Association? Contact any director below on personal issues and ideas will be reviewed at each meeting of the Board.

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