

How do reading habits influence the health outcomes of adult readers? A longitudinal Analysis

Jinxuan Ma

Emporia State University, USA
jma4@emporia.edu

ABSTRACT

Since the onset of COVID-19, the boom in streaming platforms and television seems to have replaced the sense of escape that many people once found in reading books. Meanwhile there has been a global revival of reading promotion initiatives within public libraries. Existing studies, primarily small-scale action research or empirical research, emphasize the impact of reading on early literacy development, lifelong learning, and the enhancement of mental health and cognitive function in later life.

To provide research-based evidence, this longitudinal analysis utilized survey data from the German Ageing Survey (DEAS, 1996–2021) and the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS, 2010–2025). A cross-lagged panel model was used to examine relationships among reading, memory and depressive symptoms (i.e., CES-D) from 2016 to 2022. The results show reading predicts later improvements in memory, but has no direct effect on depressive symptoms. In contrast, memory decline strongly predicts subsequent depressive symptoms, while the effects of depression on later memory is minimal. Accordingly, reading may indirectly protect against depression by supporting memory.

The findings highlight the essential roles of public libraries in reading promotion among older adults to strengthen cognitive function and lower the risk of depression. Key library services span from readers' advisory, author signings and readings, new book exhibitions, book clubs, and bookmobiles. These initiatives aim to meet the information needs of the growing aging population and promote their overall health and well-being worldwide.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Reading and reading practices; Public libraries; Readers' advisory services.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Longitudinal analysis; Reading promotion initiative; Health outcomes, Older adults

Copyright 2025 by the authors. Published under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](#).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21900/j.alise.2025.2040>

REFERENCES

The German Centre of Gerontology. (n.d.). *German Ageing Survey (DEAS)*.
<https://www.dza.de/en/research/deas>

Institute of Social Science Survey, Peking University. (n.d.). *China Family Panel Studie (CFPS)*.
<https://cfpsdata.pku.edu.cn/#/home>