

What?

A study of 21,916 adults in China aged 40 and over in 2022¹ examined the **relationship between reading and depression**. The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale questionnaire (CES-D20) was used to detect depression status, and a national cross-sectional survey was used to measure reading status.

Why?

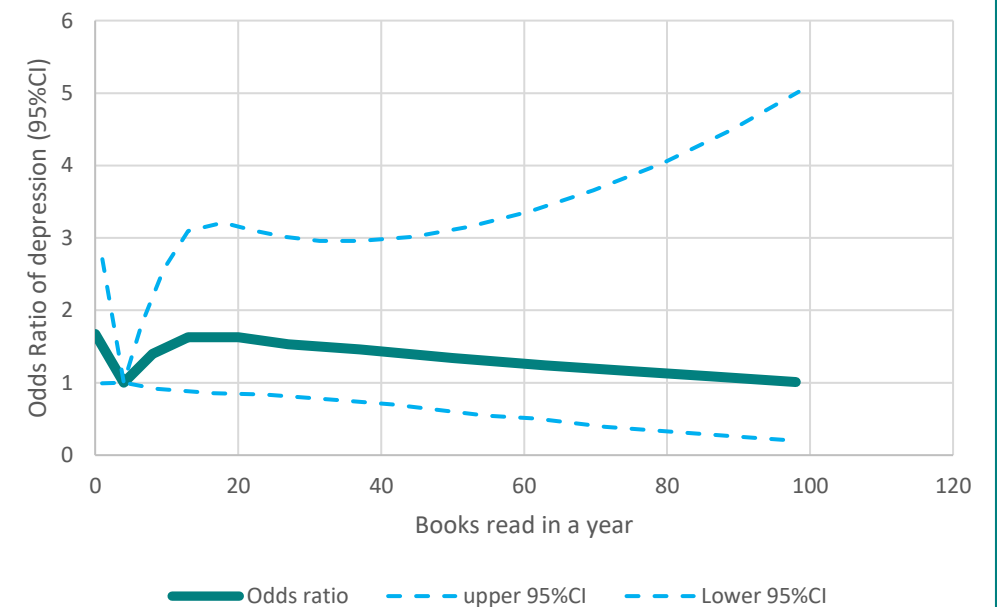
There has been an **increasing trend in the social and financial burdens of mental health management** in recent years¹, with many treatments for depression still exhibiting unpleasant side effects. Reading has been suggested as a **side effect-free and cost-effective way** of improving mood modulating emotions. This large study aimed to investigate the **mental health benefit of reading in adults**.

A univariate analysis showed that the CES-D20 score in the reading group was significantly lower than in the non-reading group, and that the prevalence of depression was 13.82% in non-readers compared with 7.99% in readers¹. However, this was prior to controlling for other variables.

The habit of **reading was negatively associated with depression** (Odds Ratio = 0.809, 95% Confidence Interval 0.657 – 0.997). A significant association was identified among the elderly population but not the middle-aged population¹, and citizens under 40 were not recruited so the link cannot be stated.

The graph shows that the **risk of depression was lowest when the number of books read was around 4 per year** (which is why 4 books is used as the reference point for the odds ratio). After this, the risk of depression increased with the number of books, although it was still lower than the risk for no books per year, until the number reached 15 or more, where risk began to decrease again. This analysis controlled for 20 different variables including age, sex, chronic disease and time with family¹.

Association between number of books read and depression



Who?

Levels of depression among UK adults have increased in recent years, in part due to the global pandemic, with one in six individuals experiencing some form of depression in the summer of 2021, compared with one in ten in the summer of 2019². Therefore, any lifestyle changes that could help alleviate these negative feelings should be encouraged throughout the population.

Author Comments

The population examined was large, and the analysis was well-controlled. However, the research should be **replicated in a UK population** to confirm its validity among those in the UK, as well as a wider range of ages, to investigate the benefits of reading **on a younger population**. Further research should explore the effect of reading on **other mental health issues, such as anxiety and stress**, to explore its potential positive or negative effects. Most importantly, given that this is not an interventional study, and its findings are correlational, it cannot be confirmed whether reading affects depression, depression affects reading, both or neither of these things. **An interventional trial should be conducted** to confirm the findings.

References

1. Pan D, Hai Z, Yang X, He S, Li X, Li J. Association between reading and depression in Chinese adults. *Medicine (Baltimore)*. 2022 Dec 23;101(51):e32486. doi: 10.1097/MD.00000000000032486. PMID: 36595839; PMCID: PMC9794234.
2. Office for National Statistics [Internet] 2021 [Cited 05/04/23]. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/coronavirusanddepressioninadultsgreatbritain/julytoaugust2021#prevalence-of-depressive-symptoms-over-time>