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PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES TO SENIOR PATRONS

by
Paul J. Brunner

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 1, 2006

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved

MAY 1, 2006

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ABSTRACT

Paul J. Brunner
PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES TO SENIOR PATRONS
2005/06
Dr. Marilyn Shontz
Master of Arts in Public Librarianship

The purpose of this research study was to determine the attitudes of senior patrons, those age 55 and older, about computer technology at the Cape May County Public Library. It was hoped that this information would provide insight into older adults' usage of OPACs, computers, and the Internet, suggesting areas for further research and leading to improved services to these patrons. Additionally, the following research questions were addressed: What computer resources do senior patrons use most frequently? For those senior patrons who do use the OPACs, computer, or the Internet, what is their level of competence or confidence with such technology? Fifty responses were collected over a three - week period. Results of the survey indicated that 86 percent of senior respondents had a positive attitude about computers in the library. Furthermore, senior patrons overwhelmingly knew how to use both computers and the Internet. However, a limited number of senior patrons were using the OPACs. Finally, senior patrons responded that their competence or confidence level was slightly above average in usage of computer technology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, this is dedicated to my beautiful wife, Ellen, who has endured more than I possibly have over these past four years of my education. Ellen, you have been my guiding light and my rock. There was many a day when I wanted to discontinue my education because of the long hours of hard work and commitment but Ellen, you helped me to stay the course and I thank you. You understood the importance of my education and how much I have enjoyed working in a public library. I love you, honey.

Second, this is dedicated to my beautiful children, Joe and Alice. Through your childlike innocence, exuberance, energy and the way you view the world, you have given me the strength to complete my education. You have always reminded me of the importance of being a kid. And Joe, Alice, and you, Ellen, have taught me the greatness and love of being a family.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Over the last 25 years, there have been many advances in technology. For many, the computer has helped make everyday life easier to manage. Today, young children learn how to use computers. There are computers in the classroom, the library, and at home, for most children. The parents of these children, too, have used computers. These parents were the first generation to work with computers in high school and then in college. Many working parents depend on their computers to do their job. With the creation of the Internet, children and their parents have been able to quickly find information. But what are their grandparents' attitudes about this new computer technology?

According to *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*, in July 2002, there were approximately 35.6 million people age 65 and over in the United States. This represented 12.3% of the total population. For this segment of the population, public libraries are prominent providers of information use. Lifelong learning is increasingly a priority for older adults (Turock, 1987), and at the same time, may be their first introduction to computer technology.

Public libraries have, for the most part, kept pace with changes in technology. The antiquated card catalog is out. It has been replaced by OPACs, on-line public access catalogs. Computers are readily available for use in public libraries. Patrons are able to retrieve information through the Internet. The problem that needs to be addressed here is

how older adults are handling these changes in computerized technology. What are their attitudes about navigating the on-line card catalog to find library material or to retrieve information through usage of the computer?

In 1990, an article, "Computer Literacy," noted that a majority of those over 55 years of age, were unfamiliar with computer technology. Further research suggested that older adults had more trouble in learning to use computers (Kelley and Charness, 1995) and might have higher computer anxiety (Laguna and Babcock, 1997). Additional research indicated that the older generation was hesitant to use new technologies (Griebel, 1998).

Justification

Older adults make up a large segment of potential users of public libraries. Some retirees and elderly persons spend much leisure time reading. Consequently, older patrons need to be able to use OPACs to find their reading material. In addition, older adults, like many other patrons, seek to find information through the Internet. Since older adults represent a significant portion of a library's patronage, it is important that librarians and the library staff pay close attention to this population. It is important that librarians are sympathetic and understanding to the needs of older adults.

The results of this study benefit primarily the members of the Cape May County Public Library. The results measured the attitudes of older adults toward such computer technology. With these results, librarians can determine a need for accessibility or instruction for older patrons.

Purpose and Objectives of the Research

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of older adults about computer technology at the Cape May County Public Library. The results provided insight into older adults' usage of OPACs, computers, and the Internet, suggested areas for further research, and led to improved services to these patrons. The following research questions were addressed: (1) What were the older adult patron's attitudes toward computers in the library? (2) For those older adult patrons in Cape May County Library who used the OPACs or the computer or the Internet, what was their level of confidence or competence with such technology? (3) What computer resources did older patrons use most frequently?

Definition of Terms

The researcher used the following definitions for the purposes of this paper. According to *ODLIS: Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science*, an older adult is an elderly person who may require special assistance in accessing and using the facilities, services, and collections of the library. Because the proportion of older adults is increasing in many communities across the United States, public libraries must focus more attention on providing outreach to seniors (Reitz, 2004). Older adult is synonymous with senior. For the purposes of this research, an older adult will be defined as a person 55 or older.

According to *Cambridge Dictionary*, attitudes are the way you feel about something or someone, or a particular feeling or opinion (Bourne, 2006).

Computer, as defined by *Cambridge Dictionary*, is an electronic device that can store large amounts of information and be given sets of instructions to organize and change it very quickly (Bourne, 2006).

Public library is defined by *ODLIS* as a library or library system that provides unrestricted access to library resources and services free of charge to all the residents of a given community, district, or geographic region, supported wholly or in part by public funds. Because public libraries have a broader mandate than academic libraries and most special libraries, they must develop their collections to reflect diversity (Reitz, 2004).

OPAC is an acronym for online public access catalog. *ODLIS* defines it as a database composed of bibliographic records describing the books and other materials owned by a library or a library system. Library materials are accessible via public OPAC terminals or workstations usually concentrated near the reference desk to make it easy for users to request the assistance of a trained reference librarian. Most online catalogs are searchable by author, title, subject, and keywords and allow users to print, download, or export records to an e-mail account (Reitz, 2004).

Patron, as defined by *ODLIS*, is any person who uses the resources and services of a library, not necessarily a registered borrower. It is synonymous with user (Reitz, 2004).

ODLIS defines Internet as being a high-speed fiber-optic network of networks that uses TCP / IP protocols to interconnect computer networks around the world, enabling users to communicate via e-mail, transfer data and program files via FTP, find information on the World Wide Web, and access remote computer systems such as online catalogs and electronic databases easily and effortlessly, using an innovative technique called packet switching. The Internet began in 1969 as ARPAnet, a project of the U.S.

Department of Defense. It now has hundreds of millions of regular users worldwide (Reitz, 2004).

Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that the older adults in Cape May County Public Library were able to read, understand, and respond appropriately to the survey. It was further assumed that the respondents were honest and forthcoming in their responses to the survey. The success of this survey depended upon the cooperation, participation, and honesty of the older adults who responded.

The scope of this study was limited to older adults who used Cape May County Public Library. This study was limited to a small number of users of the library. Since a small number of senior patrons were in this sample, there was a limited effect on the generalizability. These results could not be applied to a larger or different population. The study was also limited by duration of the study.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Since 1987, many technological advances and new technologies have been introduced to libraries and to the general public; computer use is an accepted part of life. In 1987, the *Guidelines for Library Services to Older Adults* were revised and expanded, describing in greater detail how and what should be involved in strong programs for service to seniors. Among the revisions to the Guidelines were the following: (2.4) Promote the purchase and use of assistive technology devices for older adults to easily access library materials and programs and: (6.3) Provide older adults with access to or training in technology (RUSA, 1987).

A research study by Susannah Fox, in March, 2004, *Older Americans and the Internet*, concluded that the percent of seniors who go online had jumped by 47 percent between 2000 and 2004. In the February 2004 survey, 22 percent of Americans age 65 or older reported having access to the Internet, up from 15 percent in 2000, which translated to about eight million Americans age 65 or older who used the Internet. Fifty-eight percent of Americans age 50 to 64 years old currently went online (Fox, 2004).

Results from Fox indicated 29 percent of Americans age 65 and older said they used a computer at their workplace, at school, at home, or some other location on at least an occasional basis. Fox supported Tobey Dichter, founder and CEO of Generation on Line, for pointing out that many seniors have an antique notion of computers, counting

their use of punch cards in the 1960s and 1970s as “computer experience.” In Fox’s article, Dichter also said that many elders were afraid they will break any new technology they attempt to learn. “Access, skill, and intimidation are the barriers – and the greatest of these is intimidation,” said Dichter (Fox, 2004, p.3).

Attitudes of Older Adults

According to Jo White and Ann Weatherall, in *A Grounded Theory Analysis of Older Adults and Information Technology*, S. Weisman, in 1983, was one of the earliest to investigate the attitudes of older adults toward computer technology. Four simple computer games were introduced to institutionalized older adults in a nursing home. The participants were described as finding the experience enjoyable, social, and empowering. Similar findings, as stated by White and Weatherall, were reported by M. Farris, et al., in 1994, with institutionalized elderly persons showing high interest in both the computer and the computer game the researchers presented to them (White & Weatherall, 2000).

White and Weatherall further stated that some studies reporting positive attitudes toward information technology have challenged some of the prevailing stereotypes associated with older adults and technology. White and Weatherall stated that in 1992, Ryan, Szechtman, and Bodkin suggested that older adults generally were perceived as technophobic and resistant to technological change. Several studies have investigated older adults’ attitudes toward computers. Using attitudes assessments before and after controlled computer experience, the majority of these studies indicated that experience with computers resulted in a positive attitudinal shift for older adults (White & Weatherall, 2000).

In 2000, in the research report, *The Older Adult and Public Library Computer Technology: A Pilot Study in a Canadian Setting*, Patricia Larkin- Lieffers interviewed six public library users aged 65 years and over concerning their attitudes, experiences, and issues with public library computer technology. Two participants used online public access catalogs (OPACS) regularly while four had some form of computer anxiety or aversion that inhibited use. The reasons given for not using the OPACs included difficulty with the interface, insufficient librarian help, poor or absent written instructions, and inadequate time to learn (Larkin – Lieffers, 2000).

In an article, *Study Says Older Adults Less Negative About Personal Computers*, published in February, 2004, older adults were reported as less uneasy using personal computers but were still wary of social changes caused by technology. This Ball State University study was conducted during a 10 – year span from 1989 to 1999. A survey of 94 people 60 years and older in 1999 found 39.4 percent said they would never learn how to use a personal computer as compared to 66.3 percent in 1989. When asked if some people can not be taught computer skills, agreement dropped from 62.2 percent in 1989 to 42.4 percent in 1999 (Roach, 2004).

In a research report, published in the Spring, 1997, *Older People and the Internet*, Kirsty Williamson, Associate Director of the Telecommunications Needs Research Group, (TNRG) studied how to improve older adults' access to the Internet in a public library setting. The study consisted of a survey of 120 older adults (50 years and over) and observations of 60 older adults using the Internet. This study was developed in three public libraries. Overall, there was a lack of positive feelings by many respondents towards computers. The majority of older adults indicated a level of discomfort with

computers. Thirty – six percent of respondents said they had not used a computer because they did not know how; 28 percent said that they had never used a computer and did not intend to in the future; and 13 percent indicated they used a computer when they had to, but were not really comfortable using a computer. According to Williamson, this represented quite a significant proportion of the sample (77 percent) whose feelings towards the computer were not particularly positive. On the other hand, only just over one – fifth of respondents expressed some positive feelings towards using a computer. Twelve percent of older adults said they were reasonably comfortable but felt they needed more practice and 11 percent said they were quite confident. Therefore, only a very small percentage of the older adults in the sample were completely positive in their attitudes towards using a computer (Newsletter, 1997).

In Williamson’s study, older adults were also asked to nominate a statement which best reflected the role they thought computers had in their lives. Sixty – seven percent of respondents had negative attitudes: 42 percent thought they would never need to use computers as they were not relevant to their lives and 25 percent said that they would use a computer if they really had to. Only a small number of people indicated a highly positive role for computers in their lives: four percent felt that computers were a very important part of their lives and four percent said they would be lost without their computer now. Further evidence for the lack of use of new technologies by older adults can be seen in the number of older adults who were not using the Internet: only nine of the 120 older adults had used the Internet (Newsletter, 1997).

For Williamson’s study, the most common problem was with using the mouse, both for pointing and clicking (21 percent) and for scrolling (24 percent). Another

frequent problem was the inability to read the computer screen. Thirty percent of the participants indicated they had problems reading the screen. Other issues of concern were the lack of instructions on how to use the Internet. According to Williamson, a common response was, "I am frustrated at not knowing what to do, and not being able to pick up any clues on the screen about where to start" (Newsletter, 1997).

Summary

The literature revealed that there were both positive and negative attitudes of older adults about library computer technology. At the same time, there was an increasing percentage of older adults who were using computers as well as the Internet. For those older adults who were familiar with computers, their attitudes were favorably positive towards technology. The negative attitudes generally came from those older adults who were unfamiliar with computers, as a result of computer anxiety, aversion, intimidation, or a sense that computers had no relevance in their lives – to name a few literature responses.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This research study took place at the Cape May County Public Library. Cape May County is a peninsula, located at the southernmost tip of New Jersey between the Atlantic Ocean and the Delaware Bay. The nearly 30 mile barrier islands that stretch along the eastern edge of the county form the oceanfront resorts of Cape May Point, Cape May, the Wildwoods, Stone Harbor, Avalon, Sea Isle City, and Ocean City. The inland area of the county consists of Lower, Middle, Upper, and Dennis townships, and the Borough of Woodbine. Overall, Cape May County covers 454 square miles (*Cape May County*, n.d.).

According to the 2000 *United States Census*, 20.2 percent of Cape May County's population was 65 years old and over as compared to only 13.2 percent for the state of New Jersey (*U.S. Census Bureau*, n.d.). Because a larger percentage of older adults were living in Cape May County, a research study was developed to ensure that the needs of older adults visiting Cape May County Public Library were met. A research study, involving the attitudes of older adult patrons about Cape May County Public Library's computer technology, provided the library with an assessment and an insight towards its older adult patrons.

Cape May County Public Library, located at 30 Mechanic Street, in Cape May Court House, New Jersey, was chosen by the researcher for this study. The director of Cape May County Public Library was contacted by the researcher to discuss this project and permission was received.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes of older adults about computer technology at the Cape May County Public Library. This information provided insight into older adults' usage of OPACs, computers, and the Internet, and suggested areas for further research leading to improved services for these patrons. The following research questions were addressed: (1) What were the older adult patron's attitudes toward computers in the library? (2) For those older adult patrons in Cape May County Library who used the OPACs, the computer, or the Internet, what was their level of confidence or competence with such technology? (3) What computer resources did patrons use most frequently?

Population and Sample Size

The population of this research study was older adults who used Cape May County Public Library. Since the questionnaire was distributed by the researcher in the library, the sample of older adults consisted of those older adults who were present during the visits by the researcher and were willing to respond to the survey. The sample size consisted of 50 older adult patrons of Cape May County Public Library.

Instrument Used and Variables

This research study was survey or descriptive research. The research methodology was action research. The research instrument implemented by the researcher was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher with structured (closed-ended) questions. A survey with fixed responses was easily used for statistical analysis and was more quickly answered. The types of questions asked were both factual and attitudinal.

There were a number of discrete patron variables to consider in this study. These included: senior patron's age, senior patron's highest level of education, senior patron's number of visits to the library, senior patron's attitude towards computers in the library, senior patron's interest in taking advantage of training sessions for usage of computers, and the computer resources used most frequently.

Method of Data Collection

The researcher personally distributed the patron survey to patrons who were thought to be 55 years of age or older in Cape May County Public Library. The researcher distributed the surveys to older adult patrons who were at the Circulation Desk, the Reference Desk, and at computers, including OPAC terminals. The researcher conducted five selected site visits. These visits took place during a three week time period. The scheduled visits included one week night consisting of two hours as well as visits during Saturday and Sunday afternoons for two hours. The timeline followed by the researcher was: Tuesday, January 31, 2006, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00p.m., Saturday, February 4, 2006, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., Sunday, February 5, 2006, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., Saturday, February 11, 2006, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., and Saturday, February 18, 2006, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the questionnaire and the study's validity, the researcher presented the pretest survey to residents of Village Green's Retirement Community, in Marlton, New Jersey who utilized the Burlington County Library System. This was an age-restricted community requiring all members to be 55 years of age or older. None of the pretest respondents participated in the final data collection.

To further pretest the validity of the results of the questionnaire, the researcher asked for the assistance of Dr. Marilyn L. Shontz, Associate Professor of the Department of Secondary Education / Foundations of Education.

Through the recommendations of the pretest evaluators, the researcher made the following modifications to the questionnaire: For question #11, #12, and #14, the response “Do Not Use” was inserted as a choice; at the conclusion of the survey, the statement, “Please feel free to offer your opinions or suggestions regarding this survey and / or your feelings regarding the quality of the materials or services available to you at the library you frequent the most,” was added; for question #1, the response choices for age were revised to include only “under 55” and “55 and over;” for question #4, a response choice of “Indifferent” was included; for question #6 and question #14, the word “confidence” was changed to “competence” in the question; for question #12, “Are librarians attentive and helpful in assisting you while you are at the online public access catalogs (OPACs)?,” was removed from the questionnaire; question #9, “Are you familiar with the library’s online public access catalog (OPACs)?,” was added and also, the response choices, “Yes,” “No,” and “Somewhat;” for question #15, the question “Would you be interested in a training session for online access catalogs (OPACs), or computer help, or Internet help, if offered by the library?” was changed to “Would you take advantage of a training session for (1) Online access catalogs (OPACs), (2) computer help, (3) Internet help, if offered by the library?”; a “Comment” line was added to question #12 and #15; the response choice of “Never” for question #3 was replaced with “Less than 1x a month;” and for question #8, the question, “If yes, where are you

most likely to use a computer?,” was changed to the question, “If you use a computer, where are you most likely to use a computer?”

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CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS OF DATA
Procedure/Methods

During a three – week period the researcher personally surveyed 52 senior patrons (55 years of age and older) at the Cape May County Public Library. Of those surveyed 50 responses were valid. Two senior patrons decided not to participate in the survey and returned the incomplete surveys. Table 1 records the distribution of the surveys by day and time.

Tuesday, January 31, 2006	7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.	1
Saturday, February 4, 2006	10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	17
Sunday, February 5, 2006	1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.	8
Saturday, February 11, 2006	10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	13
Saturday, February 18, 2006	10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	11
Total		50

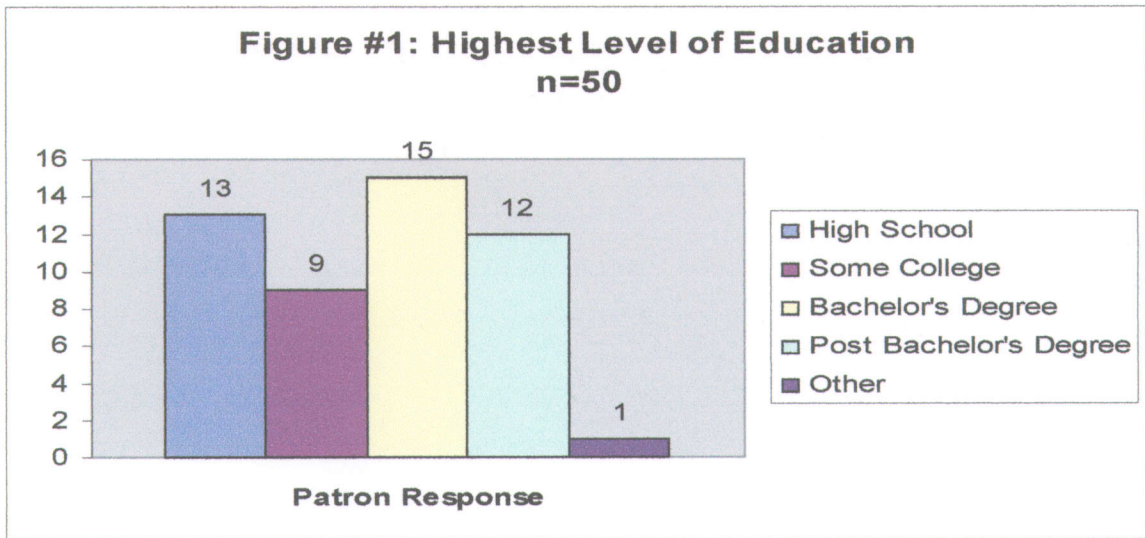
The questionnaire consisted of 15 structured (closed – ended) questions. Patrons responded to research questions concerning their attitude towards computers in the library, the type of computer technology that they use, and their level of confidence as well as competence with such computer technology.

Analysis of Data

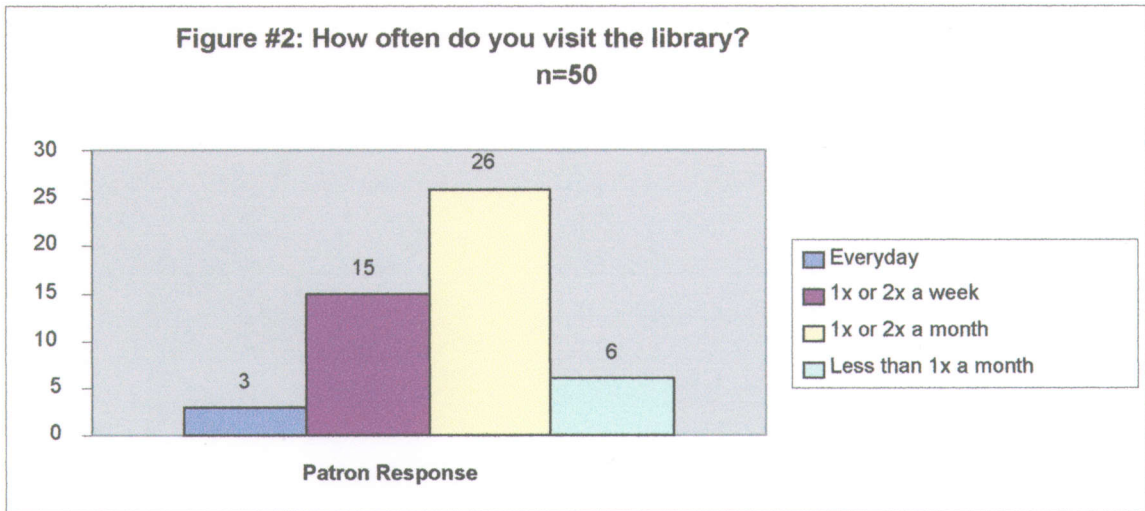
Data were tabulated from the returned surveys. Each individual response to a question was given a specific identification number. An Excel spreadsheet was used to tabulate the responses for each of the questions. Graphs were developed to report the number of responses for each question and to report the results in a clear and understandable format. Furthermore, narrative descriptions were provided to further explain the results.

Presentation of Results

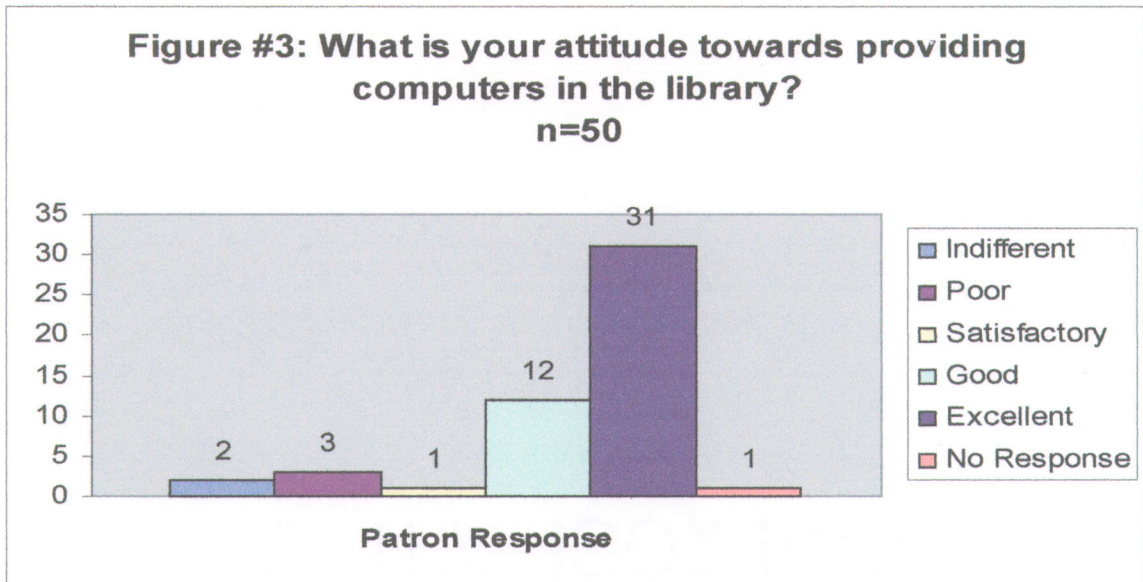
For question #2 (Highest Level of Education?) the senior patrons (respondents) had the following choices to select from: "high school," "some college," "Bachelor's Degree," "Post Bachelor's Degree," or "other." Thirteen senior patrons responded that they had achieved a high school education. Nine senior patrons responded that they had achieved some college education. Fifteen senior patrons responded that they had achieved a Bachelor's Degree. Twelve senior patrons responded that they had achieved a Post Bachelor's Degree. One senior patron responded that he / she had achieved another form of education. Figure #1 summarizes the results for question #2.



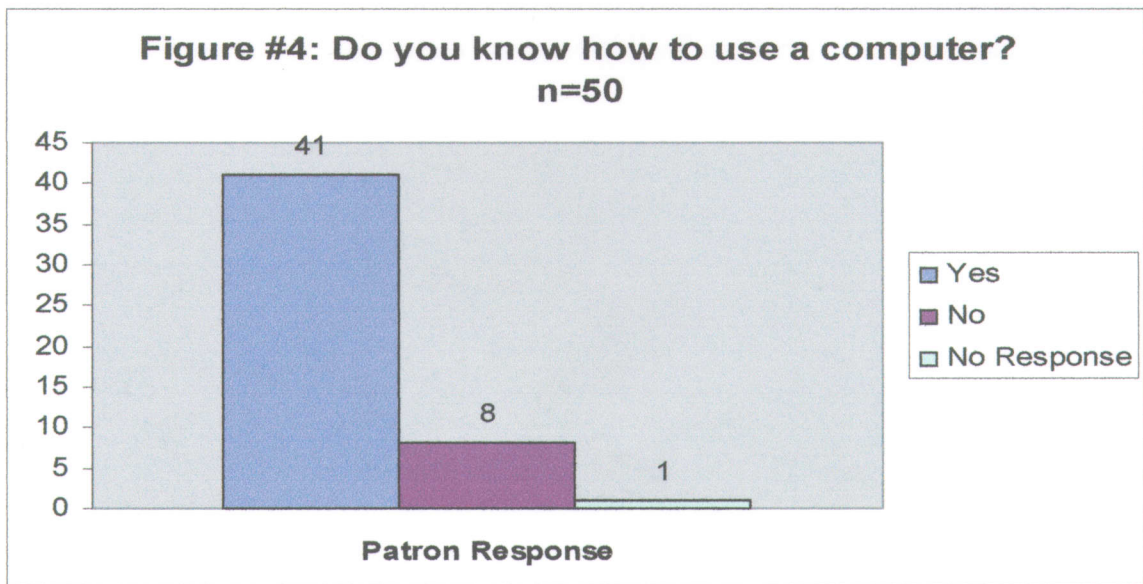
For question #3 (How often do you visit the library?), the respondents had the following choices to select from: “Everyday,” “1x or 2x a week,” “1x or 2x a month,” or “Less than 1x a month.” Three senior patrons responded that they visited the library everyday. Fifteen senior patrons responded that they visited the library 1x or 2x a week. Twenty – six senior patrons responded that they visited the library 1x or 2x a month. Six senior patrons responded that they visited the library less than 1x a month. Figure #2 summarizes the results for question #3.



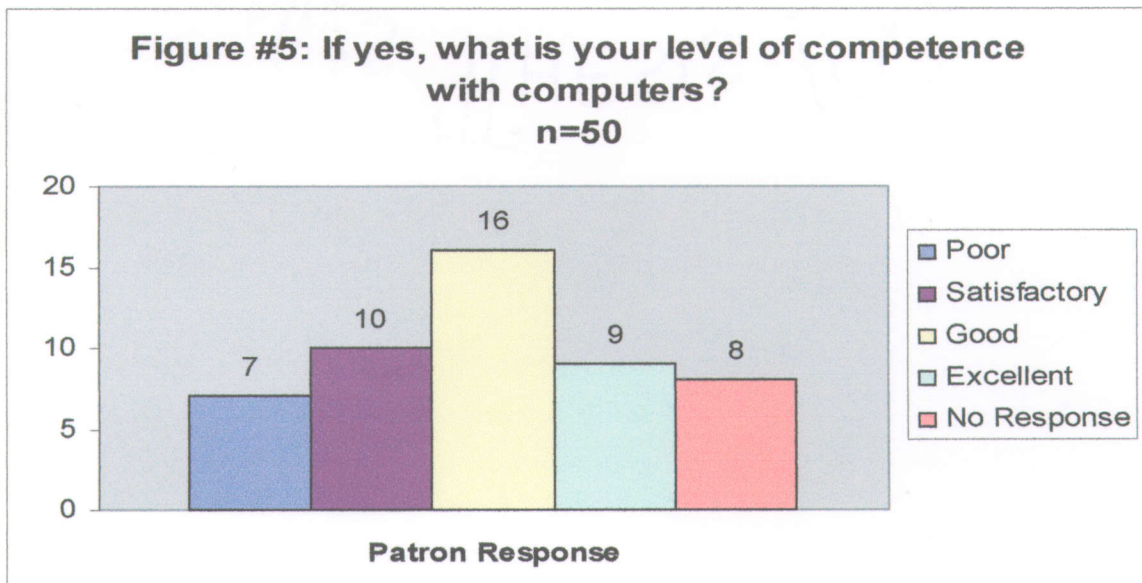
For question #4 (What is your attitude towards providing computers in the library?), the respondents had the following choices to select from: “Indifferent,” “Poor,” “Satisfactory,” “Good,” or “Excellent.” Two senior patrons responded that they had an indifferent attitude towards computers in the library. Three senior patrons responded that they had a poor attitude towards computers in the library. One senior patron responded that he / she had a satisfactory attitude towards computers in the library. Twelve senior patrons responded that they had a good attitude towards computers in the library. Thirty – one senior patrons responded that they had an excellent attitude towards computers in the library. One senior patron did not respond to this question. Figure #3 summarizes the results for question #4.



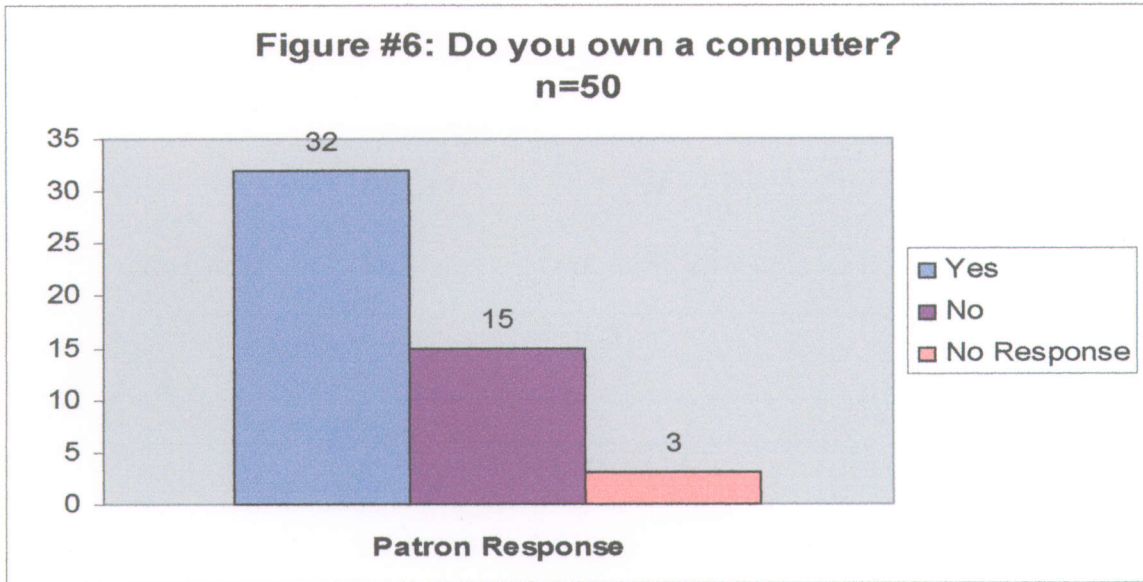
For question #5 (Do you know how to use a computer?), the respondents had to select either “Yes” or “No” as a choice. Forty – one senior patrons responded yes, that they knew how to use a computer. Eight senior patrons responded no, that they did not know how to use a computer. One senior patron did not respond to this question. Figure #4 summarizes the results for question #5.



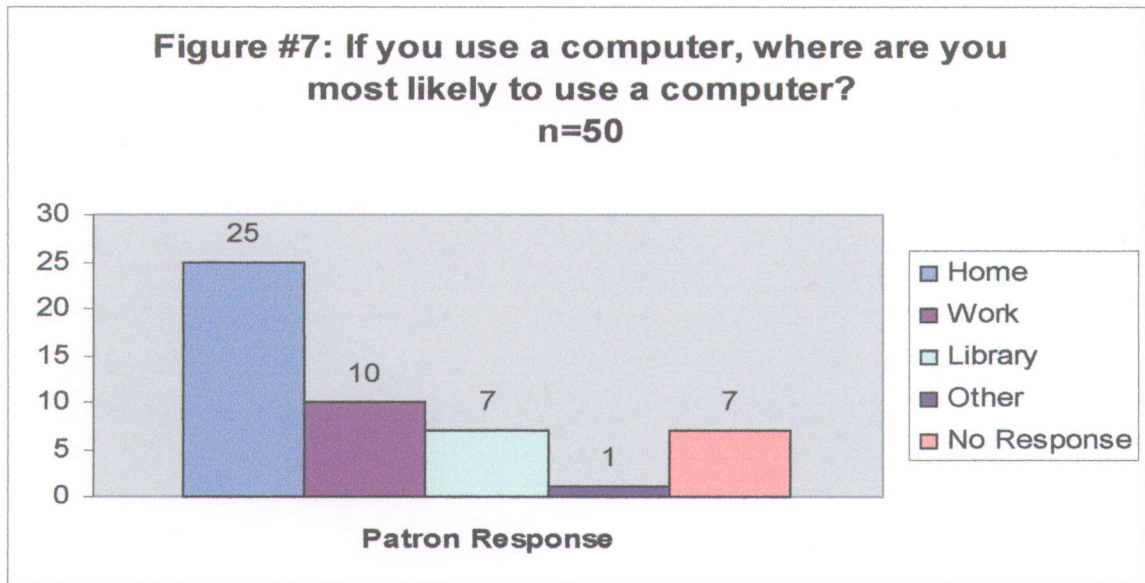
For question #6 (If yes, what is your level of competence with computers?), the respondents had the following choices to select from: “Poor,” “Satisfactory,” “Good,” or “Excellent.” Seven senior patrons responded that their level of competence with computers was poor. Ten senior patrons responded that their level of competence with computers was satisfactory. Sixteen senior patrons responded that their level of competence with computers was good. Nine senior patrons responded that their level of competence with computers was excellent. Eight senior patrons did not respond to this question. Figure #5 summarizes the results for question #6.



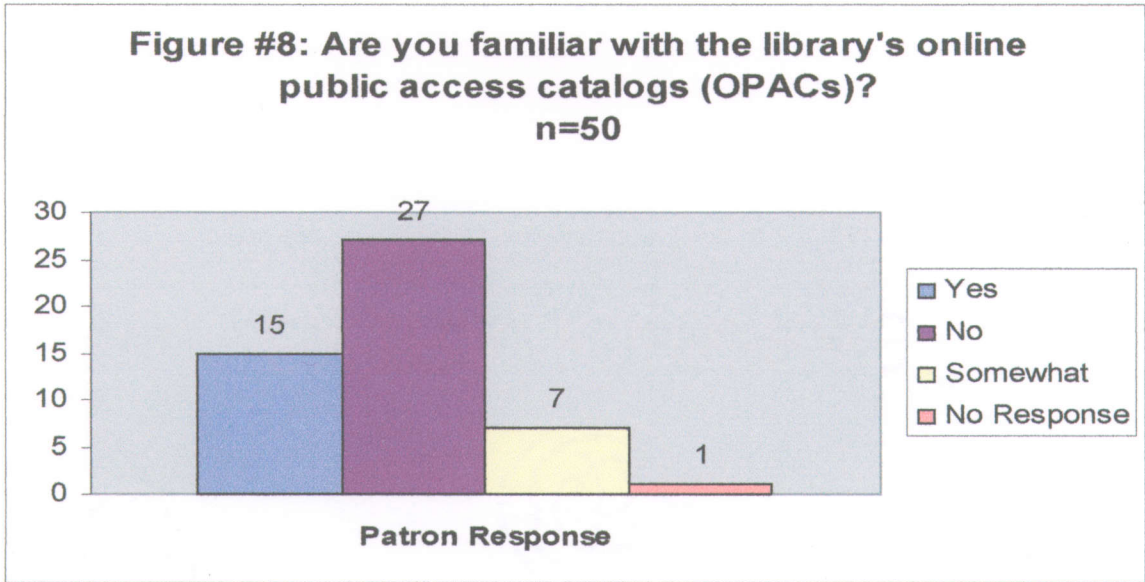
For question #7 (Do you own a computer?), the respondents had to select either “Yes” or “No” as a choice. Thirty – two senior patrons responded yes, that they owned a computer. Fifteen senior patrons responded no, they do not own a computer. Three senior patrons did not respond to this question. Figure #6 summarizes the results for question #7.



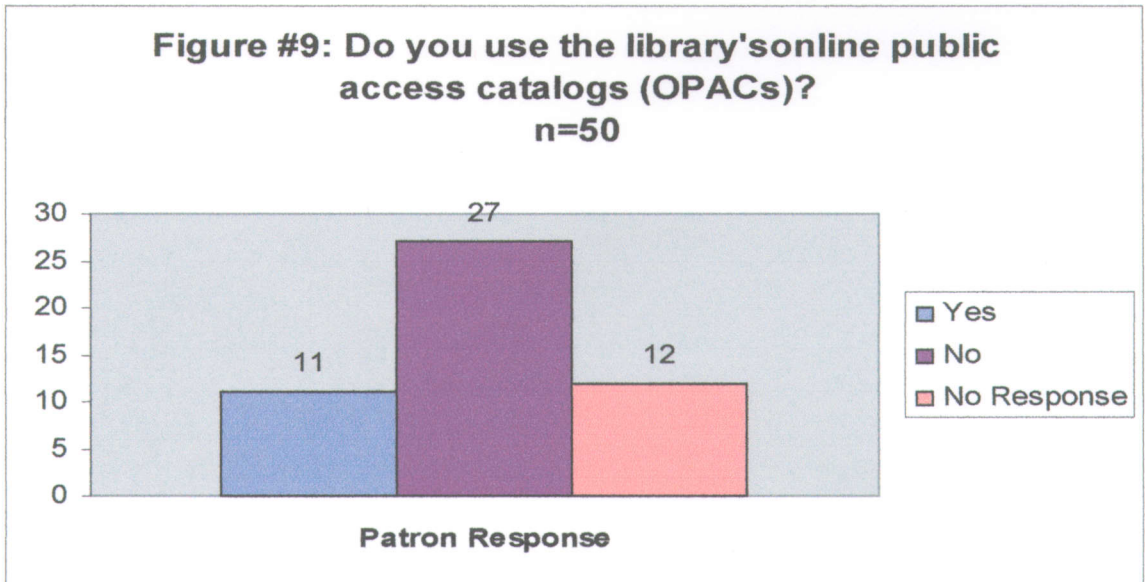
For question #8 (If you use a computer, where are you most likely to use a computer), the respondents had the following choices to select from: “Home,” “Work,” “School,” “Library,” or “Other.” Twenty – five senior patrons responded that they were most likely to use a computer at home. Ten senior patrons responded that they were most likely to use a computer at work. Seven senior patrons responded that they were most likely to use a computer at the library. One senior patron responded that he/ she was most likely to use a computer at another place. Seven senior patrons did not respond to this question. Figure #7 summarizes the results for question #8.



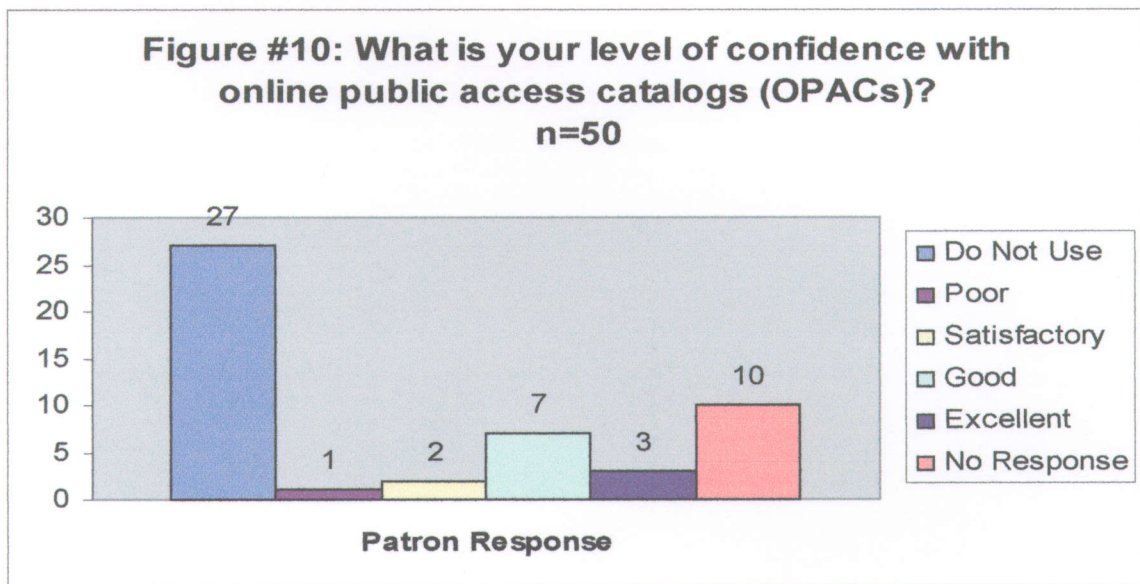
For question #9 (Are you familiar with the library’s online public access catalogs (OPACs)?), the respondents had the following choices to select from: “Yes,” “No,” or “Somewhat.” Fifteen senior patrons responded yes, they were familiar with the library’s OPACs. Twenty – seven senior patrons responded no, that they were not familiar with the library’s OPACs. Seven senior patrons responded that they were somewhat familiar with the library’s OPACs. One senior patron did not respond to this question. Figure #8 summarizes the results for question #9.



For question #10 (Do you use the library's online public access catalogs (OPACs)?), the respondents had to select either "Yes" or "No" as a choice. Eleven senior patrons responded yes, that they use the library's OPACs. Twenty – seven senior patrons responded no, that they do not use the library's OPACs. Twelve senior patrons did not respond to this question. Figure #9 summarizes the results for question #10.

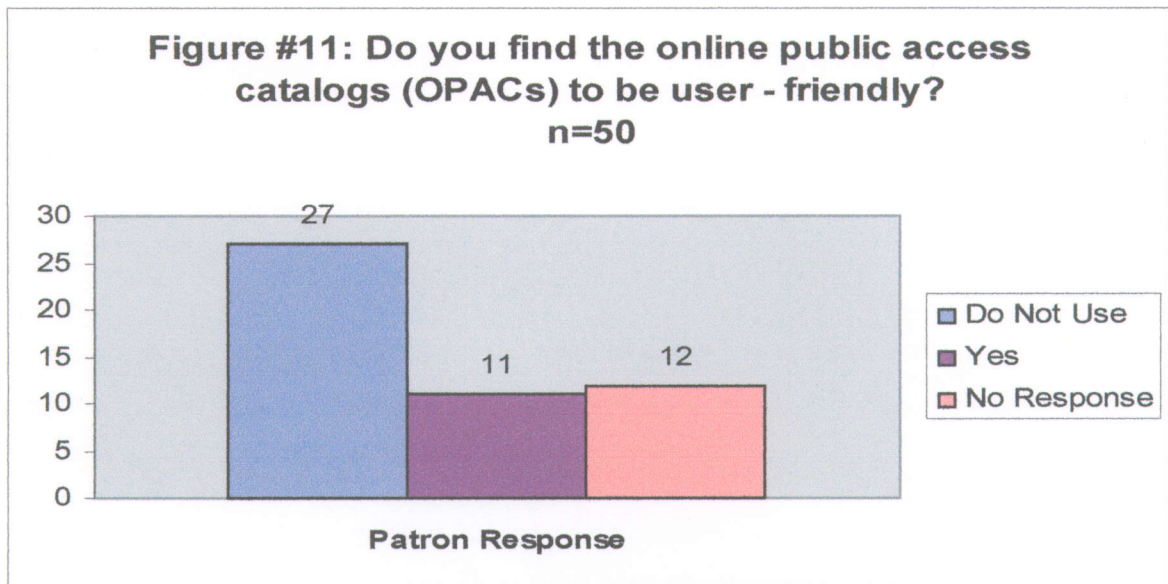


For question #11 (What is your level of confidence with online public access catalogs (OPACs)?, the respondents had the following choices to select from: “Do Not Use,” “Poor,” “Satisfactory,” “Good,” or “Excellent.” Twenty – seven senior patrons responded that they do not use the OPACs. One senior patrons responded that their level of confidence was poor with OPACs. Two senior patrons responded that their level of confidence was satisfactory with OPACs. Seven senior patrons responded that their level of confidence was good with OPACs. Three senior patrons responded that their level of confidence was excellent with OPACs. Ten senior patrons did not respond to this question. Figure #10 summarizes the results for question #11.

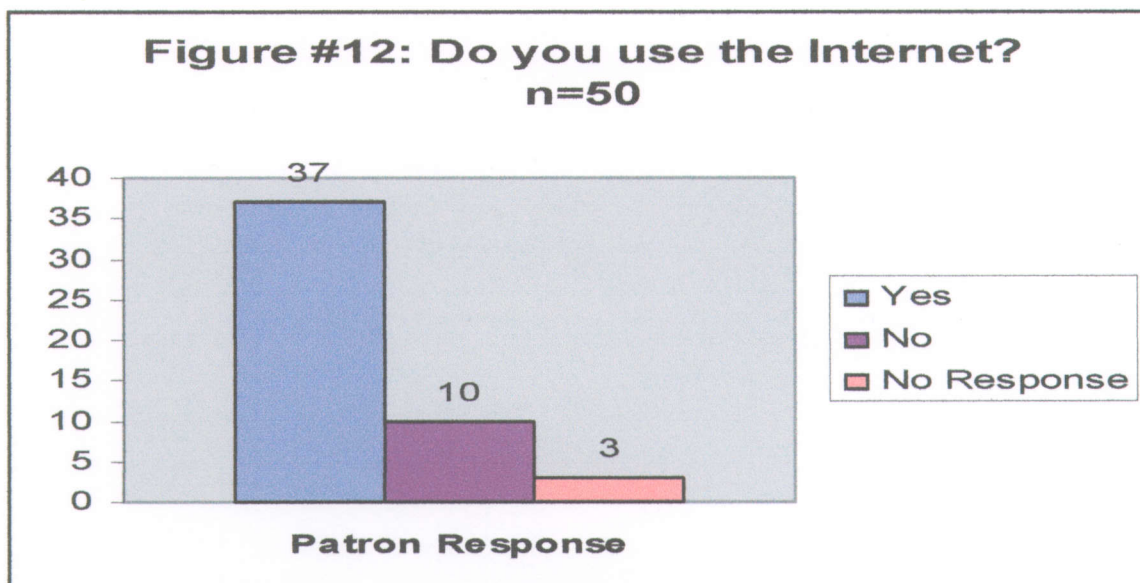


For question #12 (Do you find the online public access catalogs (OPACs) to be user – friendly?), the respondents had the following choices to select from: “Do Not Use,” “Yes,” or “No.” Twenty – seven senior patrons responded that they did not use OPACs. Eleven senior patrons responded yes, that the OPACs were user – friendly.

Twelve senior patrons did not respond to this question. Figure #11 summarizes the results for question #12.

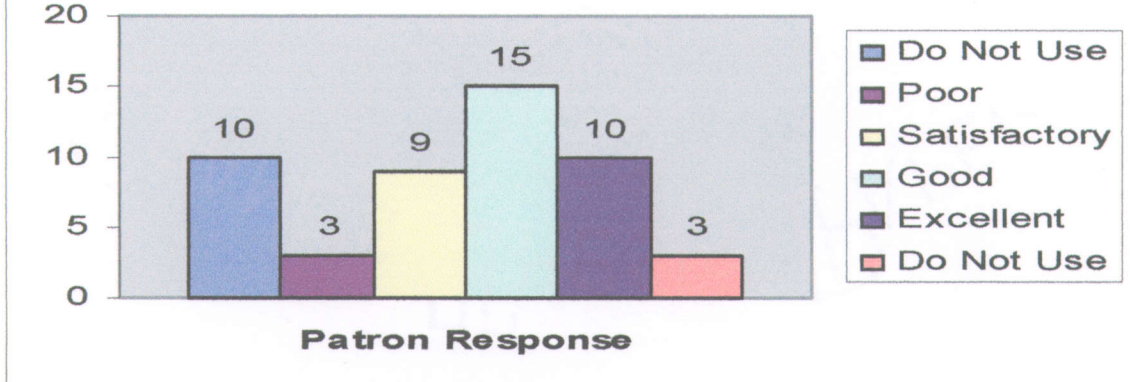


For question #13 (Do you use the Internet?), the respondents had to select either “Yes” or “No” as a choice. Thirty – seven senior patrons responded yes, that they used the Internet. Ten senior patrons responded no, that they did not use the Internet. Three senior patrons did not respond to this question. Figure #12 summarizes the results for question #13.

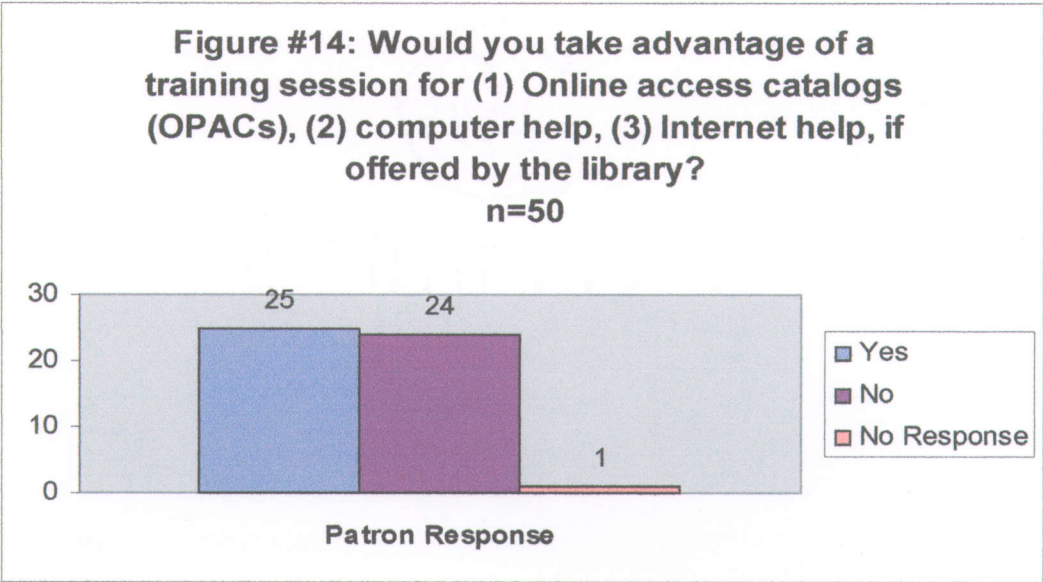


For question #14 (What is your level of competence with using the Internet?), the respondents had the following choices to select from: “Do Not Use,” “Poor,” “Satisfactory,” “Good,” or “Excellent.” Ten senior patrons responded that they did not use the Internet. Three senior patrons responded that their level of competence was poor with using the Internet. Nine senior patrons responded that their level of competence was satisfactory with using the Internet. Fifteen senior patrons responded that their level of competence was good with using the Internet. Ten senior patrons responded that their level of competence was excellent with using the Internet. Three senior patrons did not respond to this question. Figure #13 summarizes the results for question #14.

**Figure #13: What is your level of competence with using the Internet?
n=50**



For question #15 (Would you take advantage of a training session for (1) Online access catalogs (OPACs), (2) computer help, (3) Internet help, if offered by the library?), the respondents had to select either “Yes” or “No” as a choice. Twenty – five senior patrons responded yes, that they would take advantage of a training session. Twenty – four senior patrons responded no, that they would not take advantage of a training session. One senior patron did not respond to this question. Figure #14 summarizes the results for question #15.



Summary

There were 15 questions on the questionnaire. In Chapter IV, a paragraph and a figure support senior patrons' responses to each numerical question. Of interest to the researcher were the following survey questions: question #3, what is your attitude towards providing computers in the library?; question #5, do you know how to use a computer?; question #6, if yes, what is your level of competence with computers?; question #10, do you use the library's online public access catalogs (OPACs)?; question #11, what is your level of confidence with online public access catalogs (OPACs)?; question #13, do you use the Internet?; question #14, what is your level of competence with using the Internet?; and question #15, would you take advantage of a training session for (1) Online access catalogs (OPACs), (2) computer help, (3) Internet help, if offered by the library?

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

A research study was developed to ensure that the needs of older adults using Cape May County Public Library were met. Specifically, this was a research study determining the attitudes of older adults about computer technology in one public library. This study provided staff members of the public library with an assessment and insights about senior patrons and their usage of computer technology.

Not only was the purpose of this research study to determine the attitudes of senior patrons about computer technology at the Cape May County Public Library but also to identify what computer resources were used most frequently by older adult patrons. Additionally, the researcher attempted to determine the competence and / or confidence level of the computer technology used by senior patrons.

Conclusions

Attitudes of Senior Patrons about Computer Technology

According to the results of this research study, a significant majority, 86 percent of senior patrons who responded to question #4, felt positively about having computers in the public library. Included in the responses to this question were 12 seniors who had a “good” attitude and 31 seniors who had an “excellent” attitude towards computer technology in the public library. Figure #3 indicates that of the 49 seniors who answered

the question, only three older adults responded that their attitude was “poor” towards computer technology in the public library.

Computer Usage by Senior Patrons

An overwhelming number of Cape May County Public Library’s senior patrons used computers. According to question #5, 41 of the 49 older adult respondents indicated that they used computer technology (see Figure #4).

Of the senior patrons who responded to question #6 regarding their competence level of computer usage, 16 indicated that their competence level was “good” while nine older adults felt that their competence level was “excellent.” This represented a 59 percent positive competence level by those senior patrons who used the computers. Additionally, 10 older adult patrons felt that their competence level was “satisfactory.” Only seven senior patrons felt that their competence level was “poor” with using computers (see Figure #5).

Internet Usage by Senior Patrons

According to the results from question #13, many senior patrons of Cape May County Public Library used the Internet as well as computers. A substantial 79 percent (37 senior patrons out of 47 senior patron responses) of older adult patrons used the Internet. Of the 47 who responded to this question, only 10 senior patrons did not use the Internet (see Figure #12).

Of those seniors who responded to question #14 concerning their competency level with using the Internet, it was determined that a 68 percent majority had a positive level of competence. Figure #13 revealed that 15 senior patrons had a “good” competence level and 10 senior patrons had an “excellent” competence level. In addition, nine senior

patrons felt that their competence level was “satisfactory.” Only three of 47 senior patrons responded that their level of competence was “poor.” Ten older adult patrons, (21 %), responded that they did not use the Internet (see Figure #13).

OPAC Usage by Senior Patrons

An area of concern for the Cape May County Public Library staff may be the minimal number of senior patrons who responded that they used the online public access catalogs (OPACs). Of the 38 senior patron respondents to question #10, only 11 older adult patrons use the OPACs while 27 senior patrons did not use the OPACs (see Figure #9).

In regards to question #11, 27 out of 40 senior patrons who responded said that they did not use the OPACs. Of those seniors who did use the OPACs, 77 percent of senior patrons suggested that they had a positive level of confidence. Out of 13 senior patrons who did use the OPACs, seven older adult patrons felt that their level of confidence was “good” and three older adults expressed an “excellent” level of confidence. Additionally, two senior patrons indicated a “satisfactory” level of confidence (see Figure #10).

Senior Patrons’ Interest in Training Sessions

The older adult patrons of Cape May County Public Library responding to this survey were, indeed, interested in training sessions offered by the public library. For question #15, over 50 percent responded that they would take advantage of a training session to learn how to use the OPACs, or computer usage, or the Internet. Of 49 senior patrons who responded to this question, 25 older adult patrons would take a training session (see Figure #14).

Recommendations

There was substantial evidence that the sample of senior patrons of Cape May County Public Library had a very good attitude about computers in their public library. Further details indicated that the senior patrons did, indeed, know how to use both the computers and the Internet. However, the research indicated that a limited number of older adults were using the online public access catalogs (OPACs). Although the scope of this research study was restricted to the selected senior patrons of Cape May County Public Library, the researcher maintains that the lack of usage of OPACs by senior patrons may, indeed, be a problematic issue affecting other public libraries and may also include other age populations within the public library.

In making a recommendation, first, it is important to understand the many functions of the OPACs. For purposes of retrieval of library material from both within the immediate library or various other locations, OPACs can be operated conveniently and efficiently. Patrons can use the OPACs to retrieve library material by searching primarily by title, author, keyword, or subject heading. The OPACs also allow patrons to place holds and be put on a waiting list for popular library material. Furthermore, OPACs may be used from the comfort of home via the Internet to search the public library collection and to place holds on library material. Of the OPACs that are used today in Cape May Public Library, the researcher believes that they are user – friendly. Senior patrons need to be made aware of the many functions of OPACs.

In visits to Cape May County Public Library, the researcher was pleased to observe that the public library did offer many computer courses on a monthly basis. The computer course training calendar was prominently displayed in an area of much patron

traffic in the library. This researcher recommends, according to the results of this research study, that Cape May County Public Library provide OPAC training specifically for its senior patrons. This training session could be simply included in another program offered to senior patrons. The researcher believes that through effective advertising, some seniors would attend a training session. In addition, staff members could become aware of senior patrons who are using the OPACs, who may need some further assistance and, also, by approaching senior patrons within the library and offering to show them how to use the OPACs . Since one out of five residents of Cape May County is 65 years of age and older, the Cape May County Public Library could certainly benefit in terms of circulation numbers, attendance numbers, senior patron support, and senior patron satisfaction by providing training on OPACs for the senior patron population.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY

This survey is being administered as part of a graduate course research project at Rowan University. While your participation is voluntary and you are not required to answer any of the questions herein, your cooperation and participation are important to the success of the project and are greatly appreciated.

- 1.) Age (circle one) under 55 55 and over
- 2.) Highest Level of Education (circle one)
High School Some College Bachelor's Degree Post Bachelor's Degree Other
- 3.) How often do you visit the library? (circle one)
Everyday 1x or 2x a week 1x or 2x a month Less than 1x a month
- 4.) What is your attitude towards providing computers in the library? (circle one)
Indifferent Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent
- 5.) Do you know how to use a computer? (circle one) Yes No
- 6.) If yes, what is your level of competence with computers? (circle one)
Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent
- 7.) Do you own a computer? (circle one) Yes No
- 8.) If you use a computer, where are you most likely to use a computer? (circle one)
Home Work School Library Other
- 9.) Are you familiar with the library's online public access catalogs (OPACs)*?
(circle one) Yes No Somewhat
- 10.) Do you use the library's online public access catalogs (OPACs)*? (circle one) Yes No

*******PLEASE CONTINUE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ON THE BACK*******

11.) What is your level of confidence with online public access catalogs (OPACs)*?
(circle one) Do Not Use Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

12.) Do you find the online public access catalogs (OPACs)* to be user-friendly?
(circle one) Do Not Use Yes No Comment _____

13.) Do you use the Internet? (circle one) Yes No

14.) What is your level of competence with using the Internet? (circle one)
Do Not Use Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

15.) Would you take advantage of a training session for (1) Online access catalogs (OPACs)*, (2) computer help, (3) Internet help, if offered by the library?
Yes No Comment _____

*** OPAC is a database composed of bibliographic records describing the books owned by a library. Library materials are accessible via public OPAC terminals or workstations.**

Thank you for your participation with this survey. Your sincere responses will greatly assist the student researcher and the library. Please feel free to offer your opinions or suggestions regarding this survey and /or your feelings regarding the quality of materials or services available to you at the library you frequent the most.
