

# Library Usage in Northern Ireland: Who, what, why and when?

*February 2009*



Findings from the 2007/2008  
Continuous Household Survey

DCAL Survey Findings 2/ 2009

## Executive Summary

- Five percent of those surveyed go to a public library at least once a week. Seventeen percent go to a public library at least monthly. Twenty-seven percent go to a public library at least once every 12 months (see Table 1).
- For respondents who had been to a library in the last year the most popular reason for going was to borrow, renew or return a book (77%) (see Figure 3).
- The large majority of respondents who had visited a library were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with their last visit (91%) (see Table 2).
- Thirty-three percent of respondents who had not used the public library in the last 12 months said they did not use it because they weren't really interested, while 24% said they buy or get bought all the books they need (see Figure 4).
- Ninety-five percent of respondents have never used the public library website while 2% use it at least once a month (see page 8).
- While nothing would encourage 59% of respondents to use the public library service more often, 12% of respondents said they would use it more if they had more free time (see Figure 5). The same percentage said they would use the service more often if there was a better selection of books.
- When asked directly thirteen percent of respondents said they would use the Public Library Service more if opening hours were extended (see Table 3). Over a quarter of users/ visitors (28%) said they would use the public library service more if opening hours were extended.
- Fifty-four percent of all respondents were either very (14%) or fairly satisfied (40%) with library provision in Northern Ireland (see Figure 8).

## Introduction

Libraries are a part of the cultural infrastructure and make a valuable contribution to society. The Public Library Service is a resource open to all, providing opportunities to develop knowledge and skills. It can inspire creativity and is a place for social interaction and personal enjoyment.

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) is responsible for the Public Library Service in Northern Ireland, both in developing policy and providing funding via the Education and Library Boards. DCAL's vision is 'a flexible and responsive library service which provides a dynamic focal point in the community and assists people to fulfil their potential'. DCAL aims to develop the library service by improving the provision of stock and facilities available and also the buildings that the libraries inhabit.

DCAL places questions related to the Public Library Service annually in the Continuous Household Survey (CHS). The data derived from the CHS is used for various purposes: to monitor DCAL's Public Service Agreement targets, provide data to Libraries Branch to help inform policy making, for equality monitoring and contributing to Northern Ireland wide strategies.

The Continuous Household Survey is a Northern Ireland wide household survey administered by Central Survey Unit, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The sample consists of 4,500 addresses randomly selected from the Land and Property Services Valuation List and is stratified by region to ensure proportional representation: Belfast District Council, East of the Province and West of the Province. There were 3,414 respondents to the 2007/2008 survey. Respondents are aged 16+.

### Questions

Following consultation with DCAL Libraries Branch new questions related to libraries were placed on the CHS in 2007/08. All questions relating to libraries are listed below (questions and answer categories are in Appendix A):

#### New wording

- How often do you go to a Public Library (including mobile libraries)? (this does NOT include school, college, or university libraries)

#### New questions

- Why do you go to the public library (again does NOT include school, college or university libraries)?
- Thinking about the last time you visited or used the public library service, how satisfied were you with your visit?
- May I just check, how often if ever, do you use the public library service website ([www.ni-libraries.net](http://www.ni-libraries.net))? (Ask all)
- What would encourage you to use the public library service more often?
- Would you be more likely to make more use of the public library service if libraries' opening hours were extended?

#### Questions included previously

- Could you please tell me the reasons why you do not use/you have not used the Public Library Service in the past 12 months? (Asked only of those who had not been to a Public Library in the last year)
- Overall, how satisfied are you with library provision in Northern Ireland?

## Results for Library Questions

### How often do you go to a Public Library (including mobile libraries)?

Five percent of respondents go to a public library at least once a week. Seventeen percent go to a public library at least monthly. Twenty-seven percent go to a public library at least once every 12 months. (See Table 1)

**Table 1: How often do you go to a Public Library?**

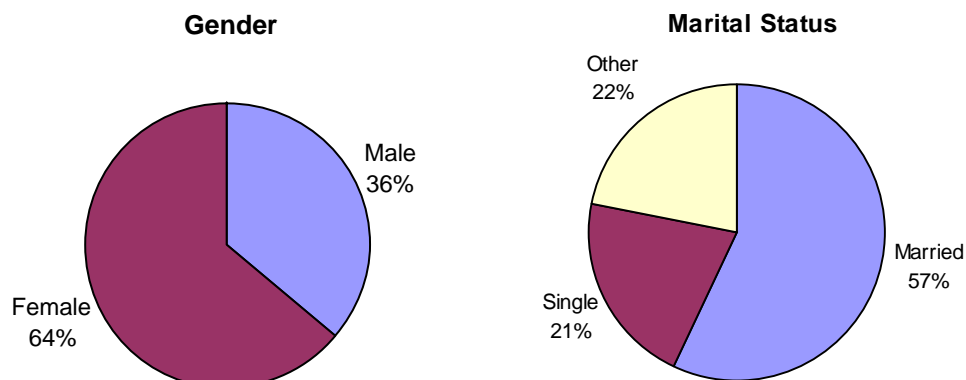
	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Several times a week	42	1.2	1.2
Once a week	145	4.2	5.4
Once every 2-3 weeks	179	5.2	10.6
Monthly	208	6.1	17.7
Once every 2-3 months	156	4.6	22.3
Once every 4-6 months	110	3.2	15.5
Once every 12 months	94	2.8	27.3
Less frequently	223	6.5	33.8
Never	2253	66.0	99.8
Missing	4	0.1	99.9
TOTAL	3414	100.0	

This compares to 40% in 2003/04, 37% in 2004/05, 37% in 2005/06 and 35% in 2006/07. These results show a downwards trend, with the latest figure being the lowest in the last 5 years.

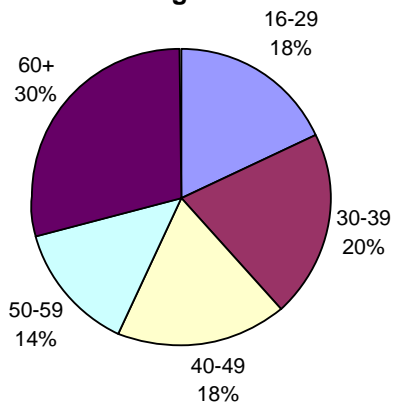
### Breakdown of Library Visitors

The 934 library respondents in the sample who had been to a library in the last year were made up as follows:

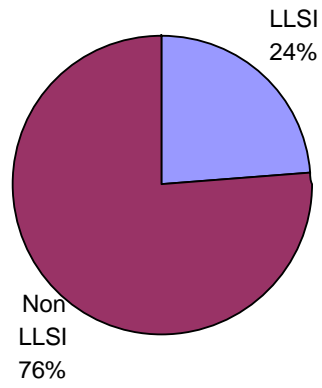
**Figure 1: Breakdown of Library visitors by socio-economic characteristics**



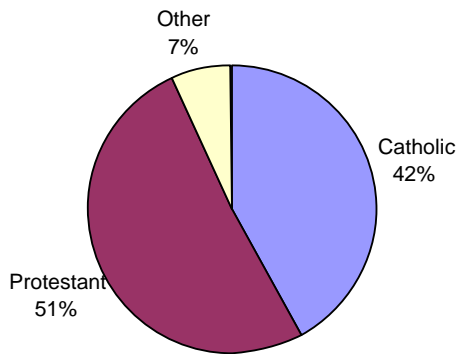
**Age**



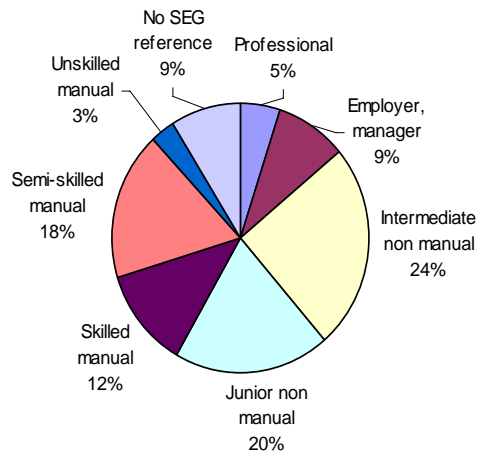
**Limiting Long Standing Illness**



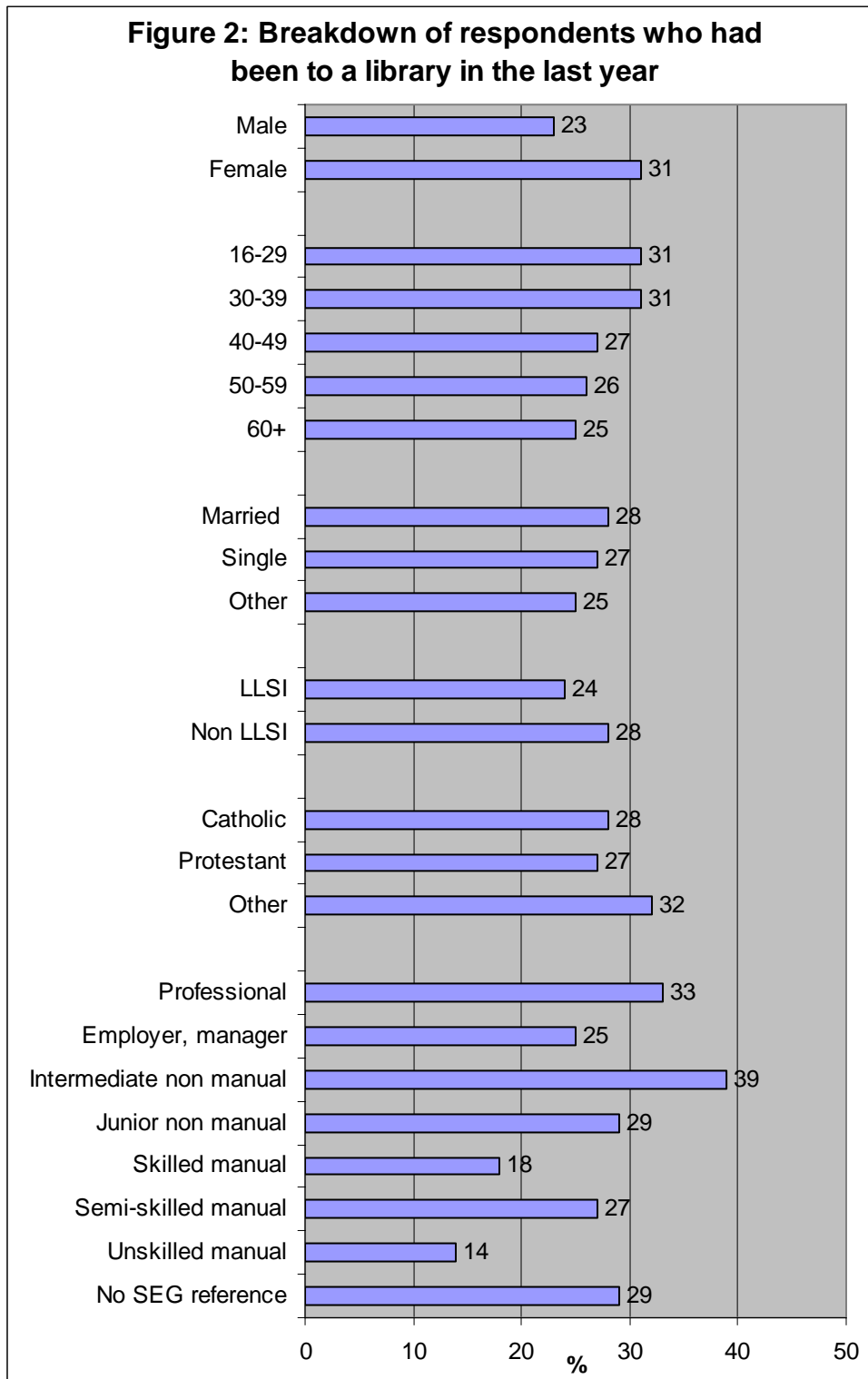
**Religion**



**Socio-economic group**



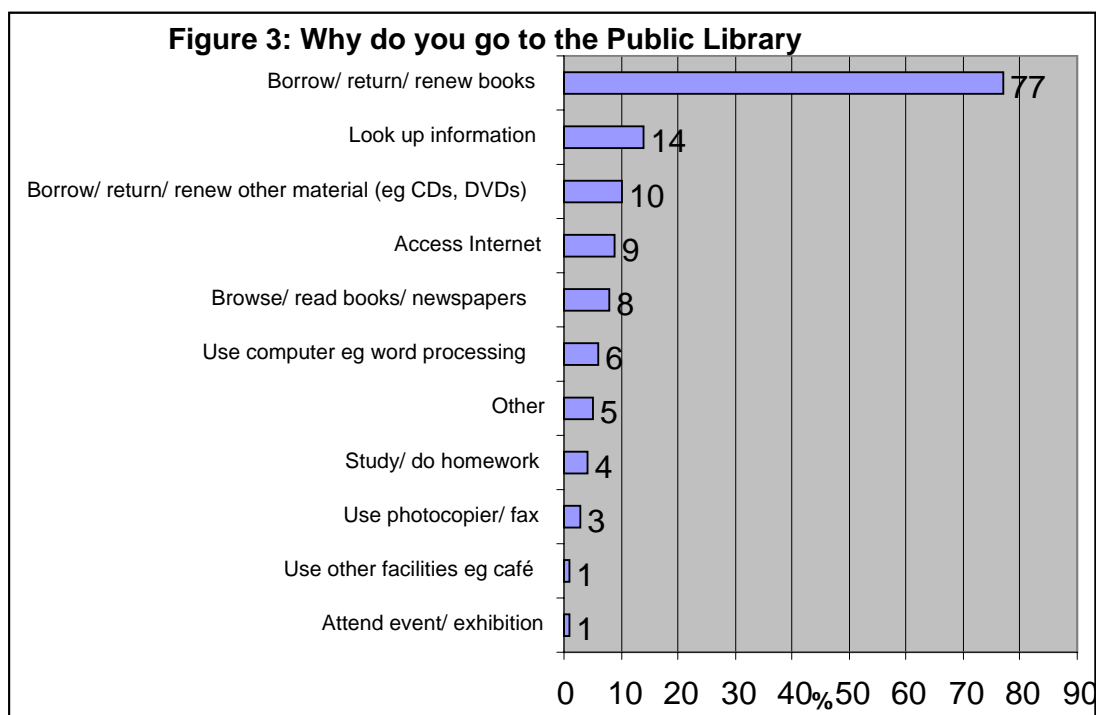
Overall, 27% of respondents went to a public library at least once every 12 months, (i.e. had been in the last year). This percentage varied according to different socio-economic characteristics (Figure 2).



## Reasons for going to a Public Library

Respondents who had ever been to a public library were asked why they went to it:

- By far the most popular reason for going to a public library was to borrow, renew or return books (77%) (See Figure 3)
- Fourteen percent had been to the library to look up information
- Ten percent had been to the library to borrow, renew or return material other than books, eg. DVDs or CDs.



## Satisfaction with last visit

Respondents who had been to a library were asked to think about the last time they visited or used the Public Library Service and how satisfied they were with their visit. Of the 1157 respondents who said they had been to a library, 91% were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied. (See Table 2)

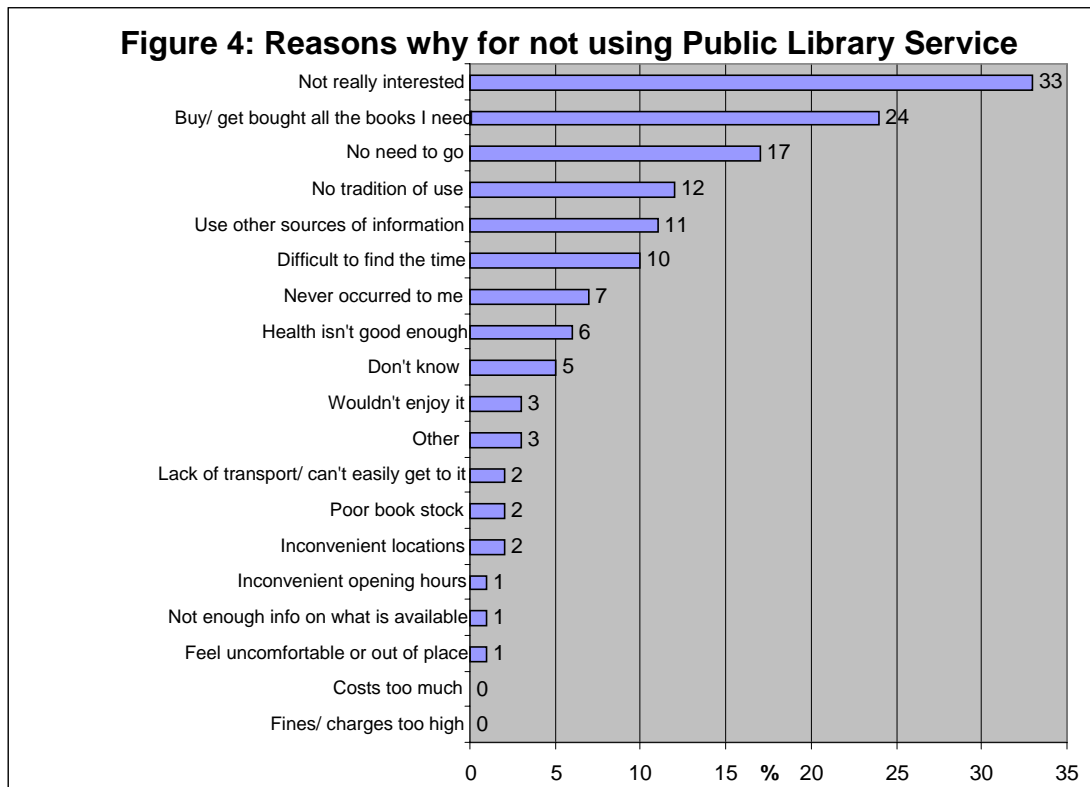
**Table 2: Satisfaction with last visit**

	Frequency	Percent
Very satisfied	521	45.0
Fairly satisfied	537	46.4
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	62	5.4
Fairly dissatisfied	29	2.5
Very dissatisfied	6	0.5
Missing	2	0.2
TOTAL	1157	

## Reasons for not using public libraries

Those surveyed who had not used the public library in the last 12 months were asked why they had not used it. The top three responses given were:

- Thirty-three percent said they weren't really interested (see Figure 4),
- Twenty-four percent of these respondents said that they buy or get bought all the books they need
- Seventeen percent said that they have no need to go.

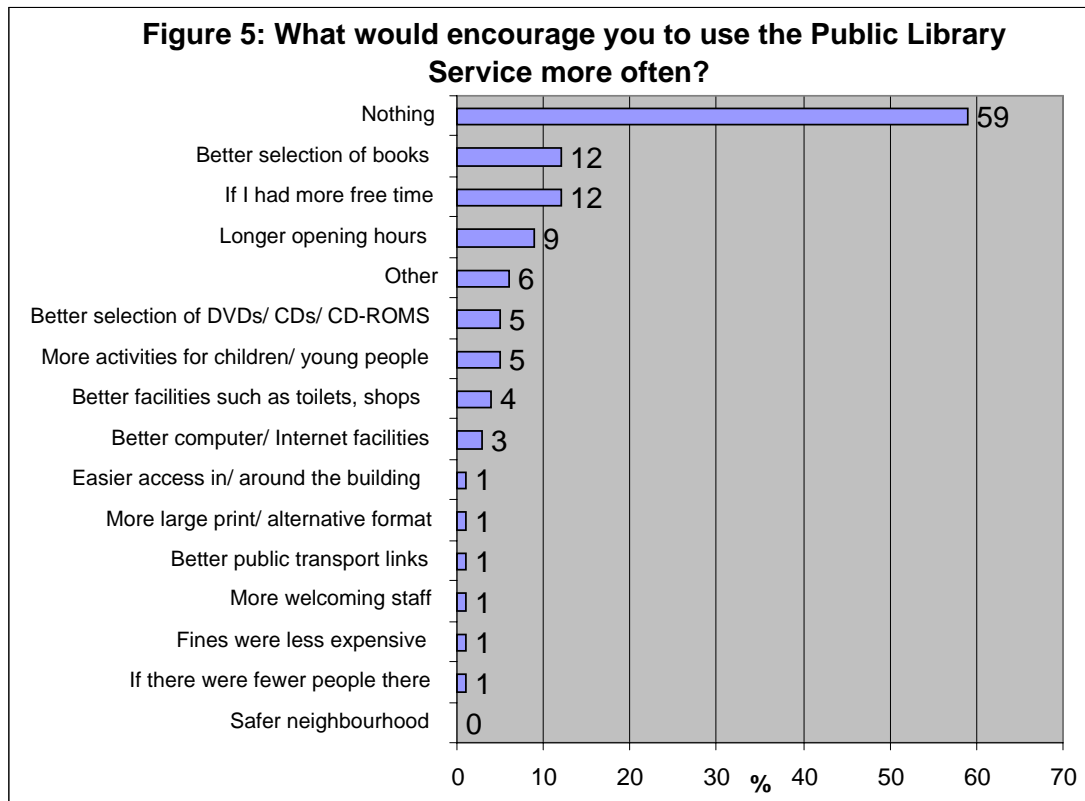


## Public Library Service Website

Those surveyed were asked how often, if ever, they used the public libraries' website ([www.ni-libraries.net](http://www.ni-libraries.net)).

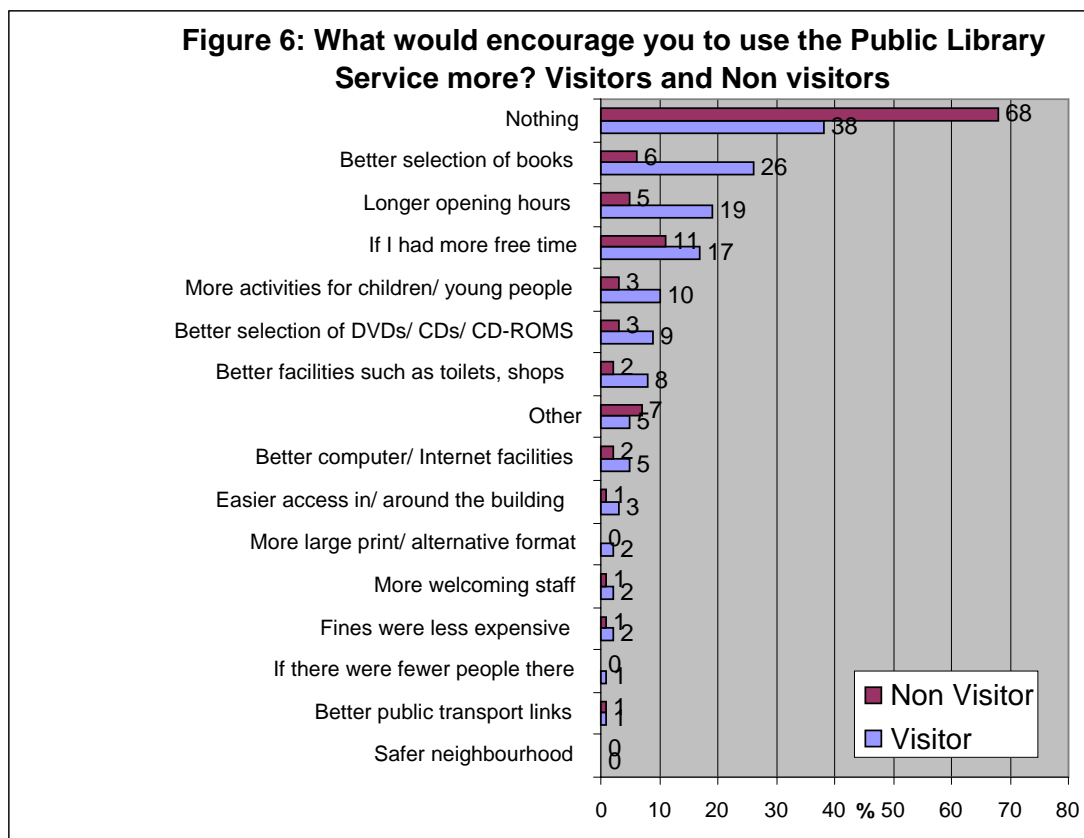
- One percent of respondents use the website at least once a week,
- Two percent use it at least once a month,
- Four percent use it at least once every 12 months,
- Ninety-five percent have never used the public library website.

## What would encourage you to use the Public Library Service more often?



All respondents were asked what would encourage them to use the Public Library Service more often. Fifty-nine percent of those surveyed said that nothing would encourage them (see Figure 5). Having more time would encourage 12% to use the service more often, while the same percentage said a better selection of books would encourage them. Longer opening hours would encourage 9% of respondents to use the Public Library Service more often.

It is possible that the views of visitors (defined as someone who had used the Public Library Service in the last year) and non-visitors differ so both groups were analysed to see what would emerge.



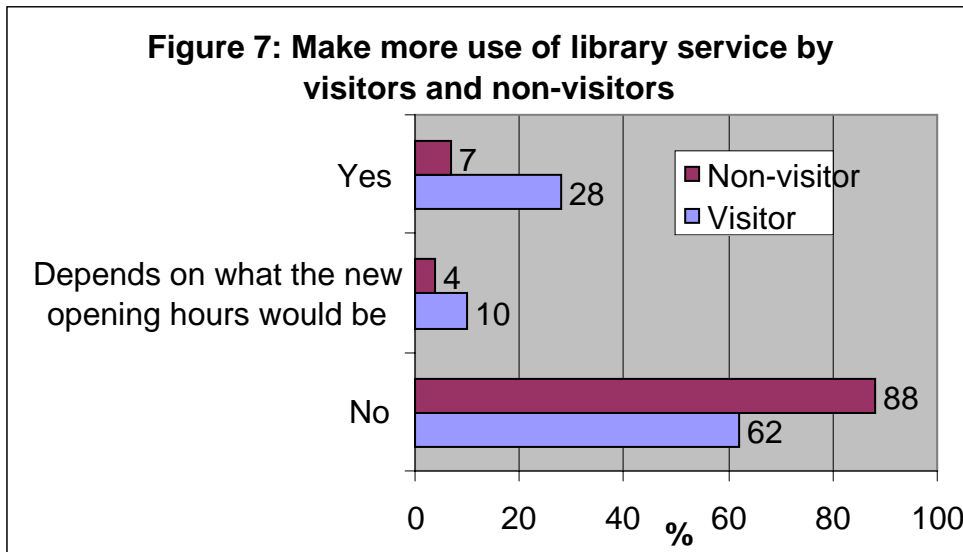
There were differences between those who had visited or not visited a public library in the last year. Looking at the most common responses, 68% of respondents who had not visited a public library in the last year said nothing would encourage them to use the Public Library Service more, in comparison to 38% of respondents who had visited in the last year (see Figure 6). A higher percentage of visitors stated that a better selection of books and longer opening hours would encourage them to make more use of the Public Library Service than non-visitors.

### Extend opening hours

When asked if they would make more use of the public library service if opening hours were extended, thirteen percent of respondents said that they would be more likely to make more use of the Public Library Service if libraries' opening hours were extended. Six percent of respondents said that it would depend on what the new opening hours were, while for 81% of respondents extended opening hours would not make them increase their use of the library service (see Table 3).

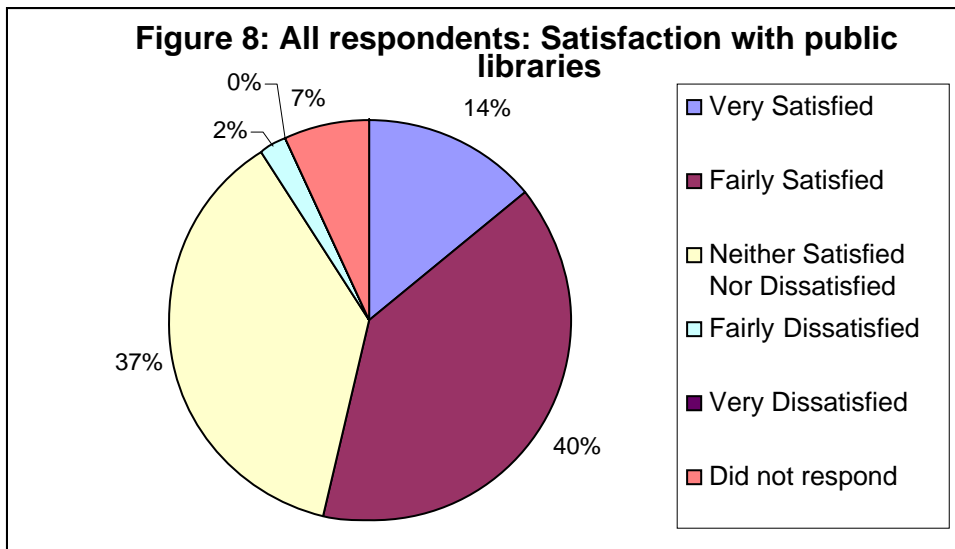
**Table 3: Would you make more use of Public Library Service if library opening hours were extended?**

Yes	437	12.8
Depends on what the new opening hours would be	197	5.8
No	2763	80.9
Missing	17	0.5
TOTAL	3414	100.0



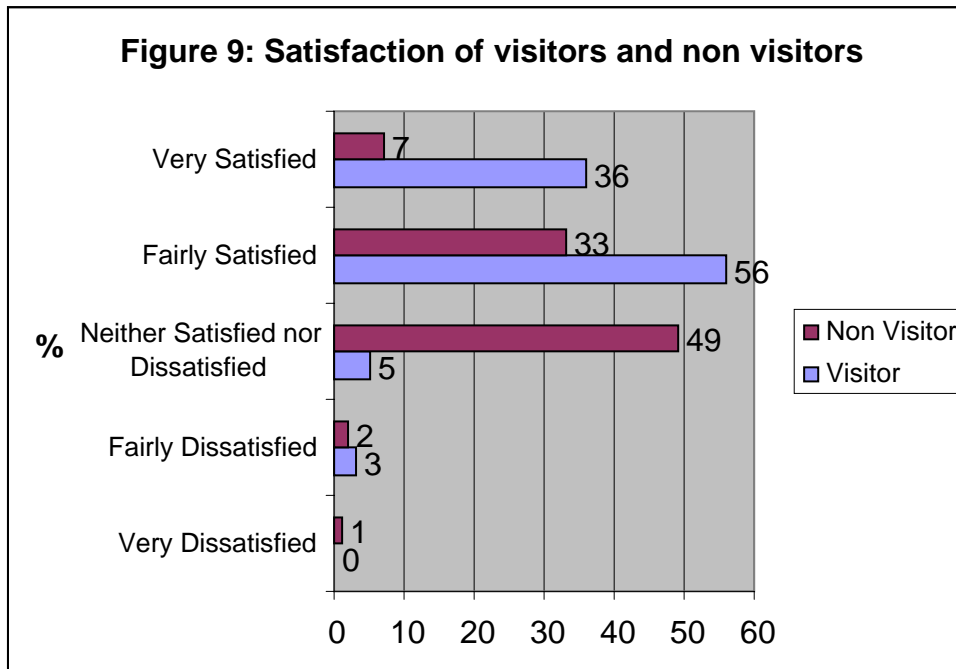
The views of visitors and non-visitors were compared. It is interesting to note that visitors were more likely to say that they would make more use of the library service if opening hours were extended (see Figure 5). Twenty-eight percent of visitors said they would make more use of the library service if opening hours were extended while 7% of non-visitors said they would make more use of the library service.

### Satisfaction with library provision



Those surveyed were asked overall how satisfied they were with library provision in Northern Ireland. Fifty-four percent of respondents were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with public library provision in Northern Ireland (See Figure 8).

Again specific analysis of visitors and non-visitors shows a difference in respondents' level of satisfaction.



Ninety-two percent of respondents who had been to a library in the last year were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied (see Figure 9). This compares with 84% in 2006/ 07.

Respondents who had visited within the last year were more likely to be satisfied than respondents who had not visited within the last year. Almost half of non visitors were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

## Appendix A – Libraries Questions asked in 2007/ 08 CHS

[LIBYEAR] How often do you go to a Public Library (including mobile libraries)? (this does NOT include school, college, or university libraries)

- |                         |  |                                    |
|-------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 1. Several times a week |  | 5. Once every 2-3 months           |
| 2. Once a week          |  | 6. Once every 4-6 months           |
| 3. Once every 2-3 weeks |  | 7. Once every 12 month             |
| 4. Monthly              |  | 8. Less frequently -> 1 to 8 GOLIB |
|                         |  | 9. Never -> LIBNOTUS               |

[GOLIB] Why do you go to the public library (again does NOT include school, college or university libraries)?

CODE ALL THAT APPLY - DO NOT PROMPT

1. To borrow/ return/ renew books
2. To borrow/ return/ renew other material such as DVDs, CDs, Videos, CD-ROMS
3. To look up information
4. To study/ do homework
5. To browse/ read books/newspapers
6. To use the computer (eg to use word processing/ database/ spreadsheet packages etc)...
7. To access the Internet)
8. To attend an event/ exhibition
9. To use photocopier/ fax
10. To use other facilities for example, café, toilet, shop
11. Other - please specify -> OTLIB
12. Don't Know

[OTLIB] Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

[LIBSAT] Thinking about the last time you visited or used the public library service, how satisfied were you with your visit?

- |                                          |  |                        |
|------------------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| 1. Very satisfied                        |  | 4. Fairly dissatisfied |
| 2. Fairly satisfied                      |  | 5. Very dissatisfied   |
| 3. Neither satisfied nor<br>dissatisfied |  | -> [LIBWEB]            |

**Asked only of those who answered code 8 or 9 (less freq or never) at LIBYEAR**

[LIBNOTUS] Could you please tell me the reasons why you do not use/you have not used the Public Library Service in the past 12 months? **SHOWCARD XX**

- |                                             |  |                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Difficult to find the time               |  | 10. Not enough information on what is available |
| 2. Costs too much                           |  | 11. Fines/charges are too high                  |
| 3. Feel uncomfortable or out of place       |  | 12. Poor book stock                             |
| 4. Never occurred to me                     |  | 13. Buy or get bought all the books I need      |
| 5. Not really interested                    |  | 14. No tradition of use                         |
| 6. Wouldn't enjoy it                        |  | 15. Inconvenient locations                      |
| 7. No need to go                            |  | 16. Inconvenient opening hours                  |
| 8. Health isn't good enough                 |  | 17. Use other sources of information            |
| 9. Lack of transport/Can't easily get to it |  | 18. Don't Know                                  |
|                                             |  | 19. Other - please specify-> LIBNOTSP           |

[LIBNOTSP] Please specify

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ASK ALL

[LIBWEB] May I just check, how often if ever, do you use the public library service website (www.ni-libraries.net)?

1. Never heard of it
2. Several times a week
3. Once a week
4. Once every 2-3 weeks
5. Monthly
6. Once every 2-3 months
7. Once every 4-6 months
8. Once in the last 12 months
9. Less frequently
10. Never

[LIBUSE] SHOWCARD XX What would encourage you to use the Public Library Service more often?

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

- |                                                              |                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Better selection of books                                 | 9. Better computer/ Internet facilities               |
| 2. Longer opening hours                                      | 10. If there were fewer people there                  |
| 3. Easier access in/ around the building e.g. disabled ramps | 11. Better facilities such as toilets, shops, parking |
| 4. More large print/alternative format material              | 12. Safer neighbourhood                               |
| 5. Better selection of DVDs/ CDs/CD-ROMs/ Videos             | 13. More welcoming staff                              |
| 6. If I had more free time                                   | 14. Fines were less expensive                         |
| 7. More activities for children/ young people                | 15. Other, please specify->                           |
| 8. Better public transport links/ access to transport        | LIBUSESP                                              |

[LIBUSESP] Please specify

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[LIBOPEN] Would you be more likely to make more use of the public library service if libraries' opening hours were extended? CODE ONE ONLY

1. Yes
2. Depends on what the new opening hours would be
3. No

[LIBOSAT] Overall, how satisfied with library provision in Northern Ireland?

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Fairly dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied