



Hidden Barriers:

The Experience of Academic Librarians and Archivists
Living with Invisible Illness and Disability

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#HiddenLIS



Disability and LIS Research

- LIS research on disability focuses primarily on patron accessibility
- Few studies on the experience of library workers with disabilities, all within the last five years
- Authors are librarians living with and studying chronic illness and invisible disabilities

Objectives

1. To identify barriers facing individuals with invisible illness and disability who are degreed LIS professionals working in academic libraries.
2. To determine ways academic libraries and the LIS profession can be more inclusive and accessible to those with invisible illness and disability.

Research Questions

1. How does living with an invisible illness or disability impact the ability of full-time, degreed LIS professionals in academic libraries to do their work?
2. How do degreed academic LIS professionals handle disclosing their invisible illness or disability?
3. How do degreed academic LIS professionals face barriers/stigma in the workplace for their invisible illness or disability?

Survey Parameters

- Participants must be Masters in Library Science (or equivalent) degree holders who work in academic institutions as either librarians or archivists
- Participants must also identify as having an invisible illness and/or disability

Disability Defined

Invisible (in reference to illness and/or disability): An umbrella term encompassing physical, mental, or neurological conditions with primary symptoms that are not visible from the outside or apparent to others. Regardless, these symptoms “limit or challenge a person’s movements, senses, or activities” (Adapted from the Invisible Disabilities Association). Also referred to as non-visible or hidden.

Survey Design

- 14 multiple choice questions on demographics, experience with librarianship and disability in the workplace
 - 1 follow up open-ended question on accommodations
- 38 Likert Scale questions on the hiring process, daily work experience, professional development, and accommodations
- Email for future interviews

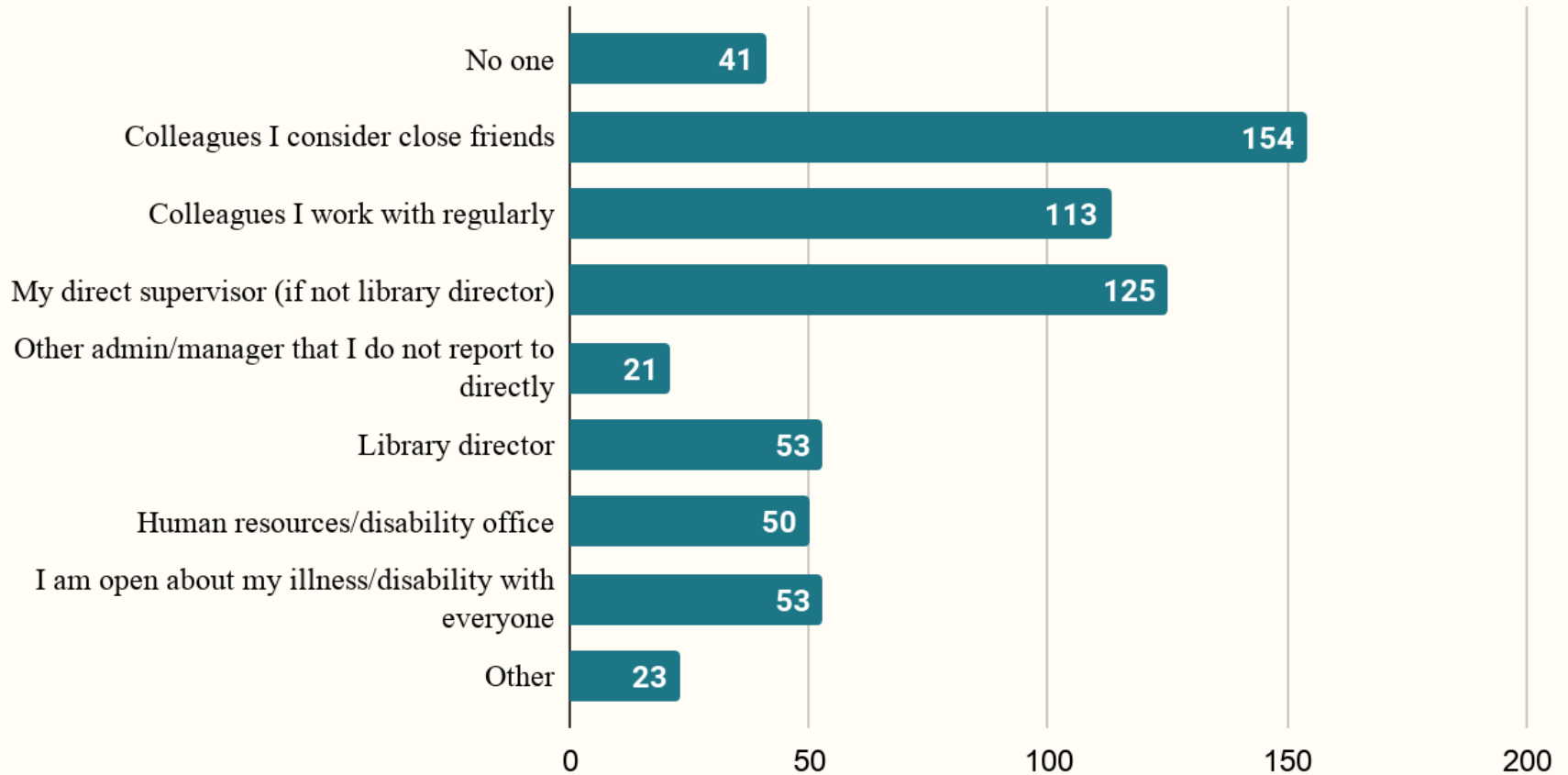
Survey Dissemination

- Online survey created in Qualtrics
- Shared through ALA and SAA listservs, social media
- Open from April 15-May 15, 2020
- 350 consented to the survey, most questions had 270-290 respondents, some only 170-200

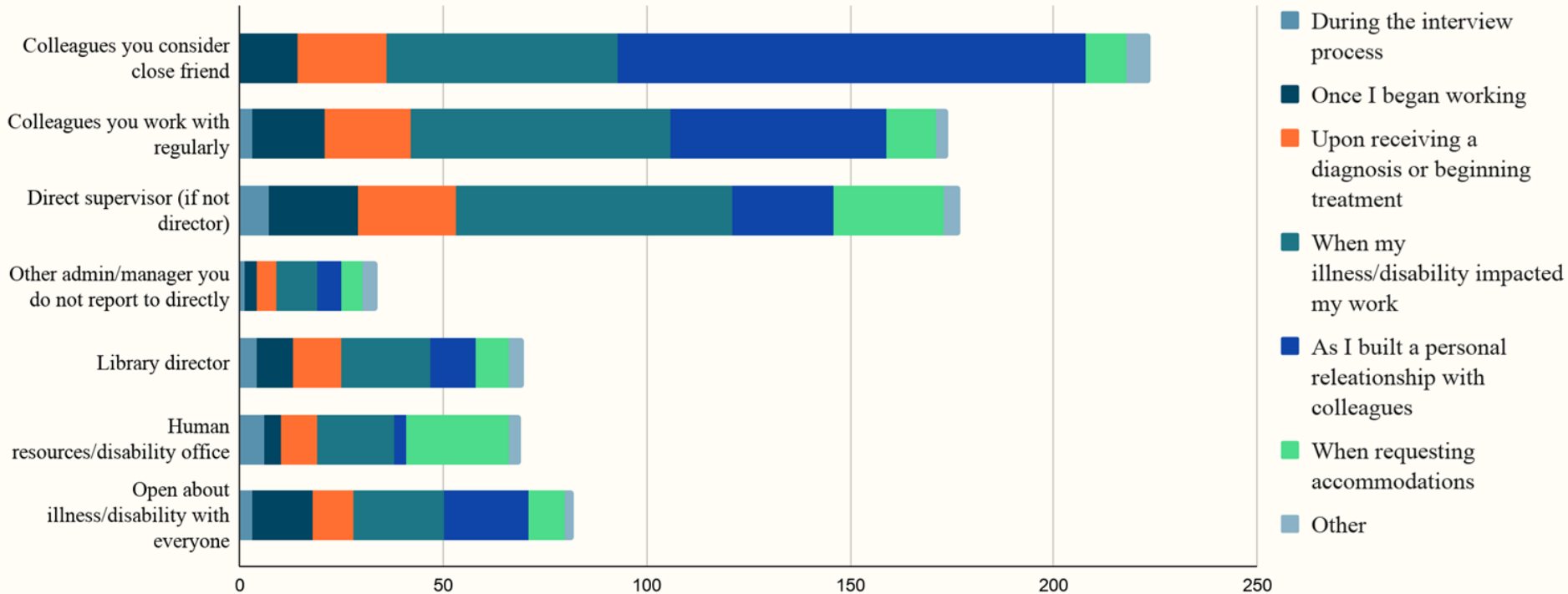
Survey Results



Who have you disclosed to?



When did you disclose?



Daily Work Experiences

52.3%

Of participants disagree or strongly disagree that they have decided not to disclose their illness and/or disability out of fear of not being believed.

58.3%

Of participants agree or strongly agree that they have decided not to disclose their illness and/or disability because it would be too complicated and energy-consuming to explain.

Daily Work Repercussions

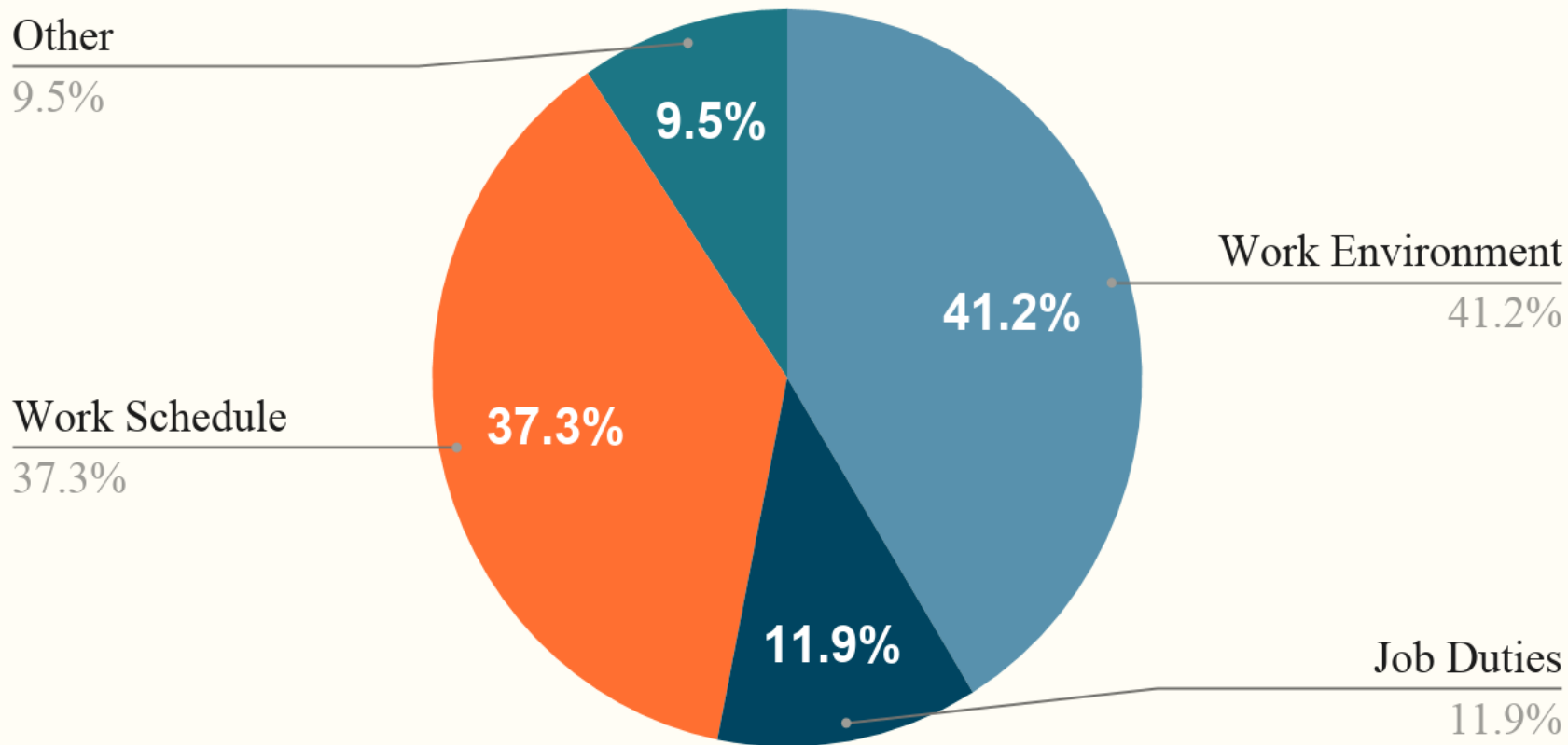
18.1%

Of participants agree or strongly agree that they have disclosed my illness and/or disability and faced professional repercussions from their colleagues and/or supervisor (being left out of projects, duties removed, etc.).

52.4%

Of participants disagree or strongly disagree that they have disclosed their illness and/or disability and faced professional repercussions from their colleagues and/or supervisor (being left out of projects, duties removed, etc.).

Accommodations Recieved



Hiring

45%

Agreed or strongly agreed that they were hesitant to apply to a job if it may impact their disability/illness

47%

Hid symptoms during the hiring process

Professional Development Participation

35.4%

Of participants agree that their illness and/or disability impacts their ability to be active in the professional community (volunteering for committees, taking on leadership roles, etc)

46.5%

Of participants disagree that their illness and/or disability impacts their ability to be active in professional discourse (conducting research, publishing, presenting at conferences, etc)

Professional Development Representation

51.18%

Of participants disagree or strongly disagree that there is an understanding of invisible illness and/or disability within LIS professions.

50.73%

Of participants disagree or strongly disagree that there are active attempts to include individuals with invisible illness and/or disability within LIS professions.

Major Takeaways

- Disclosure occurred most often through personal relationships or when disability impacted work
- Mostly positive response to disclosure or accommodations
- Hiring process difficult but few requested accommodations
- Professional development experience mixed, but acknowledged an overall lack of support

Next Steps

- Publish full results
- Conduct interviews with select group of participants
- Examine how the type of illness or disability impacts experience with hiring, disclosure, accommodations, or professional development
- Expand study beyond academic libraries and MLIS holders

Questions?

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Session Resources: <https://tinyurl.com/HiddenLIS>