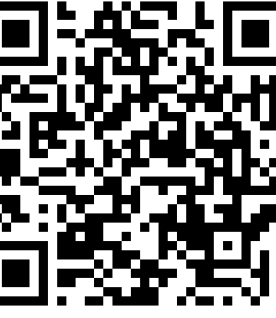


Disability and Accessibility: Training Needs of Library Employees

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INTRODUCTION

This project had its genesis through causal conversations with current library graduate students at the iSchool at UIUC and colleagues of various types as well as library colleagues. This then led to the creation of a focused grant application to run a series of surveys across several groups of library professionals as well as to embark on a cross-disciplinary scoping review of training literature that incorporates emotional intelligence, mindfulness, compassion, or empathy. This poster highlights results from the survey of current library employees.

Thesis: Ascertain the level of training, as well as the comfort level of current library employees around accessibility and interacting with people with disabilities.

Guiding Research Questions:

- What do library employees themselves feel about their ability to do activities regarding accessibility and disability?
- What is the library employee comfort level in interacting with people with disabilities and troubleshooting assistive technologies?
- How relevant do current library employees feel that topics surrounding accessibility and disability will be to their careers now and in five years?
- What training format do current library employees prefer to utilize when learning about topics of accessibility and disability?

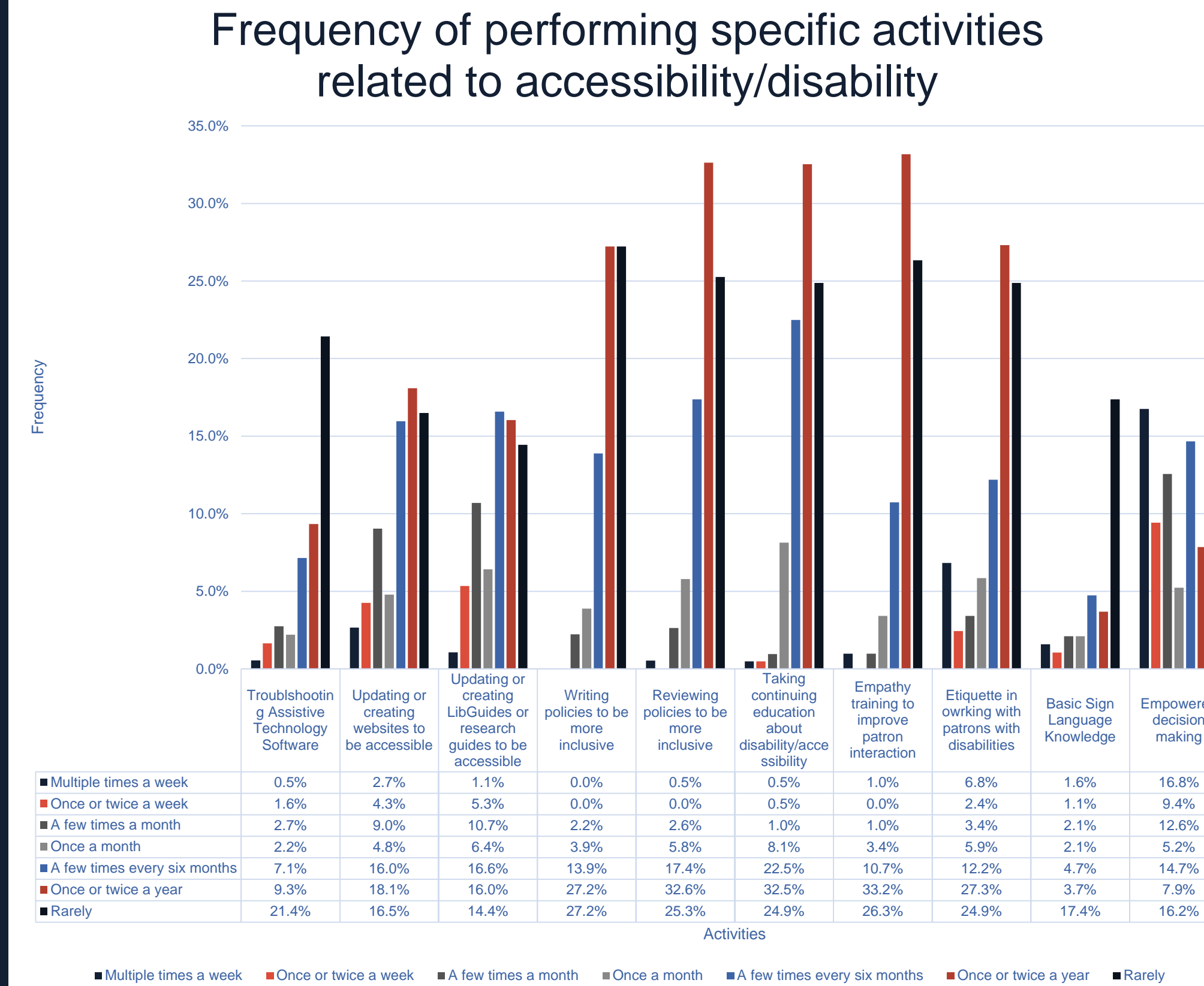
METHOD

- Internet based survey using Qualtrics.
- Survey administered in fall, 2019 and was open for two weeks.
- Recruitment was through email and social media.
- Snowball sampling was used.
- Current library employee was defined as a person who is a current employee of a library, regardless of degree status or enrollment in a library graduate program.
- 12 total questions = 10 multiple choice, 2 open ended.

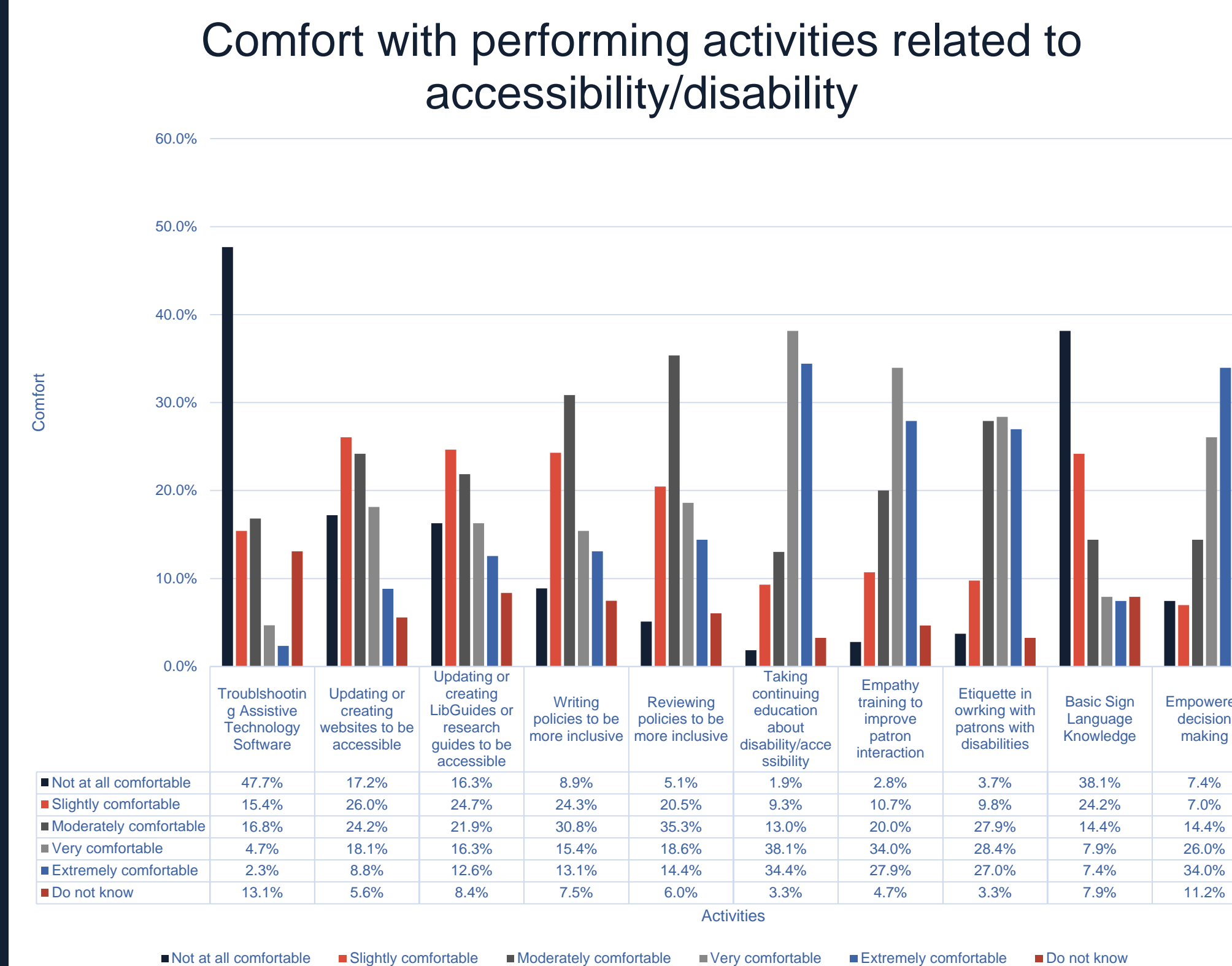
BASIC RESULTS

- 219 validated responses (completed the entire survey).
- 53% had worked in libraries less than 10 years.
- Instruction and Administration were the top two employment positions that respondents occupied.
- 90% of respondents indicated that they had assisted people with disabilities while on the job.

RESULTS



Key Finding: Empowered decision making was the most frequently performed activity whereas writing policies to be more inclusive was the least performed activity.



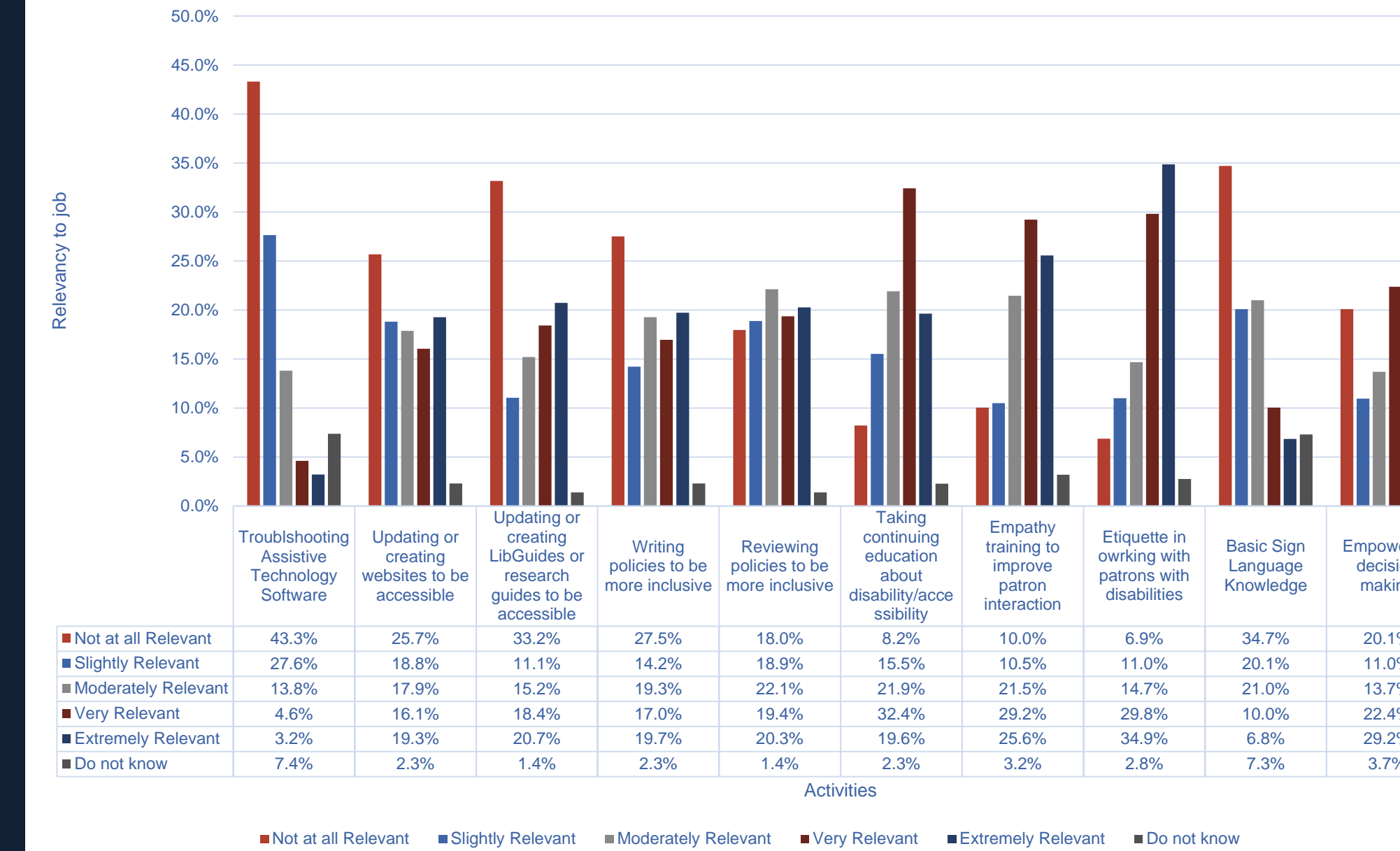
Key Finding: Respondents were most uncomfortable with troubleshooting assistive technology software. They were most comfortable with getting more education about disability and accessibility.

Selected Quotes:

“...library administration does not always understand the scope of disability accommodations, and seems narrowly focused on meeting the most basic ADA standards related to physical disabilities.”

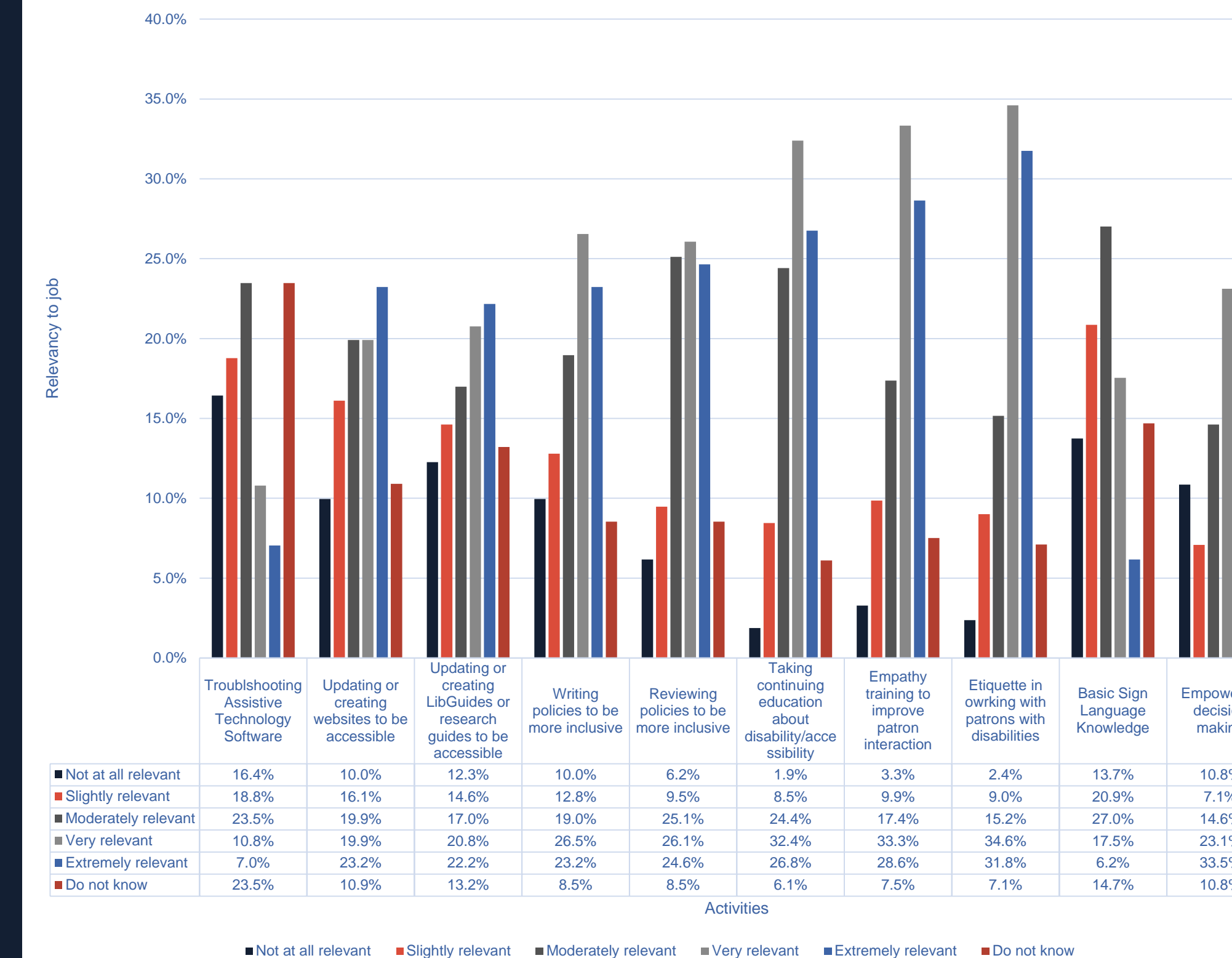
“My major concern is that my library generally assumes that we don't have any users with disabilities, so it isn't so interested in planning for them.”

Relevance of Disability/Accessibility Activities to Current Job



Key Finding: Respondents felt that troubleshooting assistive technology software was the most irrelevant to their current jobs. Knowing proper etiquette in working with patrons with disabilities was the most relevant.

Relevancy in five years of activities related to accessibility/disability to current job



Key Finding: Respondents felt that the most relevant activities in five years would be empowered decision making and etiquette in working with patrons with disabilities.

Training:

Respondents also indicated that they are generally comfortable with learning about issues and activities related to disability and accessibility. Their top three training formats were:

1. Online tutorials/webinars/seminars
2. One-day workshop
3. Print/PDF handouts/guides

DISCUSSION

Several themes emerged from the survey including:

- Accessibility of spaces, services, databases, and instruction are all concerns. Databases in particular were a topic because of the enforcement of the law and likewise were extremely frustrating because vendors didn't seem to be interested in discussing accessibility.
- Communication, especially alternative communication methods beyond spoken English, like using American Sign Language, was something that many respondents acknowledged needed work.
- The need for not only policies to be revised to be more inclusive but having flexibility with enforcement and interpretation was also identified as being critical.
- Training was something that was often delineated as a need, especially in regards to etiquette and empathy building.
- There was a great deal of concern with the seemingly blasé attitudes of library administration towards creating accessible spaces and services, going beyond minimal ADA compliance, and being inclusive.

CONCLUSIONS

Library employees have many concerns about accessibility and interacting with patrons with disabilities. Library employees also want to know more about accessibility and disability to better serve people with disabilities.

Recommendations:

- Encourage and support library employees to get more training in accessibility and disability.
- Review policies and procedures for inclusivity.

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