

CHAPTER 3: USER SURVEY RESULTS

To assess the use of public library services and the impact of those services on library patrons, the consultants conducted an in-library user survey during the week of March 9, 1998. The objectives of the user survey were to:

- Get a sense of who was using public libraries during a typical week;
- Determine what types of library services patrons used most during a typical week; and
- Determine the impact, particularly economic, of library services on library patrons.

With these data, it is possible to develop a picture of typical library users, uses, and benefits of library services.

METHODOLOGY

The consultants developed a user survey for distribution to all 625 Pennsylvania public library outlets (see Appendix 3-A for a copy of the survey). Staff members of the Office of Commonwealth Libraries, District Library Consultants, and public librarians pre-tested and provided suggestions for change to the initial survey instrument. Based on the recommendations from the pre-test, the consultants modified the survey instrument and distributed it for final comment.

Each of the 625 Pennsylvania public library outlets received 30 copies of the user survey for completion between March 9, 1998 and March 15, 1998. During this one-week period, libraries were asked to get up to 30 patrons to complete the surveys or return as many completed surveys that they had, whichever came first (see Appendix 3-B for a copy of the survey instructions).

In all, 18,750 survey forms were sent to the 625 outlets (see Figure 3-1). Of those, libraries returned 13,653 completed survey forms for a 72.8% response rate. A total of 498 outlets participated in the survey, for a 79.7% participation rate (Note: During the time of the user survey, some outlets could not participate due to library renovation closures). On average, each library outlet returned 27.4 surveys.

Figure 3-1. User Survey Rates of Return/Participation.		
	Total Participating/Distributed	Actual Participation/Return
Library outlets	625	498 (79.7%)
Survey forms	18,750	13,653 (72.8%)
Counties	67	66 (98.5%)
Urban libraries	103 (16.5%)	65 (13.1%)
Suburban libraries	211 (33.8%)	175 (35.1%)
Rural libraries	311 (49.8%)	258 (51.7%)

Prior to distributing the survey, the consultants worked with Office of Commonwealth Libraries staff and the district library consultants to designate library outlet urban/suburban/rural status. Using a combination of census data and staff district library consultant knowledge, each library outlet received an Urban, Suburban, or Rural designation. This allowed the consultants to analyze the data by the geographic status of public library outlets. As Figure 3-1 demonstrates, the survey achieved a representative percentage of surveys from urban, suburban, and rural libraries.

Limitations of Data

The investigators took numerous precautions to ensure the collection of valid, reliable, and representative user data as detailed in Babbie (1996) and Creswell (1994). The findings from the user survey, however, do have limitations about which readers should be aware. These limitations include:

- **Survey method implications.** While all Pennsylvania public libraries participated in the survey, there are discrepancies in library size, hours of operation, and staffing. Thus, for some libraries, the number of surveys completed can limit the ability of those surveys to reflect the library's uses by patrons.
- **Completion of surveys.** The investigators relied on the participating library staff to have patrons complete the surveys. As such, the investigators did not have control over the time of day/day of week libraries distributed the surveys to patrons. It is unclear as to whether the surveys reflect a time of day/day of week bias.
- **Generalizability of the data.** As the figures in Figure 3-1 suggest, the user surveys are representative of urban, suburban, and rural public libraries across the state. Without knowing, in detail, Pennsylvania library patron demographics, the investigators cannot express the extent to which the user surveys are representative of all Pennsylvania public library patrons.
- **Other library factors.** During the user survey, several public libraries could not participate due to closures, renovations, and other factors.

Given these limitations, it is best to view the user survey data as indicators of public library impacts and benefits to library patrons.

FINDINGS

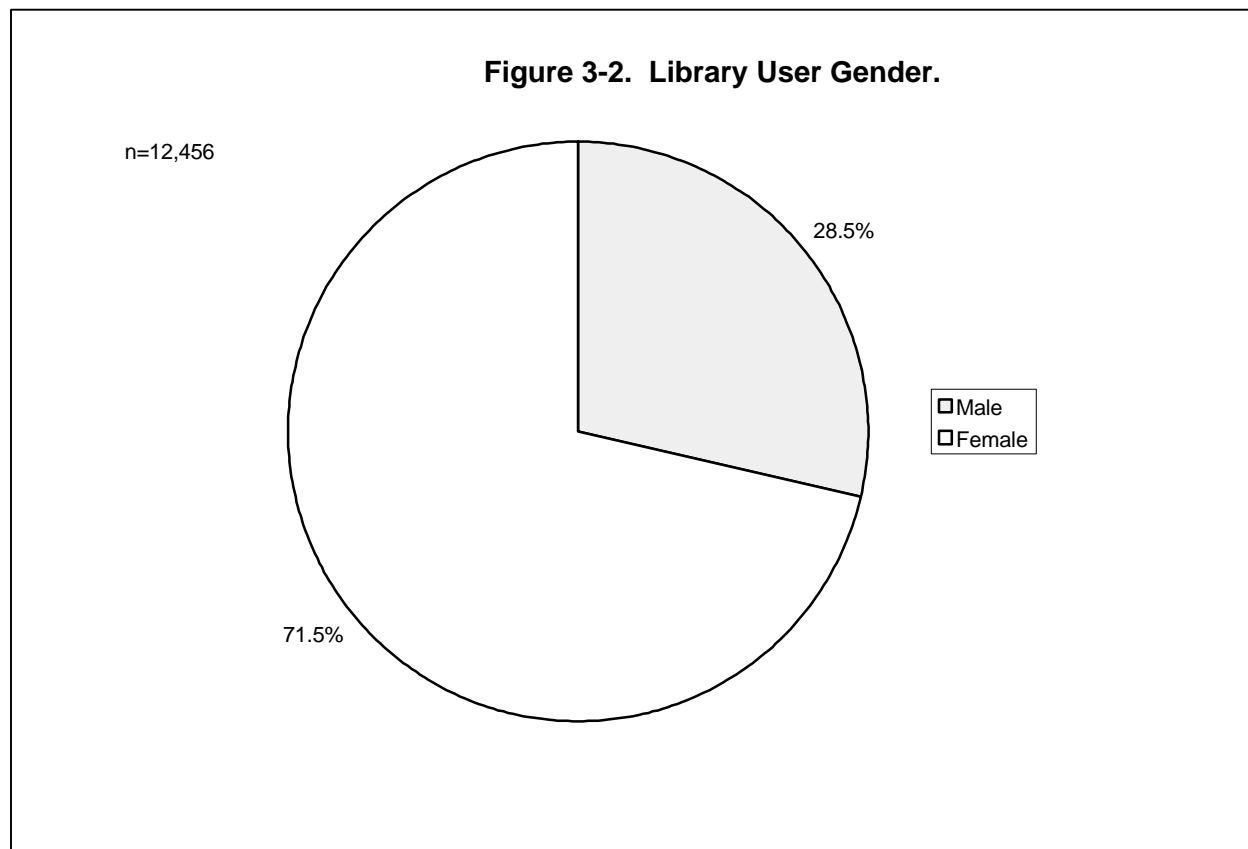
This next section presents findings from the user survey. The analysis is selective, as it does not include all possible types of analysis of all the user survey questions.

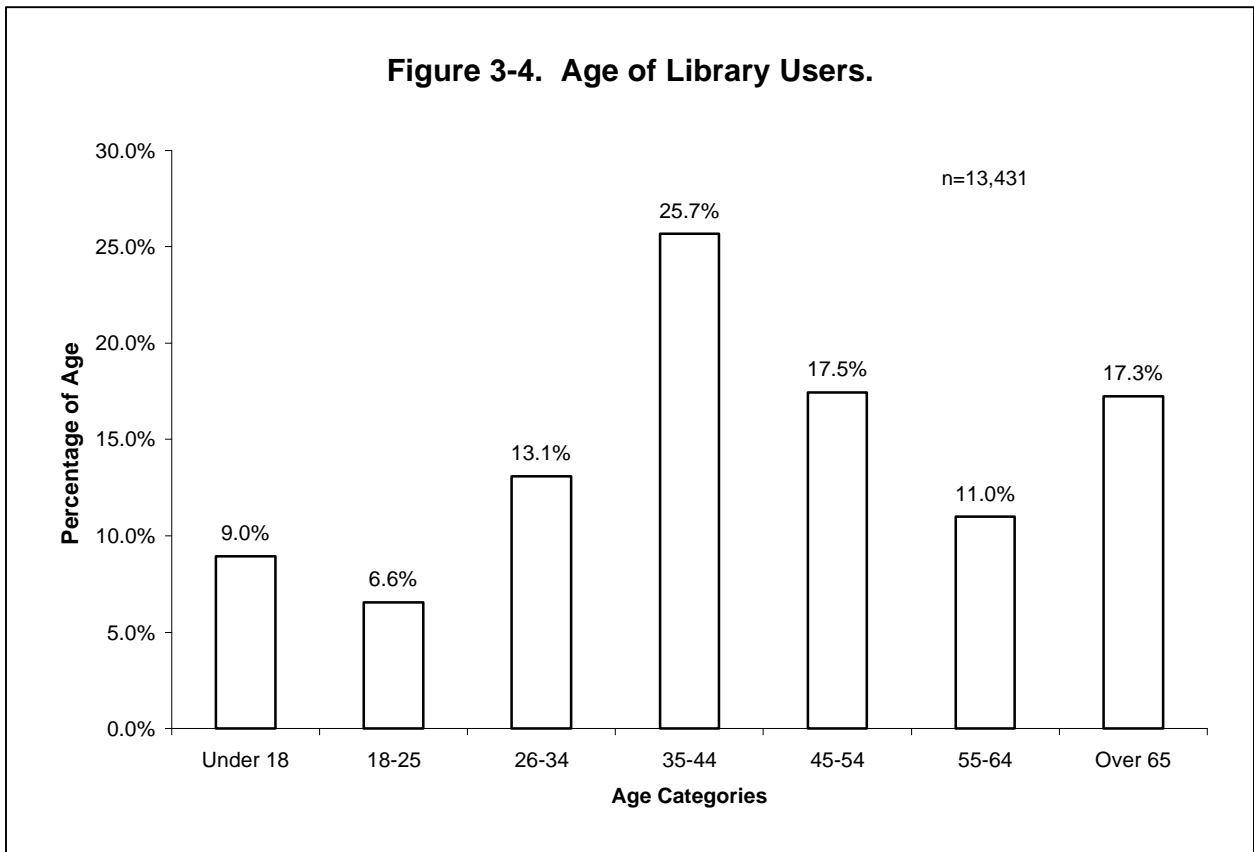
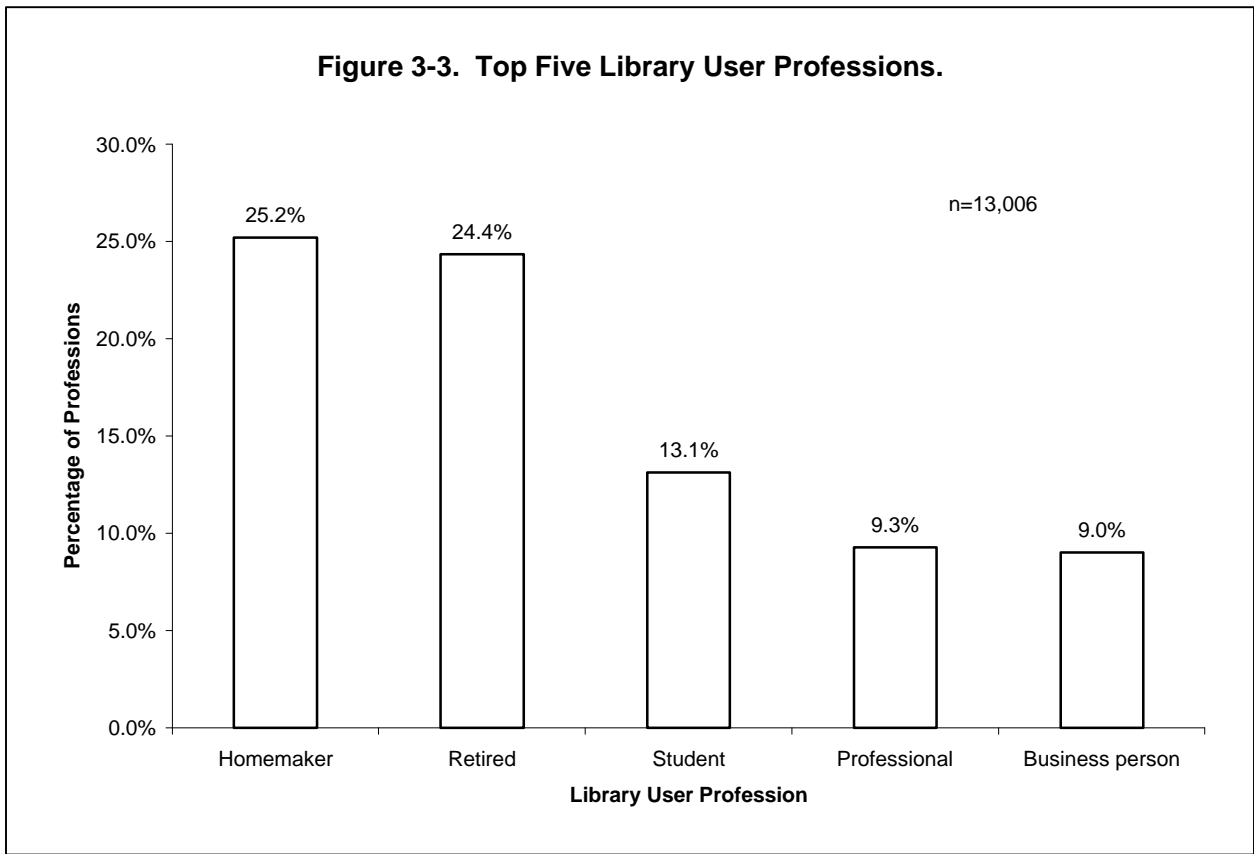
User Demographics

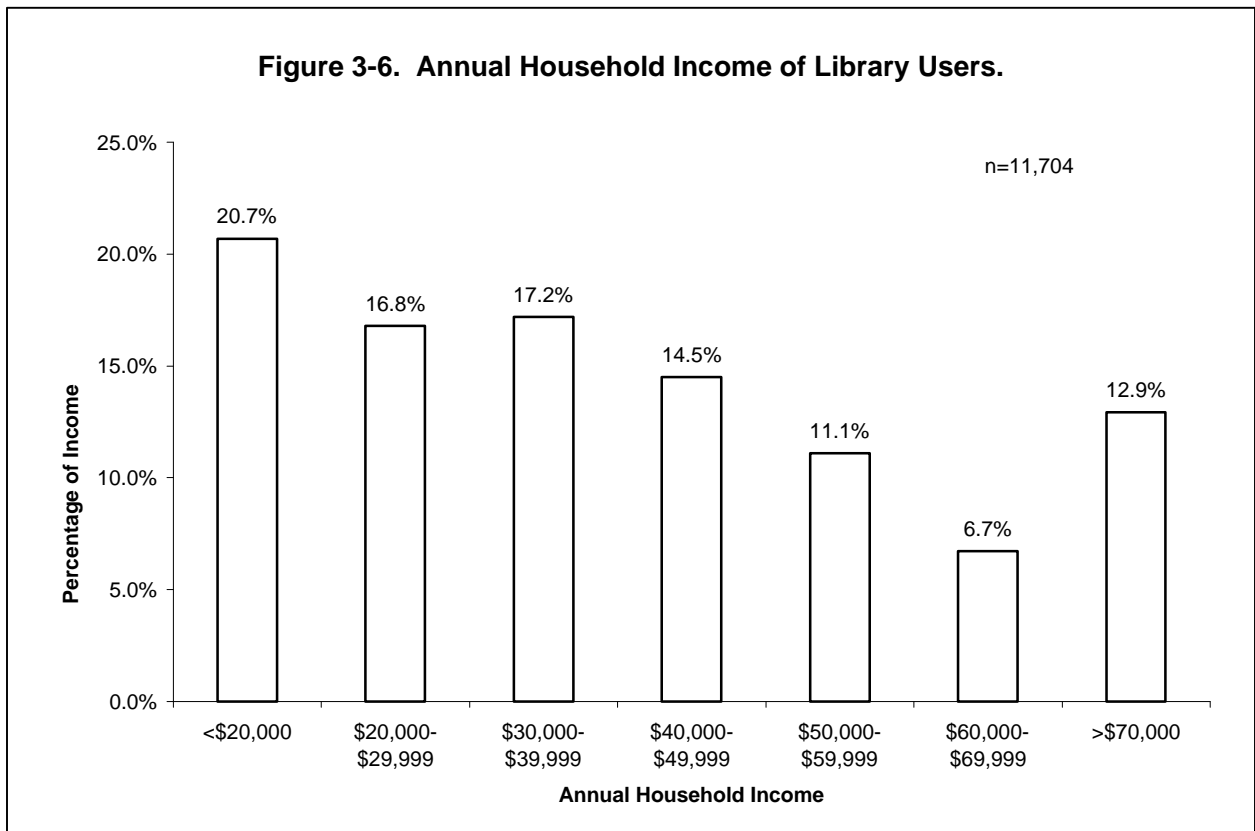
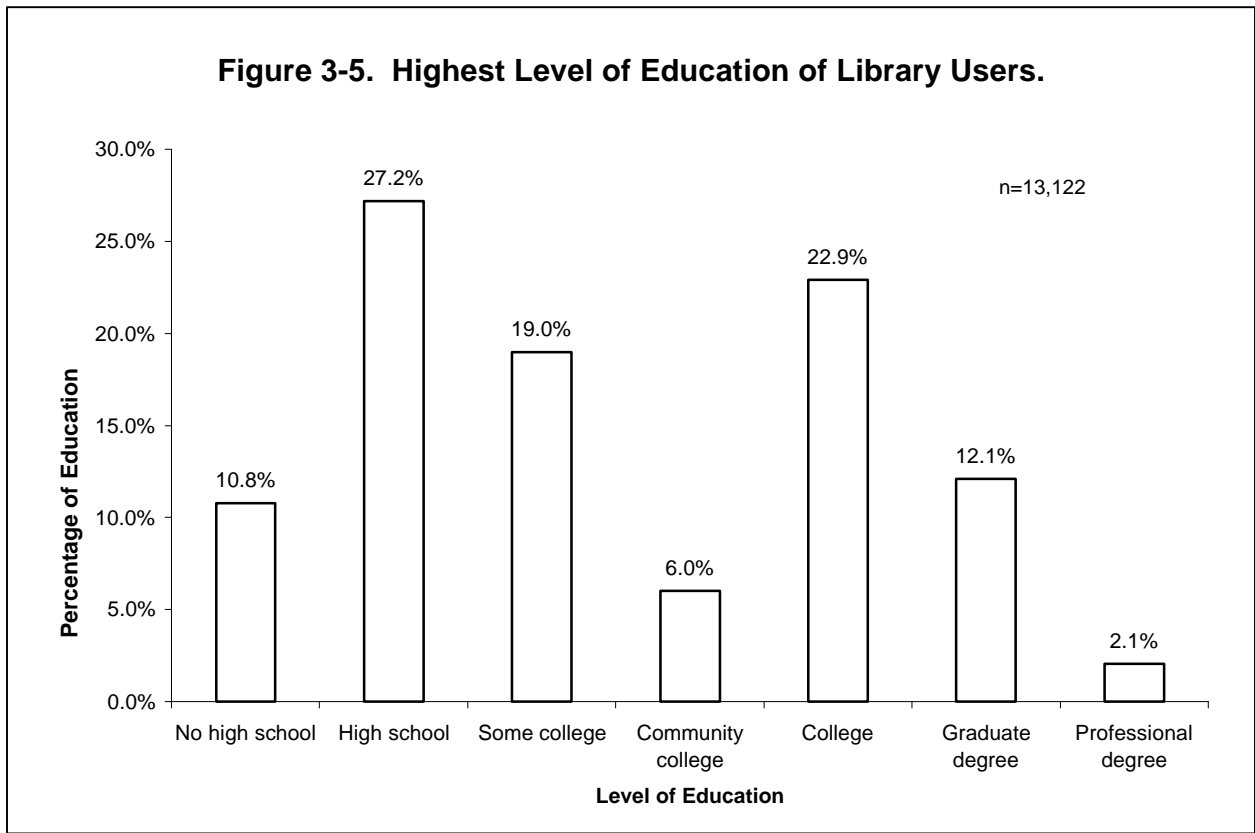
A majority of library patrons are female (71.5%) homemakers (25.2%) (see Figures 3-2 and 3-3). Other user groups include retirees (24.4%), students (13.1%), professionals (9.3%), and business persons (9.0%) (see Figure 3-3).

Patron ages range from under 18 to over 65, with a majority of users being between 35 and 44 (25.7%) (see Figure 3-4). The next largest range of users is between 45 and 54 (17.5%), followed by over 65 (17.3%), 26-34 (13.1%), 55-64 (11.0%), under 18 (9.0%), and 18-25 (6.6%). [Note: the survey gathered library usage data primarily from adult patrons].

A large percentage of users – 27.2% – have their high school degree, followed by 22.9% with a college degree, 19.0% with some college, 12.1% with a graduate degree, 10.8% without a high school diploma (Note: This is likely due to the percentage of under 18 year olds shown in Figure 3-4), 6.0% with a community college degree, and 2.1% with a professional degree (e.g., law, medicine) (see Figure 3-5).



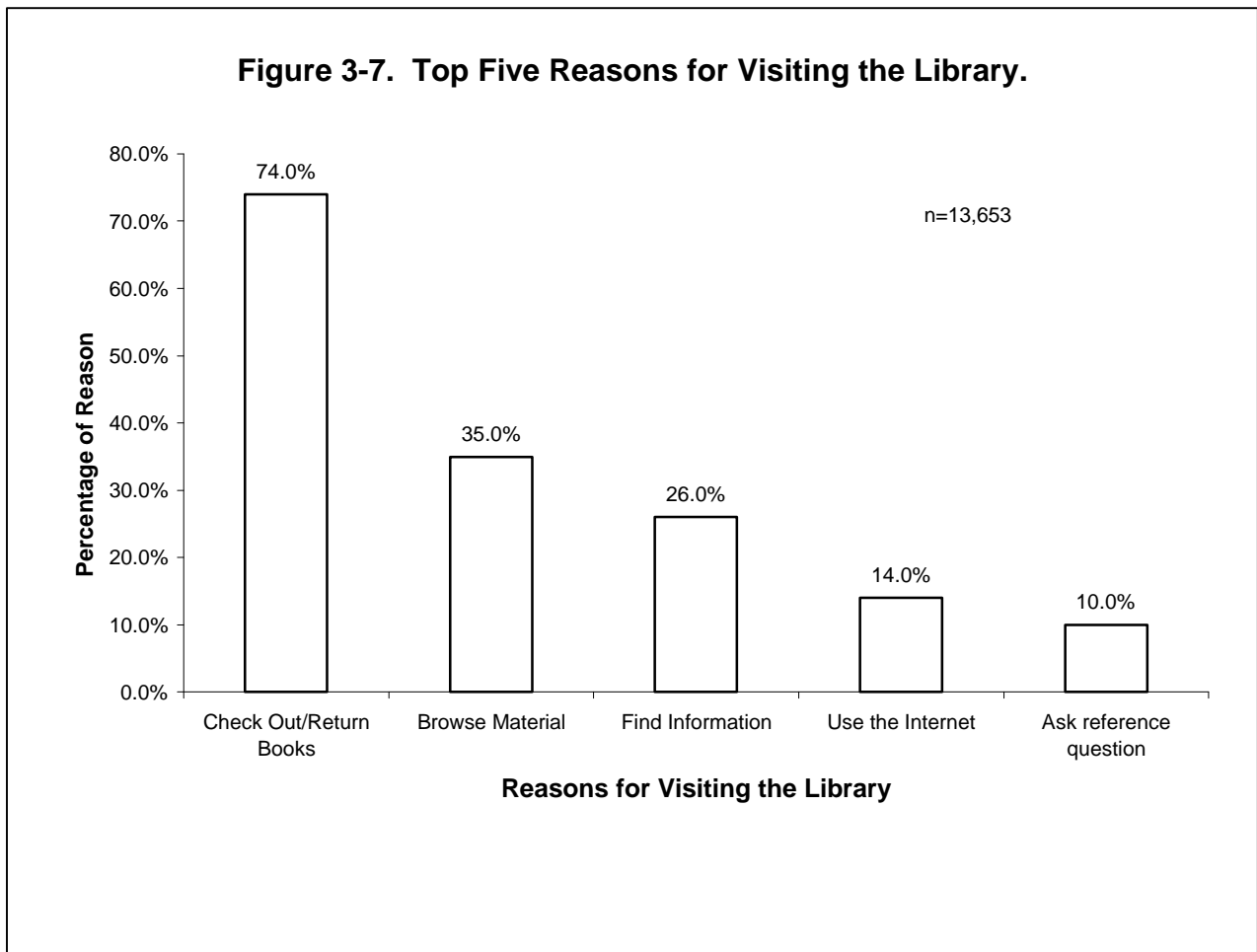




Overall, 20.7% of library users report annual household income levels of below \$20,000, followed by 17.2% with incomes between \$30,000 and \$39,999, 16.8% with incomes between \$20,000 and 29,999, 14.5% with incomes between \$40,000 and \$49,999, 12.9% with incomes of over \$70,000, 11.1% with incomes between \$50,000 and \$59,999, and 6.7% with incomes between \$60,000 and \$69,999 (see Figure 3-6).

Reasons for Visiting the Library

Overall, patrons identified numerous reasons for their visit to the library (see Figure 3-7). These reasons included checking out/returning books (74.0%), browsing library material (35.0%), finding specific information (26.0%), using the Internet (14.0%), and asking reference questions (10.0%). Based on the responses, it is clear that patrons come to the public library to perform several tasks during a single visit – e.g., checking out/returning a book and asking a reference question or finding specific information and using the Internet.

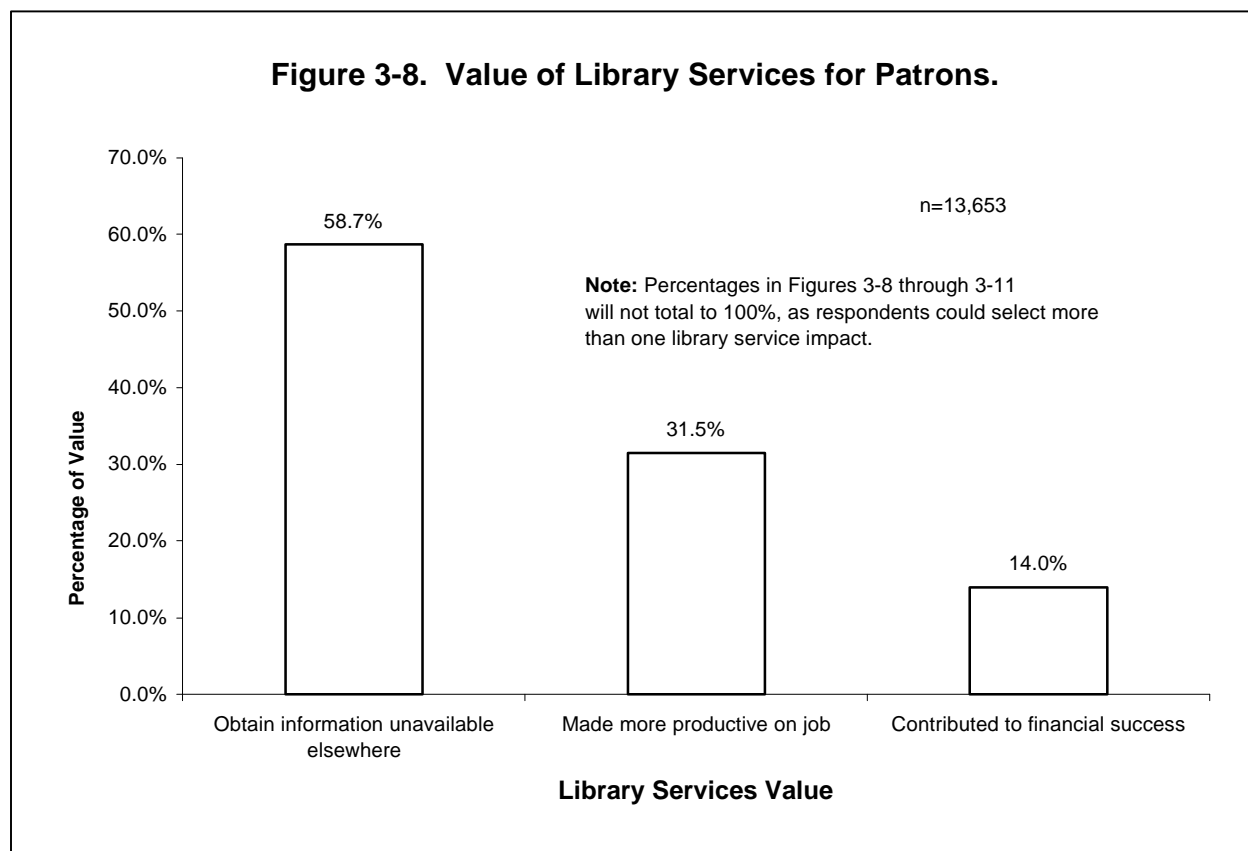


Benefits and Impacts of Library Services

Patrons identified several impacts and/or benefits of library services. These ranged from personal to educational to economic in nature.

Readers should note that Figures 3-8 through 3-11 present data from a single question on the user survey (see Appendix 3-A). This question asked users to identify *all* of the impacts and/or benefits that public library services had on them. Thus, none of the percentages in Figures 3-8 through 3-11 will total to 100%.

In determining the value of library services, 58.7% of patrons indicated that they were able to find information at the public library that they would otherwise not have been able to obtain, 31.5% indicated that the use of library services made them more productive in their current jobs, and 14.0% indicated that the use of library services made them more financially successful (see Figure 3-8).



For business-related uses of library services, 18.9% of patrons indicated that library services assisted them to find new jobs or business opportunities, 13.7% stated that library services assisted them to locate and use a Pennsylvania business, 9.8% stated that library services promoted the use of a local business, 6.0% found that library services supported starting a business, and 5.6% found that library services assisted them in obtaining a new job (see Figure 3-9).

Patrons also indicated that public library services assisted them in both formal and informal educational activities (see Figure 3-10). Indeed, 60.8% of users indicated that public library services contributed to their general education and 21.4% of users indicated that public library services contributed to their formal education (e.g., supported course work at higher education institutions).

Public library-based technology serves two critical functions for patrons: (1) it introduces patrons to new and emerging technologies, and (2) it encourages patrons to bring new technologies into their homes (see Figure 3-11). For example, 28.1% of patrons indicated that public libraries introduced them to new technologies such as the Internet. Furthermore, 11.1% of patrons indicated that, because of the library's public access Internet services, they went out and purchased their own Internet accounts from Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

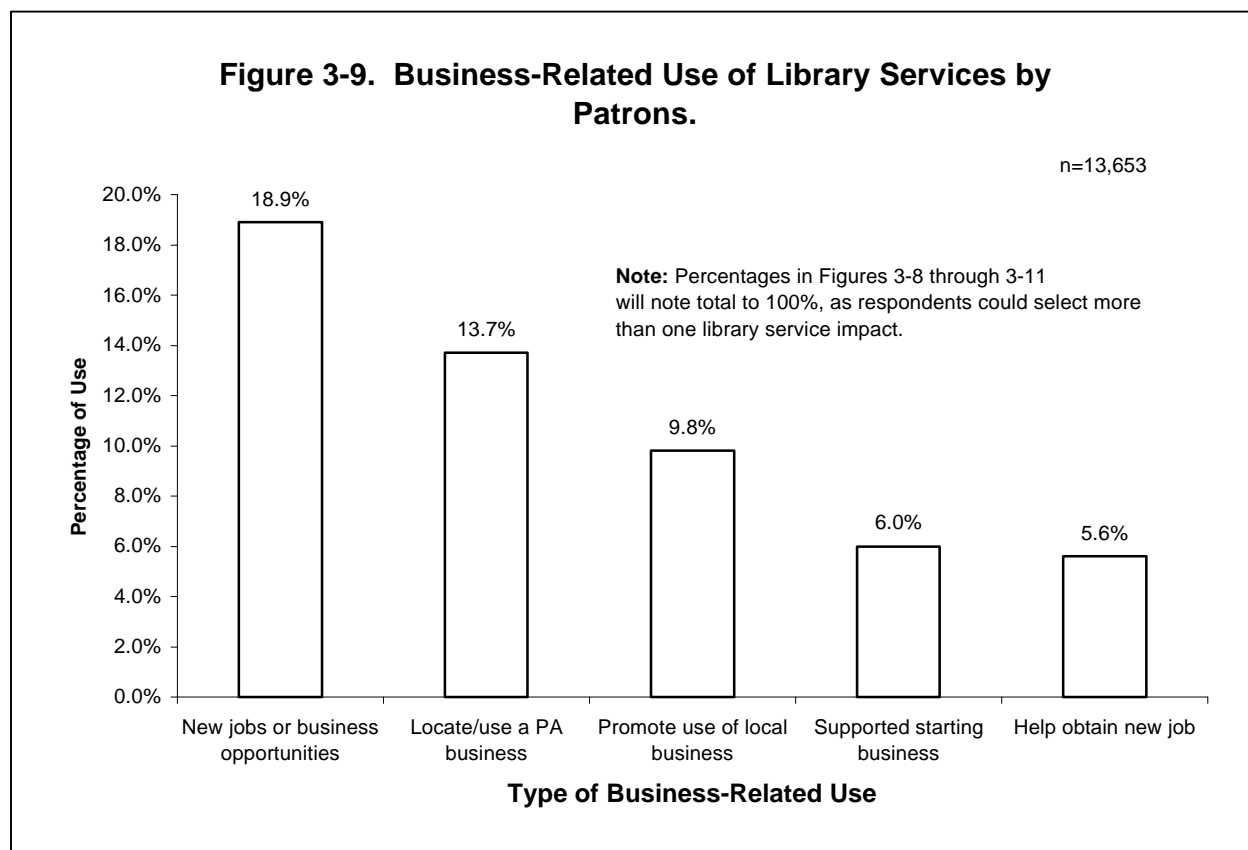


Figure 3-10. Education-Related Use of Library Services by Users.

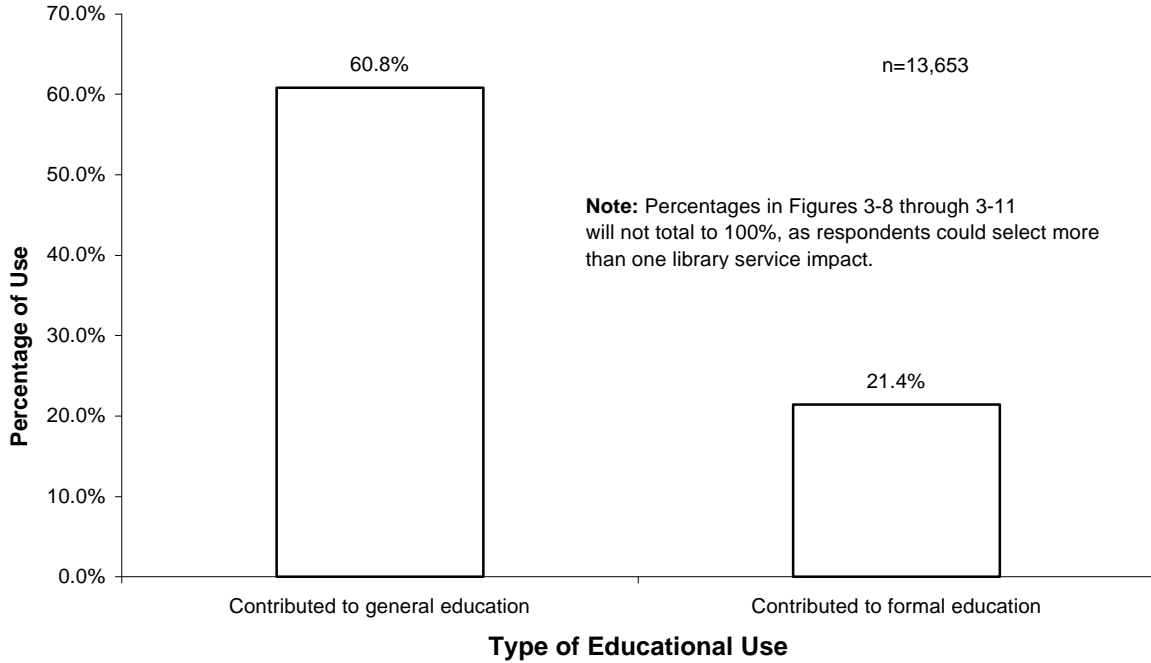
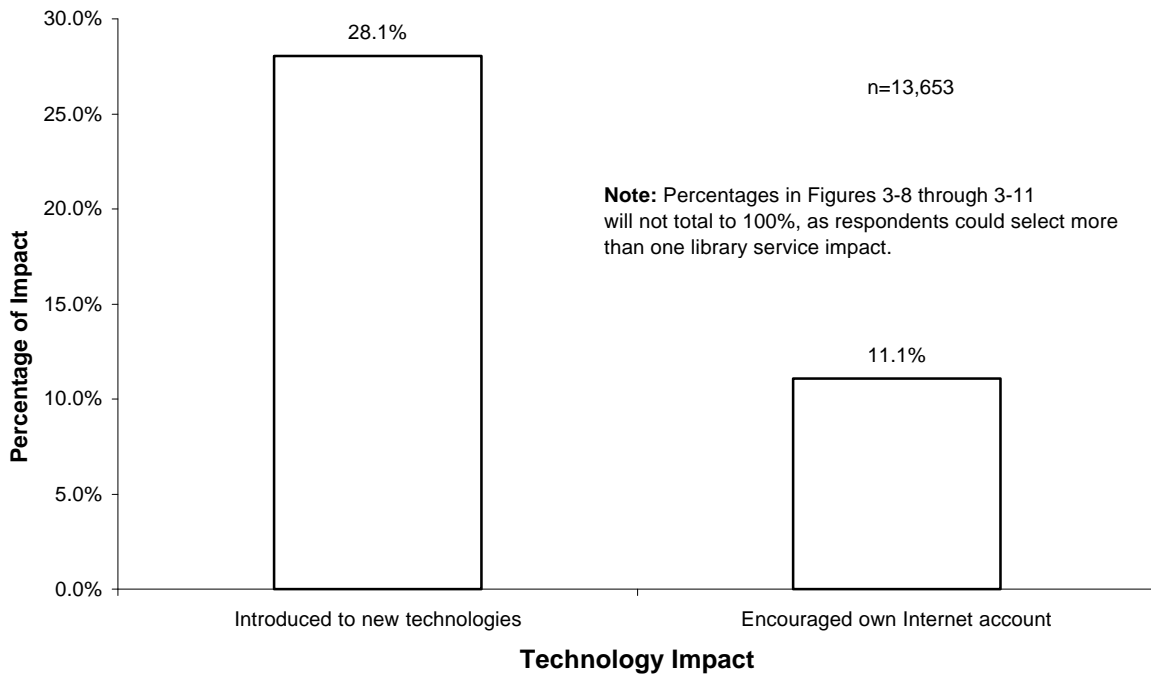


Figure 3-11. Impact of Technology in Public Libraries.



Benefits to Library Patrons between the Age of 18 and 64

To better assess the impact of library services on patrons most likely to be in the Pennsylvania workforce, the investigators eliminated survey responses from patrons under 18 and over 65 years of age. By doing so, it is clear that the impact of library services on patrons increases (see Figures 3-12 through 3-14). That is, the:

- Impact of business-related library services on patrons is greater (see Figure 3-12);
- Impact of education-related services on patrons is greater (see Figure 3-13); and
- Impact/benefit of technology-based library services is greater (see Figure 3-14).

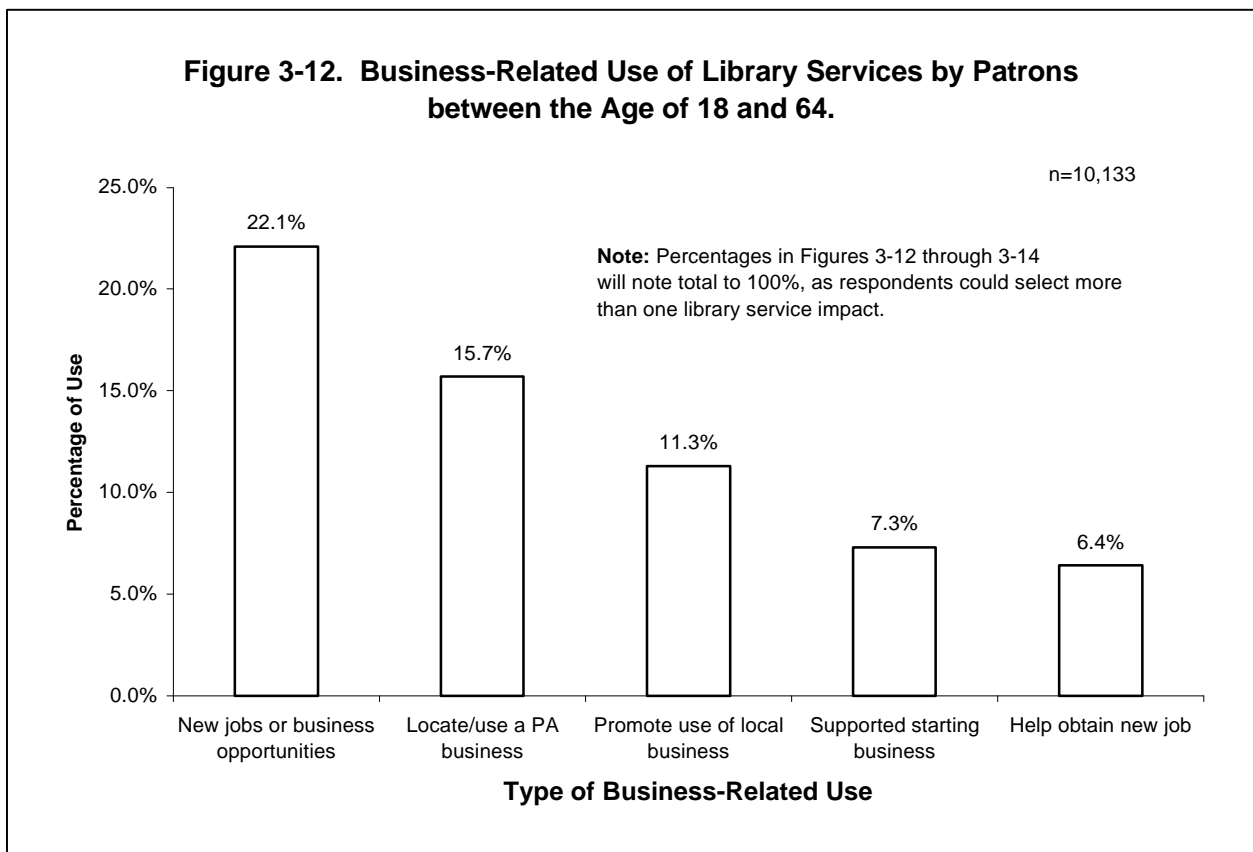


Figure 3-13. Education-Related Use of Library Services by Patrons between the Age of 18 and 64.

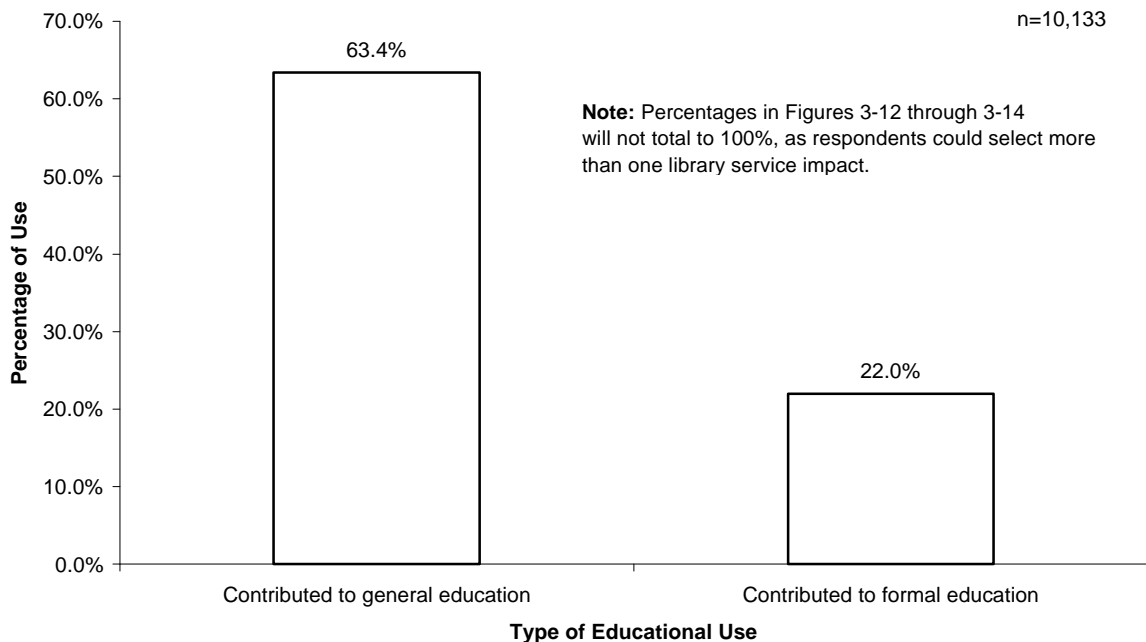


Figure 3-14. Impact of Technology in Public Libraries on Patrons between the Age of 18 and 64.

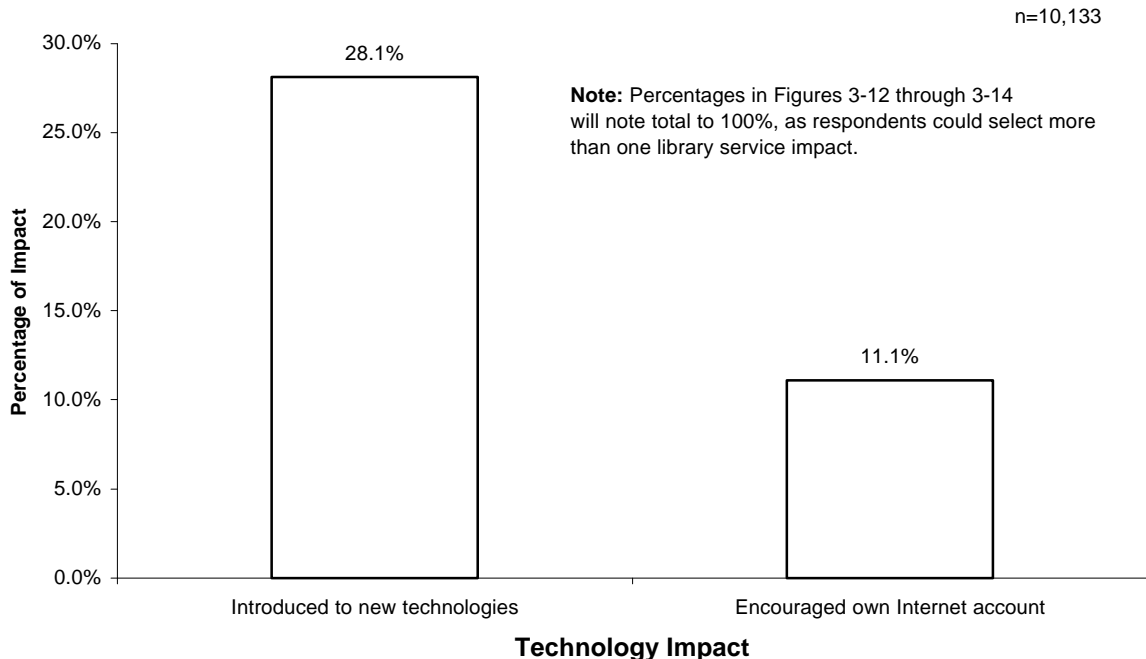


Figure 3-15. Library Service Benefits by Urban/Rural Library Classification.

N=13,653	Urban/Rural Status		
	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Library Service Benefit			
Made you more productive on your job	29.5%	31.2%	39.7%
Helped you learn about new jobs or other business opportunities	16.8%	18.1%	29.3%
Helped you obtain a new job	4.1%	5.0%	13.8%
Supported starting a business on your own	4.7%	6.0%	11.4%
Promoted your use of a local business	9.0%	9.4%	14.2%
Contributed to your overall financial success	11.8%	15.3%	19.6%
Supported your education in a <i>formal</i> school, college, or university class	19.9%	21.1%	28.3%
Contributed to your learning and education, but <i>not</i> via a formal classroom setting	58.5%	62.4%	65.7%
Helped you locate and/or use a PA business	11.9%	10.1%	19.9%
Helped you obtain information that you could not have gotten elsewhere	56.3%	58.8%	67.7%
Introduced you to new technologies (e.g., the Internet)	26.9%	27.1%	35.5%
Encouraged you to go out and get your own Internet account from a local/other Internet service provider (e.g., America OnLine, Prodigy)	9.9%	11.3%	15.5%
Total Percentage of Rural, Suburban, and Urban Surveys	51.7% (n=7,065)	35.1% (n=4,794)	13.1% (n=1,794)

All differences between rural, suburban, and urban libraries were found statistically significant using the Chi Square procedure. Chi Square values range from 39.161 to 203.581, $p < .0001$.

Within Rural/Suburban/Urban Library User Analysis

One purpose of the user survey was to explore differences between library patrons along various factors. One area of interest was to examine the impact of library services on patrons by the urban/rural nature of the library.

As Figure 3-15 indicates, there are statistically significant differences of library service impacts and/or benefits by the urban/rural nature of the library. In particular, patrons indicate that library services in:

- Urban libraries help patrons learn more about new jobs or business opportunities (39.7%) as compared to library services in rural libraries (29.5%);
- Urban libraries help users obtain new jobs (13.8%) as compared to library services in rural libraries (4.1%);
- Urban libraries make users more productive on their jobs (39.7%) as compared to library services in rural libraries (29.5%);

- Urban libraries introduce patrons to new technologies (35.5%) as compared to library services in rural libraries (26.9%); and
- Urban libraries promote the acquisition of personal Internet accounts from ISPs (15.5%) as compared to library services in rural libraries (9.9%).

While the data show a somewhat more profound impact of library services in urban libraries, readers should realize that the data clearly demonstrate *that library services have an impact on patrons across all communities.*

Within Gender User Analysis

The impact and benefit data also demonstrate interesting differences between men and women library users (see Figure 3-16). Overall:

- Men find that library services help them learn more about new jobs or other business opportunities than do women (24.2% and 16.3%, respectively);
- Men find that library services are more likely to contribute to their financial success than do women (21.3% and 11.2%, respectively);
- Men find that library services are more beneficial towards general education purposes than do women (65.2% and 59.5%, respectively);

Figure 3-16. Library Service Benefits by Gender.		
	Gender	
	Women	Men
Library Service Benefit		
Made you more productive on your job	29.8%	35.0%
Helped you learn about new jobs or other business opportunities	16.3%	24.2%
Helped you obtain a new job	4.7%	7.1%
Supported starting a business on your own	4.9%	8.1%
Promoted your use of a local business	9.2%	11.0%
Contributed to your overall financial success	11.2%	21.3%
Supported your education in a <i>formal</i> school, college, or university class	20.4%	24.0%
Contributed to your learning and education, but <i>not</i> via a formal classroom setting	59.5%	65.2%
Helped you locate and/or use a PA business	12.0%	17.4%
Helped you obtain information that you could not have gotten elsewhere	57.2%	63.3%
Introduced you to new technologies (e.g., the Internet)	26.1%	32.5%
Encouraged you to go out and get your own Internet account from a local/other Internet service provider (e.g., America OnLine, Prodigy)	9.6%	14.4%
Total Percentage of Surveys Completed by Women and Men	71.5% (n=8,900)	28.5% (n=3,556)
All differences between women and men were found statistically significant using the Chi Square procedure, except "Promoted use of a local business." Chi Square values range from 18.530 to 202.810, p<.0001.		

- Men are more likely to use library services to get information that they would otherwise be unable to find than do women (63.3% and 57.2%, respectively); and
- Men are more likely to be encouraged to purchase their own Internet accounts through ISPs than are women (14.4% and 9.6%, respectively).

Men are, therefore, more likely to derive benefits from key library services than are women.

Readers should note, however, that while the differences between men and women are statistically significant, the data clearly indicate that *library services benefit substantially both men and women*.

Single Most Important Library Impact

The user survey also asked patrons to identify the single most important impact of the library on them. Although responses ranged from the specific to the general, it is possible to provide the following summary of library impacts:

- **Business.** Library services assist individuals to establish, grow, and/or diversify small businesses.
- **Literacy.** Library services promote, foster, and enhance literacy skills in children, young adults, and adults.
- **Education.** Library services supplement and augment the educational experience of students – both in the K-12 and higher education environments.
- **Information access.** Library services provide access to a wide range of information resources in a variety of formats (e.g., electronic, Internet, print).
- **Engagement.** Library services keep the mind active, a particularly powerful resource for retired individuals.
- **Arts and culture.** Library services promote an awareness of local, state, and national arts and culture.
- **Democracy.** Library services foster an informed citizenry, which in turn promotes citizenship.

Together, these serve as a core set of library service impacts on patrons. Readers should note that these impacts reinforce those impacts as identified through the case sites as presented in chapter 2 of this report.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The findings from the user survey indicate that public libraries in Pennsylvania provide the communities that they serve with numerous benefits that have substantial impacts. These benefits and impacts include the:

- Assistance of patrons to locate and obtain new job and business opportunities;
- Location and use of local/statewide business services;
- Introduction of new technologies (e.g., the Internet) to patrons;
- Promotion of economic development through new technologies such as the Internet by creating an interest in patrons to purchase Internet accounts;
- Enhancement of user productivity in their current jobs;
- Enhancement of personal financial success;
- Availability of information not available elsewhere;
- Support of educational pursuits – both formal (e.g., classroom) and personal; and
- Support of societal goods such as arts, culture, and democracy.

Moreover, it is important to note that library services serve users regardless of income level, gender, education level, or age. Thus, these findings suggest that library services support a wide range of patron groups in all areas throughout the state of Pennsylvania. In all those areas, patrons indicate that they use and value library services. In turn, the state in general, and the communities that the libraries serve in particular, derive substantial benefit from public library services.