

Socioeconomic differentials of the members of BRAC
Gonokendra Pathagar

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Abstract

This study aimed to document the socioeconomic background of the members of BRAC *Gonokendra (community-based library)*, to identify why some members did not avail its services and why some members of the Management Committee did not play an active role in managing the *pathagars*. A total of 904 members were selected through systematic random sampling. Besides, 74 general users and 26 members of the Management Committee were selected purposively. The study revealed that the programme successfully mobilised the literate rural people of all age groups as well as all economic strata. More male members attended than female members, but female members borrowed more books than male members. Children and students of lower grades were more regular in attendance and borrowed more books than members of higher age groups and the students of higher grades. Amongst the non-student members, the higher educated were more regular in attendance than the lower educated, and borrowed more books. Lack of interest of the members towards *pathagars*, lack of reading habit, students' turn over from the associated schools or colleges, lack of new arrivals of reading materials, and pressure of academic study seemed to be the major reasons for not availing the services of the *pathagars*. On the other hand, members of the Management Committee did not play an active role due to dependency on BRAC staff, lack of practice of power, and involvement in occupational activities. It was realised that there still have rooms to extend its services among the target population. Thus, extensive campaigns are needed to motivate the members as well as the community to maximize the use of *pathagars*. At the same time, a participatory management system may be applied to ensure more close community involvement in managing the *pathagars*.

INTRODUCTION

In upgrading the socioeconomic conditions of the rural people and raising their living standard, an appropriate information support system needs to be developed (Khan, Chowdhury and Nazimuddin, 1999). The community-based library is one of the systems that has a rigorous impact, particularly in the context of economic development, in instituting required changes in our social system, reducing poverty, strengthening literacy efforts, expanding the educational basis, and undertaking development initiatives. Rehnema (1976) pointed out that development of reading skills and its retention is a difficult task, and to achieve these skills various methods have been identified. One of the most common methods is the post-literacy activity, as without this, neo-literates quickly relapse into illiterates. Malaya (1976) estimated that in the absence of follow-up to literacy programmes, 60-90 % of the adult learners relapse into illiteracy. The findings of a test given to literacy certificate holders showed that within 6-12 months, hundreds of them forgot almost everything they learned from the literacy classes. The reason behind this, as Quddus (1963) noted, was lack of post literacy materials.

Considering the urgency of rural based reading centers, BRAC introduced a community-based *pathagar* programme in 1995 under the Continuing Education (CE) programme. The aim of the programme was to foster a learning environment in the community through providing opportunities to neo-literates as well as literates to develop their literacy skills further. The programme also aimed to develop a reading habit among people and sensitize them to the significance and strength of mass media to involve them in the learning process (BEP, 2000).

BRAC operates three types of *pathagars* - general, female and small type *pathagars*. This grouping is based on the number of members, the amount of reserve funds generated by the community, and the location of *pathagars*. The standard required number of members is 300-400, and the amount of reserve funds to be raised by community contribution is Tk. 50,000 for general and female type *pathagars*, but these are flexible for small type *pathagars*. It should be mentioned here that there is no upper limit for the number of

members and the fund to be raised for the *pathagars*. The *pathagars* that are located in co-education schools/collages or in common places and have achieved the minimum requirements are called 'general *pathagar*'. The *pathagars* with the same achievement in the number of members and amount of fund, but located in girls high school/colleges are called 'female *pathagar*'. The *pathagars* that are located in any of the above places but still have not achieved minimum requirements of number of member and amount of reserve fund equal to general and female type *pathagars* are called 'small *pathagar*'. The small *pathagars* are transformed either to general or female type *pathagar* (based on location) if the requirements are met.

Details about the BRAC *Gonokendra Pathagar*, i.e., its procedure and terms and conditions of establishment, target population, membership and subscriptions, fund generation, management and supervision, services offered by the *pathagars*, etc., have thoroughly been discussed elsewhere (Khan, 1999; Khan and Akter, 1999; Khan, 2000).

However, until December 2001, BRAC had been operating 570 *pathagars* of which 486 were general, 53 female, and the remaining 31 were small type *pathagars*. The *pathagars* had 2,55,336 members (44% were female) (CEP, BRAC).

The research issues

The previous BRAC studies identified some shortcomings of the programme and showed positive community perception towards *pathagars*. They participated actively in establishing the *pathagars*, but the trend was found to be declined. A certain extent of members were irregular in attendance of the *pathagars* – eventually, they did not borrow books and did not renew their membership. Some members of the Management Committees were found inactive. Predominance of female users was much higher in the Female type *pathagars*, but it was far lower in the general and small type *pathagars* (Khan and Akter, 1999, Khan, 2000).

The objectives

Considering the findings of the research and field reports of the programme, the programme felt necessity to undertake further research on different aspects of the programme. This study aimed to meet the following objectives:

- ❶ To record the socioeconomic background of the members,
- ❷ To investigate who avails and who does not avail the services of the *pathagars*,
- ❸ To identify reasons why some members do not avail the services of the *pathagars*,
and
- ❹ To determine why some members of the Management Committee do not play an active role in managing the *pathagars*.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and strategy: This study was designed as both quantitative and qualitative in nature, and followed an exploratory strategy.

Study area

This study has covered all the (12) operational areas of BRAC's Continuing Education Programme (CEP). The areas were Srimongal, Comilla, Gazipur, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Shirajganj, Rajshahi, Jessore, Magura, Faridpur, Pabna and Narshingdi.

Sources of data

Information was collected from primary sources, mostly from the members of the *pathagars*. In addition, information about the academic performance of student members was collected from concerned teachers of the associated schools. Data related to the number of books lending by the members was collected from the library cards of the members.

Sample size and sampling procedure

Thirty *pathagars* were selected purposively from all types of *pathagars* (23 general, 5 female, and 2 small type). From each *pathagar*, 30 members were targeted to be interviewed who were chosen following systematic random sampling method. Finally, 904 members were interviewed. The following table gives a distribution of selected members by sex and type of membership.

Table 1. Distribution of sample population by sex and type of *pathagar*

Type of <i>pathagar</i>	Number of <i>pathagar</i>	Number of sampled population					
		Male		Female		All	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
General	23	415	59.6	281	40.4	596	100.0
Female	5	12	8.1	136	91.9	148	100.0
Small	2	33	55.0	27	45.0	60	100.0
Total	30	460	50.9	444	49.1	904	100.0

Besides, 74 (41 male and 33 female) different types of members (some of them were primarily selected), especially those who were irregular and most irregulars in attendance were selected purposively. Similarly, 26 (21 male and 5 female) members of the Management Committee also were selected following the same method. They were chosen from 9 of the 30 selected *pathagars*. The concerned programme organisers (PO) and the librarians of the concerned *pathagars* were also chosen.

Data collection techniques, instruments, and field activities

Quantitative data were collected from the selected members through individual interviews. A structured format was used that accommodated all information related to the socioeconomic background of the members. To collect qualitative information, irregular and most irregular members were interviewed in-groups using a checklist.

Some 11 well-trained and experienced field investigators collected socioeconomic information of the members. A female field investigator was also recruited to collect

qualitative information especially from the female respondents. The investigators were imparted a four-day orientation on the data collection techniques. During the orientation, one-day was allocated for a field test to provide practical exposure of the data collection techniques. The researcher himself supervised some of the spots of data collection at the field level and conducted group discussions with male groups.

FINDINGS

Socioeconomic profile of the members

In analysing data, the sampled population was divided into two main categories - student members (students of primary, secondary and higher level) and non-student members. The majority (87.4%) of the student members were less than 20 years old. On the other side, about 19.0% of the non-student members were 50 years of age or above, followed by 16.1% in the 36-39 years age group. The mean age of the student members was 14.6 years and 37 years for the non-student members (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of members by age group

Age group	Student members		Non-student members	
	No	%	No	%
<10	14	1.8	-	-
10 -14	377	49.5	3	2.1
15 - 19	351	46.1	9	6.3
20 - 24	19	2.5	17	11.9
25 - 29	-	-	13	9.1
30 - 34	-	-	18	12.6
35 - 39	-	-	23	16.1
40 - 44	-	-	18	12.6
46 - 49	-	-	15	10.5
50 +	-	-	27	18.9
Total	761	100.0	143	100.0
Mean	14.6		37.0	
Standard deviation	2.2		12.6	

Table 3 shows that more than 79.0% of the student members were the students of secondary level, followed by students of colleges or universities (16.8 %). Of the non-student members, the majority (67.8%) had more than 10 years of schooling, followed by

6-10 years (30.8%). The mean year of schooling of the student members was 8.7 years, which was 12.1 years for the non-student members.

Table 3. Distribution of member by year of schooling

Year of schooling	Student members		Non-student members	
	No	%	No	%
1 - 5	29	3.8	2	1.4
6 - 10	604	79.4	44	30.8
11 +	128	16.8	97	67.8
Total	761	100.0	143	100.0
Mean	8.7		12.1	
Standard deviation	2.0		2.9	

Fathers of more than 41% of the student members had secondary education, followed by 22% higher education, and 20% primary education. On the other side, fathers of 37% of the non-student members had higher education, followed by 31% primary education (Table 4). The table further exhibits that fathers of 17.2% of the student members had no education, which was 14.7% for the non-student members. Fathers of 21.6% of the student members had higher education, which was 17.5% for the non-student members. The mean year of schooling of the fathers of the student members was 7.5, which was 7.0 years for the fathers of the non-student members.

Table 4 also shows that mothers of 38.2% of the student members had secondary education, followed by primary education (35.9%). Mothers of 37.1% of the non-student members had primary education, followed by no education (35.0%) and secondary education (26.6%). Mothers of 4.3% of the student members had higher education, which was higher than mothers of 1.4% of non-student members. Mothers of 35% of the non-student members had no education, which was higher than mothers of 21.8% of the student members.

Table 4. Distribution of members by parent's year of schooling

Year of schooling	Student member		Non-student member	
	No	%	No	%
<u>Father's year schooling</u>				
Nil	131	17.2	21	14.7
1 - 5	151	19.8	44	30.8
6 - 10	315	41.4	53	37.1
11 +	164	21.6	25	17.5
Total	761	100.0	143	100.0
Mean year of schooling	7.5		7.0	
Standard deviation	4.6		4.4	
<u>Mother's year of schooling</u>				
Nil	166	21.8	50	35.0
1 - 5	273	35.9	53	37.1
6 - 10	289	38.2	38	26.6
11 +	33	4.3	2	1.4
Total	761	100.0	143	100.0
Mean year of schooling	5.3		3.9	
Standard deviation	3.7		3.5	

Table 5 that the mean year of schooling of all members was 9.2. The mean year of schooling of the 'Respected' type members was 13.1 years which was higher than other types of members, i.e., life members (12.1 years), donor members (11.8 years), general members (10.9 years) and student members (8.7 years).

Table 5. Distribution of members by mean year of schooling and type of membership

Type of membership	Number	Year of schooling (mean)	SD
Student member	761	8.7	2.0
General member	35	10.9	3.1
Respected member	20	13.1	2.5
Life member	49	12.1	2.9
Donor member	39	11.8	3.0
Total	904	9.2	2.5

Table 6 shows that except general and student members, household's mean years of schooling of the remaining types of members were more than 9 years.

Table 6. Distribution of members by mean year of household's schooling and type of membership.

Type of membership	Number	Household year of schooling (mean)	SD
Student member	761	6.7	2.5
General member	35	7.5	3.1
Respected member	20	9.3	2.3
Life member	49	9.7	2.4
Donor member	39	9.3	3.1
Total	904	7.1	2.7

Table 7 reveals that fathers of more than 36% of the student members were farmer, followed by trader (28.1%) and service holder (14.8%). On the other hand, 36% of the non-student members were teacher¹, which was higher than other occupations. Some 4.2% of them were unemployed and 6.3% were housewives.

¹ As most of the BRAC *Pathagars* were cited in school and/or college campuses, the teachers of those institutions were enrolled as the members of the *Pathagars*.

Table 7. Distribution student members by their father's occupation and non-student members by self occupation

Student member			Non-student member		
Father's occupation	No.	%	Self occupation	No.	%
Service holder	113	14.8	Housewife	9	6.3
Teaching	45	5.9	Service holder	27	18.9
Farming	278	36.5	Teaching	52	36.4
Trading	214	28.1	Farming	7	4.9
Artisan (Handicraftsman)	4	.5	Trading	27	18.9
Labour	23	3.0	Artisan (Handicraftsman)	1	.7
Contractor	5	.7	Labour	-	-
Member/Chairman	4	.5	Contractor	1	.7
Retired	28	3.7	Member/Chairman	-	-
Advocate's asst.	3	.4	Retired	3	2.1
Unemployed	1	.1	Advocate's asst.	2	1.4
Others	43	5.5	Unemployed	6	4.2
			Others	8	5.6
Total	761	100.0	Total	143	100.0

The economic status of the members has been divided into three categories - good, moderate and poor. Table 8 shows that about 44% of all members had good economic condition. The economic status of more than 73% of the life members and donor members was good. Similarly, 46% of the respected members, 43% of the general members and about 40% of the student members had good economic condition.

Table 8. Distribution of members by household economic status

Type of member	Economic status					
	Good		Moderate		poor	
	No	%	No	%	NO	%
Student member	306	40.2	339	44.5	116	15.2
General member	15	42.9	16	45.7	4	11.1
Respected member	9	45.9	6	30.0	5	25.0
Life member	36	73.5	10	20.4	3	6.1
Donor member	29	74.4	9	23.1	1	2.6
All	395	43.7	380	42.0	129	14.3

Television is one of the valuable assets in a family and it is considered as an influential determinant of socioeconomic status. Table 9 shows, half of all the members had TV in their homes. The Table also shows that about 46% of the student members had TV in their homes which was 60% or above for other types of members.

Table 9. Existence of TV at home by type of membership

Type of member	Has TV		Does not have TV	
	(No.)	%	(No.)	%
Student member	346	45.5	415	54.5
General member	21	60.0	14	40.0
Respected member	16	80.0	4	20.0
Life member	36	73.5	13	26.5
Donor member	33	84.6	6	15.4
All	452	50.0	452	50.0

Who uses the *pathagars*, who does not and to what extent

The following part of this paper shows the dynamics of *pathagars* use. In evaluating it, members' level of attendance in the *pathagar* and borrowing of books by them have been analysed by different socioeconomic indicators of the members. It should be mentioned here that the level of attendance of the members was categorised into three levels: regular, irregular and most irregular. The student members who attended the *pathagars*

once a week were considered 'regular', those who attended the *pathagar* twice a month were considered 'irregular' and those who attended the *pathagar* less frequently or did not attend at all were considered 'most irregular'.

Similarly, the non-student members who attended the *pathagars* twice a month were considered 'regular', those who attended once a month were considered 'irregular' and the members who attended less frequently or did not attend at all were considered as 'most irregular'. It should be further mentioned here that following this method, the librarians of the respective *pathagars* assessed the level of attendance of the members.

Level of attendance

Figure 1 shows proportion of members attending the *pathagars* regularly by category of membership and sex. The figure episodes that amongst the student members, 72.9% of the male attended the *pathagars* regularly, which was higher than the female (68.1%). The difference was not statistically significant ($p=0.05$) (Table 1 in Appendices). Similarly, amongst the non-student members, 57.6% of the males and 43.2% of the females attended the *pathagars* regularly, the difference was highly significant ($p<.001$) (Table 1 in Appendices). The findings indicate that male members were more regular in attendance than female. Amongst female, 68.1% of the student members attended the *pathagars* regularly, which was far higher than the non-students (43.2%). Similarly, amongst men, 72.9% of the student members attended the *pathagars* regularly, which was far higher than the non-students (57.6%). The figure further shows that among all the members, 69.3% of the male attended the *pathagars* regularly, which was 66% for the females. This difference was not statistically significant at $p = 0.05$ level. An interesting finding was that although overall attendance of the males was higher than the overall attendance of females, the level of attendance of the males was lower in the female and small type *pathagars* (Table 2 in Appendices).

Figure 1. Regular attendance of members by sex

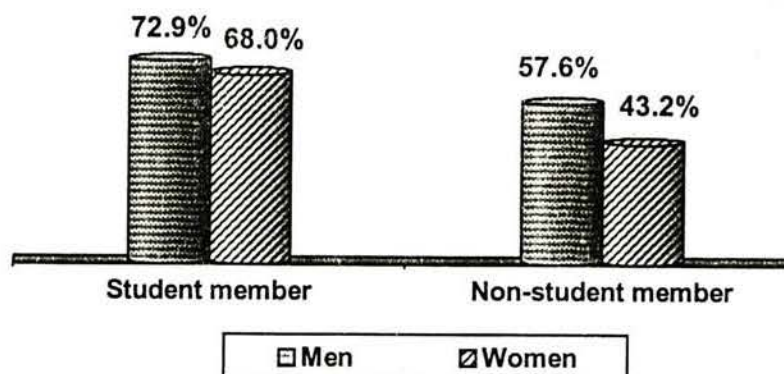


Table 10 shows that 73.3% of the student members attended the *pathagars* regularly which was higher than all other types of members. As most of the *pathagars* were housed in schools or colleges, more than 70% of the student members attended the *pathagars* regularly. Of the student members who did not attend the *pathagars* regularly, most of them were former students of the associated schools or colleges who left school or college after passing the SSC or HSC examinations. Amongst other types of members, such as general, respected, life and donor members, more than 50% of each type attended the *pathagars* regularly.

Table 10. Distribution of members by level of attendance and type of membership

Type of member	% of members		
	Regular (612)	Irregular (154)	Most irregular (138)
Student member	70.3	17.0	12.7
General member	51.4	31.4	17.2
Respected member	55.0	10.0	35.0
Life member	56.4	17.9	25.6
Donor member	53.1	10.2	36.7
All	67.7	17.0	15.3

Figure 2 presents proportion of members attending the *pathagars* regularly by their age groups. The figure shows that 76.2% of the members who aged less than 10 years, attended the *pathagars* regularly, followed by 10 - 14 years (72.4%), 20-24 years (69.2%) and 25-29 years age group (61.5%). The figure shows a gradual decrease of attendance towards higher age groups. More details of attendance are shown in Appendices (Table 3).

Figure 2. Regular attendance of members by age group

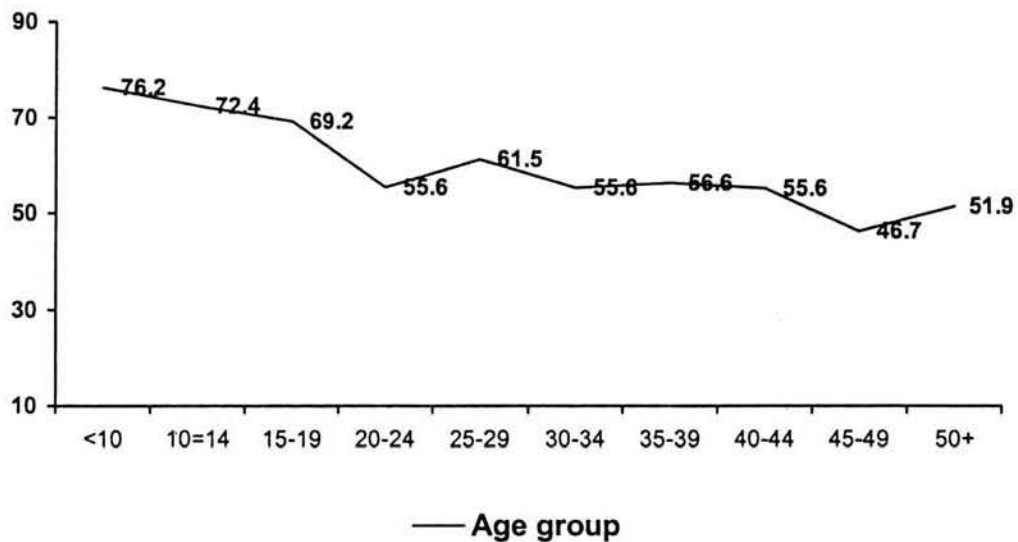


Figure 3 shows that amongst the student members, 76% of the primary level students attended the *pathagars* regularly, followed by secondary level (71.5%) and college/university level (63.3%). Similarly, amongst the non-student members, 60.8% of the higher educated members attended the *pathagars* regularly, followed by primary (50.0%) and secondary level (38.6%). Table 4 in appendices gives more details.

Figure 3. Regular attendance of members by level of education

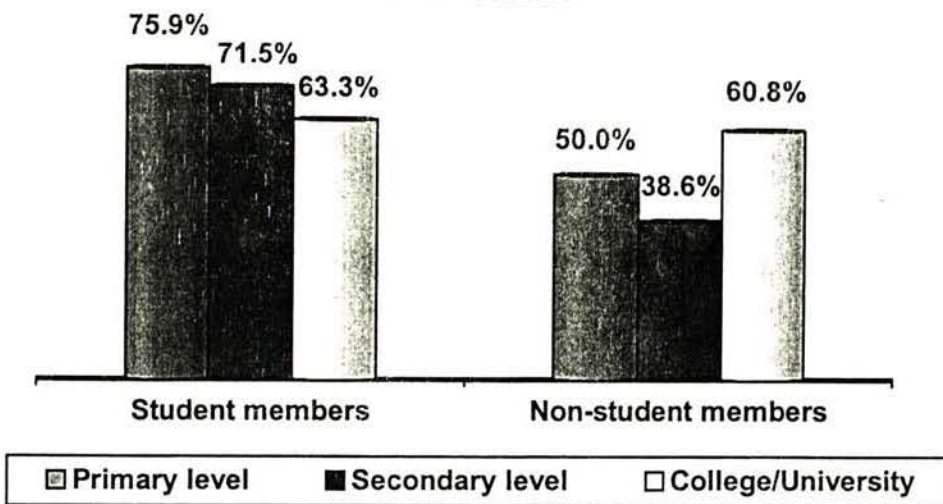


Table 11 distributes the non-student members by their occupation and level of attendance in the *pathagars*, which shows that about 78% of the service holders attended the *pathagars* regularly, followed by unemployed (67%), and teachers (57.7%). Although, most of the selected teachers were the teachers of the associated schools, 42% of them did not attend the *pathagars* regularly.

Table 11. Distribution of non-student members occupation and level of attendance

Occupation	Number of member (143)	Level of attendance		
		Regular (77)	Irregular (25)	Most irregular (41)
Housewife	9	-	55.6	44.4
Service holder	27	77.8	3.7	18.5
Teaching	52	57.7	15.4	26.9
Farming	7	14.3	14.3	71.4
Trading	27	33.3	29.6	37.0
Artisan/handicrafts	1	100.0	-	-
Advocate's assistant	2	50.0	-	50.0
Member/chairman	1	-	-	100.0
Unemployed	6	66.7	16.7	16.7
Retired	3	66.7	33.3	-
Others	8	100.0	-	-
Total	143	53.8	17.5	28.7

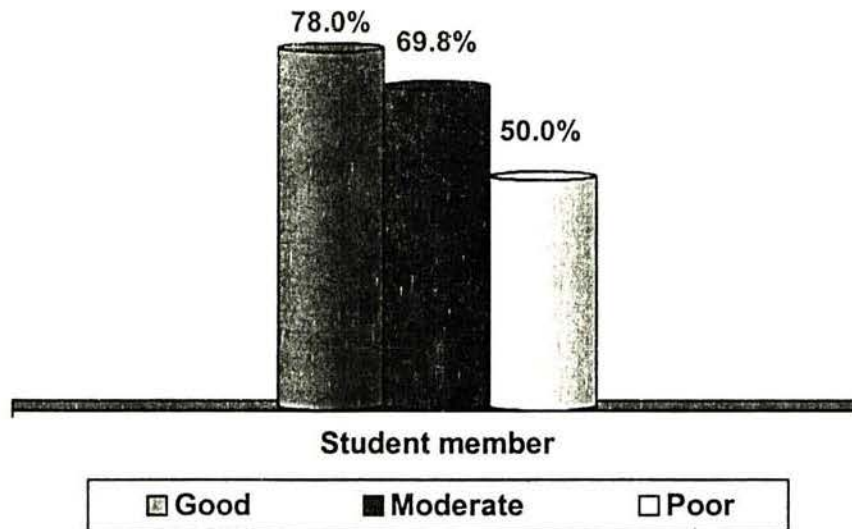
Table 12 shows the level of attendance of the members by level of their economic status. The economic status of the members was divided into three strata: 'good', 'moderate' and 'poor'. The Table depicts that amongst the student members, level of attendance was much higher for those who came from economically well-off strata (good 72.9%) than those who came from poor strata (51.7%). Conversely, these results were the opposite for the non-student members. The Table depicts that the level of attendance in the *pathagars* was higher for the members who were from poor economic strata (76.9%) than those who were from economically well-off strata (50.6%).

Table 12. Distribution of members by level of economic status and attendance

Level of economic status	Level of attendance		
	Regular	Irregular	Most irregular
<u>Student member</u>	(535)	(129)	(97)
Good	72.9	15.4	11.8
Moderate	74.3	15.6	10.0
Poor	51.7	25.0	23.3
Sub total	70.3	17.0	12.7
Level of significance	p<.001		
<u>Non-student members</u>	(77)	(25)	(41)
Good	50.6	19.1	30.3
Moderate	53.7	19.5	26.8
Poor	76.9	-	23.1
Sub total	53.8	47.5	28.7
Level of significance	p<.001		
All	67.7	17.0	15.3

Figure 4 presents correlation between the level of attendance of the student members in the *pathagars* (student of secondary level) and their level of academic performance. As most of the *pathagars* were in secondary schools, the majority of the members were students of secondary level. Thus, academic performance of the student members of secondary level was collected.

Figure 4. Regular attendance of members (secondary level) by level academic



The teachers of primary and college level faced difficulties in evaluating their students in this manner (as mentioned in the methodology section). However, the following figure shows that 78% of the good performers attended the *pathagars* regularly, which was 69.8% for moderate and 50% for poor performers. The findings indicate that the level of attendance of the student members in the *pathagars* increased with good academic performance. Table 5 in appendices gives more details.

Number of book lending

Figure 5 presents the mean number of books borrowed by the members in six months (May - October 2001) by category of membership and sex. The figure shows that female members on average, borrowed higher number books (student 9.1 and non-student members 8.0 books) than male members (student 7.1 and non-student 4.1 book). The differences of book lending between male and female were significant both amongst the student members ($p < 0.05$ level) and the non-student members ($p < 0.001$) (Appendices Table 6).

Figure 5. Number of books (mean) borrowed by sex

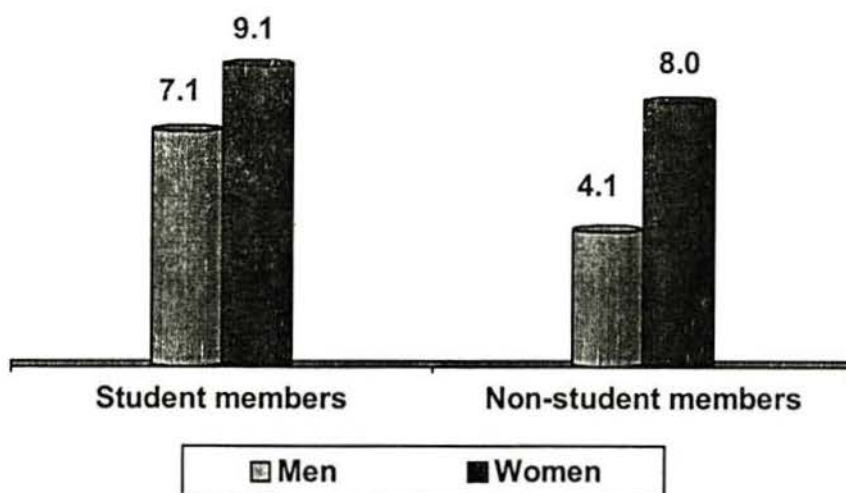


Table 13 shows that student members, on average, borrowed more books (8.1) in six months, followed by general members (7.8), donor members (4.6), life members (4.2) and respected members (4.2). As the donor members, respected members, and life members were engaged with different professions, it might be concluded that they had inadequate time to read books, and consequently borrowed fewer books compared to the student and general type members.

Table 13. Number (mean) of book borrowed by members by type of membership

Type of member	Number	Number of book borrowed (mean)	SD
Student member	761	8.1	10.8
General member	35	7.8	9.6
Respected member	20	3.5	6.5
Life member	49	4.2	6.7
Donor member	39	4.6	6.5
All	904	7.7	10.4
Level of significance		p<.001	

The members of lower age groups borrowed comparatively higher number books than those of higher age groups (Figure 6). The trend of book lending had a gradual decrease towards higher age groups. Table 7 in appendices gives more details.

Figure 6. Number of books borrowed by age group

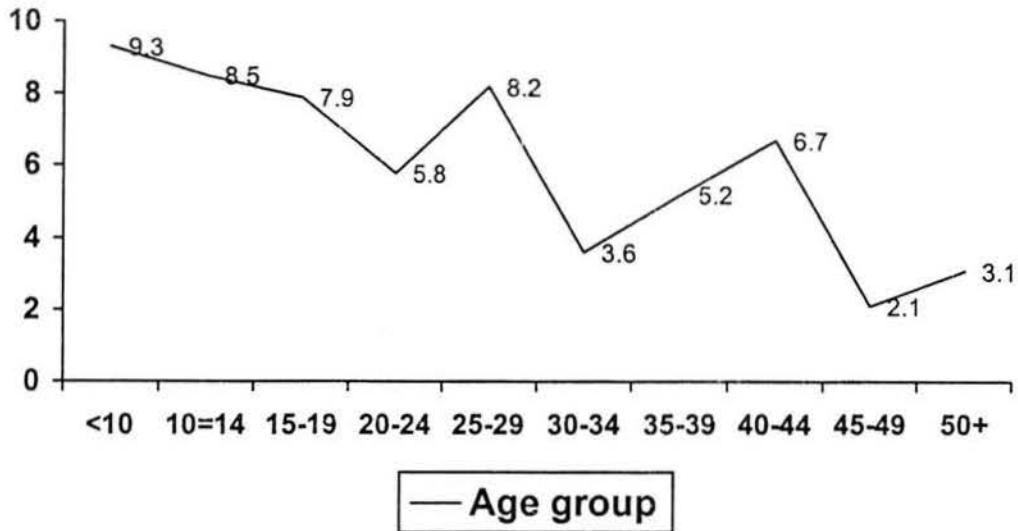
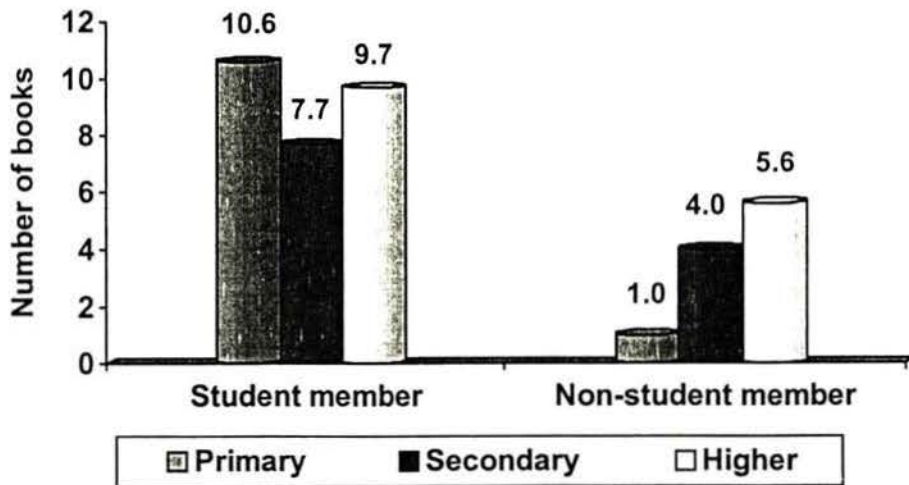


Figure 7 shows that the students of primary level, on average, borrowed 10.6 books, which was higher than the number of books borrowed by the students of college or university (9.7) and secondary levels (7.7). Amongst the non-student members, higher educated members borrowed on average higher number of book (5.6) than those who

Figure 7. Number of books borrowed by level of education



had secondary (4.0) and primary (1.0) education. The difference of book lending between student members (8.1) and non-student members (5.1) was statistically significant ($p < .001$).

The student members who were from good economic strata, borrowed on average, 9.2 books in six months which was higher than those from moderate (8.3) and poor economic strata (5.0) (Table 14). Amongst the non-student members, those who were from moderate economic strata borrowed, on average, 6.2 books in six months, which was higher than the those who were from good (5.0 books) and poor (1.9 books) economic strata.

Table 14. Number of book lending by economic status of members

	Student member			Non-student member		
	Number of member	Number of book	SD	Number of member	Number of book	SD
Good	306	9.2	10.5	(89)	5.0	7.7
Moderate	339	8.3	12.0	(41)	6.2	8.1
Poor	116	5.0	7.0	(13)	1.9	2.6
All	761	8.1	10.8	(143)	5.1	7.5

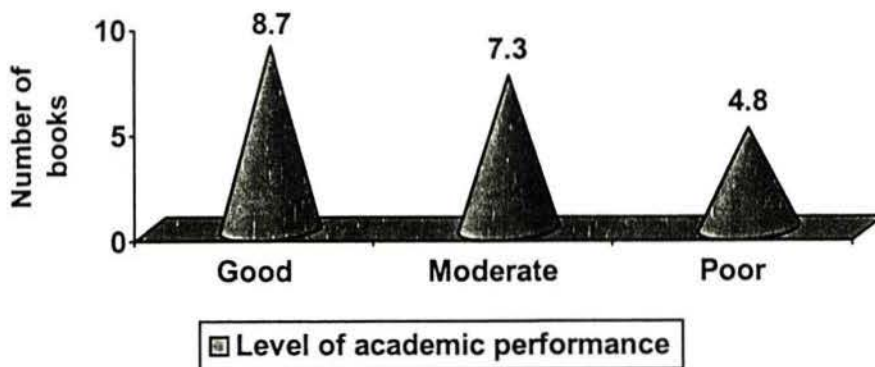
Table 15 reveals that housewives, on average, borrowed a higher number of book (9.2) than service holders (8.9), unemployed (7.5), and traders (3.9). As the housewives borrowed a higher number of books, the finding of this table further confirms that women members borrowed a higher number of books than male members.

Table 15. Distribution of books borrowed by the non-student members by occupation

Occupation	No.	Number of book borrowed (mean)	SD
Housewife	9	9.2	10.9
Service holder	27	8.9	8.7
Teaching	52	3.5	6.6
Farming	7	1.4	3.8
Trading	27	3.9	6.3
Retired	3	2.0	3.5
Advocate's assistant	2	1.5	.7
Unemployed	6	7.5	9.1
Others	10	4.9	7.8
Total	143	5.1	7.5

Figure 8 presents number of book borrowed by student members by level of their academic performance. It should be mentioned here that the teachers (teachers in-group) of the respective schools evaluated academic performance of the students. It should further be mentioned here that academic performance of the student members was

Figure 8. Number of books borrowed by academic performance



gathered only of the student members of secondary level. The figure, however, shows a gradual increase of book lending towards good academic performers. The result indicates that the students, who had good academic performance not only read textbooks but also reading materials out of syllabus. The finding of this figure shows a positive association between level of academic performance and number of book lending.

Reasons for not availing the services of BRAC *pathagars*

The study found that not a single factor, but a number of issues were responsible for not availing the services of the *pathagars* by general users. The members of the Management Committee also raised some issues in this regard. The major issues of both general users and the Management Committee are discussed below.

Issues of general users

One of the major but interesting finding was that majority of the members could not express satisfactory reason(s) for their irregular attendance in the *pathagars*. From their responses, it was realised that they had less interest in attending the *pathagar*. It was observed that a significant number of student members did not willingly enroll in the *pathagars* rather, they were charged for membership along with tuition fee or admission fee by the school authority. On a relating question, teachers of the associated school pointed out that they did this to generate funds to establish the *pathagars*. Otherwise, it would be difficult for them to mobilise such a big amount of reserve funds as community contribution. However, in this regard the members raised some issues that are discussed below.

A number of student members leave schools and colleges each year after passing the SSC and HSC level. Most of them continued their study in college or universities - thus they could not manage time to attend the *pathagar*. They mentioned that they had to attend colleges or universities from the early morning until the afternoon. Although some of the male students attended the *pathagar* after returning from colleges, a limited number of female students attended the *pathagars*. Some of the female members expressed that often they were not allowed to get out of their homes for a second time. Some of the girl students informed that their guardians often feel insecure outside their homes especially in such a public place. In addition, the girl students had to help their mothers with household activities in their leisure time. Some students, both male and female, were enrolled in colleges or universities located in other places where they had to stay for a long duration – thus, they could not attend the *pathagars*.

The irregular members who previously were regular, pointed out that there were no new finished reading the books that were interested to them. A senior manager, some programme organisers of the Continuing Education programme and some members of Management Committees of the selected *pathagars* expressed similar views. More specifically, they pointed out that of the approximately 250 books authored by Humayun Ahmed and 150 books authored by Imdadul Haq Milon, the majority were not available in the *pathagars*. It was realised that these writers were favourites to most of the student members. Some of them also expressed their interest on thriller series, but these books were not available in most of the *pathagars*. In this regard, some of the higher educated respondents informed that books and reading materials available in the *pathagars* did not satisfy the requirements of the major users.

Some irregular student members informed that they previously attend the *pathagars* regularly but for the last few months they did not attend due to their different public examinations. For these examinations, they had to study hard, attend schools or colleges, or go to coaching centers or private tutors to prepare for the examinations. Thus, they had limited time to attend the *pathagar*, but this absenteeism would not be continued after the examinations.

It was observed that some of the student members of secondary level, especially the male members had interest in outdoor games rather than indoor activities. Thus, their level of attendance in the *pathagars* and book lending was found lower than their female counterpart.

It was also observed that the concerned librarians, POs or Management Committees never contacted the irregular and most irregular members. In this ground some respondents suggested that individual contact or organising meetings with concerned members or community would be useful to motivate the members as well as the community. Unfortunately, in most *pathagars*, there was no provision to record the membership number in the daily attendance register. Similarly, in some *pathagars*, detailed addresses

of the members were not available. Thus, it was difficult for the concerned BRAC staff, Management Committee and librarians to trace out the members who did not avail the services of the *pathagars*. It was also observed that the concerned BRAC staff could allow very limited time to the ongoing *pathagars*, because they regularly had to allow much time for opening new *pathagars* in their respective working areas.

Among the *pathagars* that were located on the premises of schools or college and were kept open throughout school hours, some non-student members felt shy or hesitate to attend the *pathagar* during school hours. In some *pathagars*, non-student members were found to be discouraged to attend the *pathagars* during school hours. In the majority of the female type *pathagars*, male students and non-students were not allowed to attend.

It was discovered that some guardians and even some teachers of the associated schools nurture in mind that the students should not read novels and story books other than their text books, because this could hamper their regular studies. Teachers in most of the associated schools asked the librarians not to issue books to the student members immediately before their school examinations began.

Some members, especially the female, read reading materials that were borrowed by library cards of their older or younger siblings. Thus, they often did not attend the *pathagars*.

Issues of Management Committee

It was confirmed that most members of the Management Committee were the members of adhoc committees at the initial stage of *pathagar* establishment. They played an active role during *pathagar* establishment and no doubt worked very hard to generate funds and members. Otherwise, it would not be possible to establish the *pathagars* and raise a big amount of funds as community contribution. Although most of them were well-wishers of the *pathagars*, an extent of them did not continue their active role in managing the *pathagars*.

The members of Management Committee were of different occupations. As such they were always busy with activities related to their occupations. Eventually, they often could not manage to allow time for the *pathagars*. It was found that, Chairman or Secretary of some BRAC *pathagars* simultaneously held some other important posts in the society, such as, Chairman of Union Parishad, Chairman of several educational institutions or other social institutions. In some cases, the founders or donors of the associated schools or colleges held the post of Chairperson of the *pathagars*. Thus, they rarely could attend the meetings of the *pathagars* or took responsibilities of the *pathagar* related activities.

It was observed that the majority of the members of the Management Committee were fully dependent on concerned BRAC staff. They only attended the meetings when organised by BRAC staff but did not involve themselves with the implementation of the decisions taken in the meetings.

In this regard, some members of the Management Committee informed that they did not organise meetings on a regular basis, but they organised meetings based on issues to be discussed.

It was also observed that most of the members of the Management Committees were the practitioners of power especially in rural settings but they had limited scope to practice such power in BRAC *pathagars*. Eventually, they had less interest in *pathagar* related activities. The members of Management Committee, in one of the selected *pathagars*, openly raised the issue saying that they alone could not take decisions related to *pathagars* to be implemented rather, the concerned BRAC staff held the supreme power. As an example, they expressed that although the *pathagars* had adequate amount of reserve fund - they intended to increase monthly remuneration of the librarian, but the concerned BRAC staff did not agree. Thus, it was discouraging for the members of the Management Committee.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The concept of rural based *pathagar* is a new phenomenon in our environment compared to the urban-based information resource centers. Although, about 80% of our country's population live in rural areas, information services are not available for them. As information has rigorous impact particularly in the context of socioeconomic development, a suitable information system needs to be developed in rural areas to provide information support to the rural people. The service can facilitate to uplift their socioeconomic conditions and raise their standard of living to enable them to lead a healthy and quality life (Khan, 1997). Khan recommended that "each village of Bangladesh should have a good information resource center." Realising the necessity of rural based information centers, BRAC undertook the *pathagar* programme to meet the information needs of the rural population.

Khan and Akter in 1999 conducted a study on BRAC *pathagars* focusing on issues, problems and operational status of the *pathagars* that identified some shortcomings of the programme. The study reported that some *pathagar* members did not avail the services and some members of the Management Committee did not play active role in managing the *pathagars*. This paper has dealt especially with its members that aimed at documenting socioeconomic background of the members and exploring the reasons for not availing the services available in the *pathagars*. The study also aimed at exploring why some members of Management Committee do not play an active role in managing the *pathagars*.

The study, however, reveals that the programme successfully has mobilised the literate segment of rural population and has covered people of all age groups. The young group and students of secondary level were the major users of the *pathagars*. Similarly, amongst the non-student members, higher educated were the major users of the *pathagars*. Since most of the *pathagars* were located in the school or college premises, the scope of *pathagar's* use was predominantly higher for student members compared to

non-student members. The findings indicate that the younger groups and the student members benefited more than the older and the non-student groups.

Although the *pathagar* programme was developed keeping in mind that people by class, race and gender in the community will equally use the *pathagars*, findings indicate that the level of attendance of the females and non-students was still limited. Amongst the target people, the access of females was more limited. A study (Khan and Akter 1999) on the programme showed similar findings but the situation has positively improved. Although, separate reading tables were arranged for male and female in each *pathagar* to increase attendance of female users, gap in level of attendance between two sexes is minimising slowly.

Although, the level of attendance of female was lower than male, an interesting result was that female members on average, borrowed higher number books than their male counterpart. The reason is that most of the male users, especially the non-students, had interest in political issues, thus, they read the daily newspaper. The student members, especially the boys, had interest in outdoor games rather than indoor activities. On the other hand, female users had little interest in political issues, and thus borrowed more books. The findings suggest that emphasis should be given to increase the level of attendance of the female users and this would help increase the number of book lending. At the same time, male members should also be encouraged to borrow books or reading materials. As one of the objectives of the BRAC *pathagars* was to provide information support to all people in the community, people of all professions and educational status, male or female should have equal opportunity to avail the services of the *pathagars*. Khan, Chowdhury and Nazimuddin (1999), emphasised the need to take necessary measures in which most people in the community can benefit from the programme. Khan and Akter in 1999 and Khan in 1997 made similar suggestions.

The level of attendance of the students of primary level and the number of books borrowed by them were higher than the students of other levels. The children basically

used the children's corners, which were well equipped by reading materials, some indoor games and some musical instruments suitable for children. The findings indicate that the children's corners have a positive effect that attracted the children towards the *pathagars*. The findings give the message that attractive provisions in the *pathagars* grow interest of the people toward the *pathagar*. The findings suggest that reading materials as well as services should be made available according to the needs and interests of the potential users to encourage users to avail the services of the *pathagars*. The findings further suggest that some indoor and outdoor game instruments may be made available in BRAC *pathagars*.

The study further reveals that a great extent of rural adults and neo-literates still do not have access to *pathagars*. The concerned authority should consider how they could be captured through such a people oriented programme.

Finally it can be concluded that although some members had some reasons for not attending the *pathagars* on a regular basis, a significant portion of them had no acceptable reasons. The programme still has some shortcomings that limit the maximum use of the *pathagars*. As the levels of attendance of users and number of reading materials borrowed by them are the most important variables in evaluating performance of the *pathagars*, more attention should be given to these variables to improve the situation. At the same time, the irregular as well as potential users need to be contacted either at an individual level or in-groups that may encourage them in using the *pathagars*. Along with these, campaigning and more interactions with the community may be an additional measure, and a participatory management system may be applied to ensure community involvement in managing the *pathagars*.

Management implication

1. There was no machinery to motivate the irregular or most irregular members to regularise their attendance in the *pathagars*. They may be contacted either individually or in-groups. Following the methods, the community people can be made aware of the objectives and benefits of *pathagar* use. In each *pathagar*, the concerned Management Committee with the assistance of teachers of the concerned schools can take an intensive campaign programme.
2. As books and reading materials such as novels and story books, series books, religious books, daily newspaper, weekly magazine, text books, dictionary, general knowledge, etc., were inadequate in the *pathagars*, these can be made available according to the interest of the user groups. As most of the *pathagars* had no new arrivals after its establishment, some reading materials can be made available based on interest of the major users.
3. To draw the attention of the members and to increase their interest in the *pathagars*, cultural activities should be organised on a regular basis. For the same purpose, *some outdoor sports instruments can be made available in the pathagars*.
4. As the Management Committee was the most influential factor in making the programme more effective, the members of the management committees may be trained to become more aware of their responsibilities and duties. They also should be given decision making power, which may encourage them in playing their active role in *pathagar* related activities.
5. Some *pathagars* were found to keep open only throughout the school hours, consequently limiting the attendance of the non-student members. Thus, *pathagars* should be kept open at least one hour after school hours, in which non-student members can avail the services of the *pathagars*.

6. The programme organisers are responsible for supervising the *pathagars* on a regular basis, but they faced difficulties in performing their duties. They always had to spend much time in opening new *pathagars* in their respective programme areas. Thus, contact staff may be employed to assist the programme organisers for a particular time.

7. The members of the Management Committee may be given adequate power in which they can take necessary decisions related to *pathagars* and take necessary steps to implement their decisions.

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Appendices

Table 1. Distribution of members by level of attendance and sex

Level of attendance	% of student members		% of non-student members		% of all		
	Male (354)	Female (407)	Male (106)	Female (37)	Male (460)	Female (444)	All (904)
Regular	72.9	68.1*	57.6	43.2**	69.3	66.0*	67.7
Irregular	17.5	16.5	11.3	35.1	16.1	18.0	17.0
Most irregular	9.6	15.5	31.1	21.6	14.6	16.0	15.3
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

* Not significant at $p=0.05$ level , * * Significant at $p<.001$ level

Table 2. Member's level of attendance by sex and type of *pathagar*

Type of Pathagar	Level of attendance					
	Regular		Irregular		Most irregular	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
General	70.9 (294)	63.3 (178)	14.7 (61)	16.7 (47)	14.5 (60)	19.9 (56)
Female	50.0 (6)	72.8 (99)	8.3 (1)	8.4 (25)	41.7 (5)	8.8 (12)
Small	57.6 (19)	59.3 (16)	36.4 (12)	29.6 (8)	6.1 (2)	11.1 (3)
All	69.3 (319)	66.0 (293)	16.1 (74)	18.0 (80)	14.6 (67)	16.0 (71)

Table 3. Distribution of members by age group and level of attendance

Age of member (year)	Level of attendance		
	Regular (612)	Irregular (154)	Most irregular (138)
< 10	76.2	17.1	6.7
10 – 14	72.4	16.5	11.1
15 – 19	69.2	18.1	12.7
20 – 24	55.6	25.0	19.4
25 – 29	61.5	30.8	7.7
30 – 34	55.6	5.6	38.8
35 – 39	56.6	13.0	30.4
40 – 44	55.6	16.7	27.7
46 – 49	46.7	-	53.3
50 +	51.9	18.5	29.6
Total	67.7	17.0	15.3

Table 4. Distribution of members by level of education and attendance

Level of education	Level of attendance		
	% Regular	% Irregular	% Most irregular
Student member	(535)	(129)	(97)
Primary level	75.9	13.8	10.3
Secondary level	71.5	16.2	12.2
College/University	63.3	21.1	15.6
Sub total	70.3	17.0	12.7
Level of significance	p<.001		
Non-student member	(77)	(25)	(41)
Primary level	50.0	50.0	-
Secondary level	38.6	22.7	38.6
College/University	60.8	14.4	24.7
Sub total	53.8	17.5	28.7
Level of significance	p<.001		
All	67.7	17.0	15.3

Table 5. Proportion of secondary level student member by level of their academic performance and level of attendance in the *pathagar*

Academic performance	Level of attendance		
	% Regular	% Irregular	% Most irregular
	(432)	(98)	(74)
Good	78.0	11.7	10.3
Moderate	69.8	17.3	12.9
Poor	50.0	31.9	18.1
Total	71.5	16.2	12.3
Level of significance	p<.001		

Figures in the parentheses indicate number of student members of secondary level.

Table 6. Number of book borrowed by the members by sex

Sex of member	Student member (761)		Non-student member (143)	
	No. of book borrowed (mean)	SD	No. of book borrowed (mean)	SD
Men	7.1	8.6	4.1	6.0
Women	9.1	12.4	8.0	10.4
All	8.1	10.8	5.1	7.5
Significance	p < 0.05		p < 0.001	

Figures in parentheses indicate number of member

Table 7. Number of book borrowed members by age group

Age of member (year)	Number of member	Number of book borrowed (mean)	SD
< 10	14	9.3	11.2
10 - 14	380	8.5	11.7
15 - 19	360	7.9	9.9
20 - 24	36	5.8	7.3
25 - 29	13	8.2	11.3
30 - 34	18	3.6	5.5
35 - 39	23	5.2	7.5
40 - 44	18	6.7	9.9
46 - 49	15	2.1	3.4
50 +	27	3.1	3.8
Total	904	7.7	10.4
Significance	p < .05		

]Table 8. Number of book borrowed by members by level of education

Level of education	Student member (761)		Non-student member (143)	
	Number of book (mean)	SD	Number of book (mean)	SD
Primary	10.6	11.2	1.0	1.4
Secondary	7.7	10.8	4.0	7.2
College or university	9.7	10.6	5.6	7.7
All	8.1	10.8	5.1	7.5

Figures in parenthesis indicate number of member

Level of significance: Number of book borrowed by student members (8.1) vs non-student members is significant at p < .001 level.

Table 9. Number of book borrowed by student member of secondary level by school performance

Level of school performance	No. of student	Number of book (mean)	SD
Good	300	8.7	12.5
Moderate	232	7.3	9.4
Poor	72	4.8	6.5
All	604	7.7	10.8

Table 10. Number of books borrowed by members by sex and type of *pathagar*

Type of Pathagar	Male		Female		All	
	# of member	No. of book borrowed	# of member	No. of book borrowed	# of member	No. of book borrowed
General	415	6.2	281	8.5**	696	7.1
Female	12	8.3	136	10.1*	148	10.0
Small	33	8.1	27	8.3*	60	8.2
All	460	6.4	444	9.0	904	7.7

* not significant at $p = .05$ level, ** significant at $p < 0.05$ level