

Collection Development and CAM: Prioritizing Intellectual Freedom or Quality Information?

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this research was to explore the collection development opinions and actions of health sciences librarians when considering controversial health information resources, particularly regarding complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) resources that may not be evidence-based. The current research on the ethics of intellectual freedom is particularly focused on moral or subjective issues. This research focuses on something more objective: how librarians, as information professionals, can or should approach misinformation. As health sciences librarians collaborating with and supporting academic and practicing health professionals, what materials are collected regarding CAM? How do health sciences librarians prioritize intellectual freedom and high-quality information when doing collection development regarding CAM?

METHODS

A cross-sectional, observational approach was used to discover how health sciences librarians approach CAM materials and collection development and how they prioritize respecting intellectual freedom with providing high-quality information. An online Qualtrics survey was distributed to members of the Medical Library Association with questions about their institutions' support of CAM, their personal knowledge of CAM, and their collection development process and priorities. After the survey closed, the data was cleaned for a total of 185 complete responses.

CONCLUSION

Health sciences librarians, and the institutions in which they work, approach CAM resources in a variety of ways, and this research sheds light on how those decisions are made. The health sciences librarians who participated in this survey repeatedly selected a number of factors, including patron recommendation, as more important in their decision making than quality of evidence.

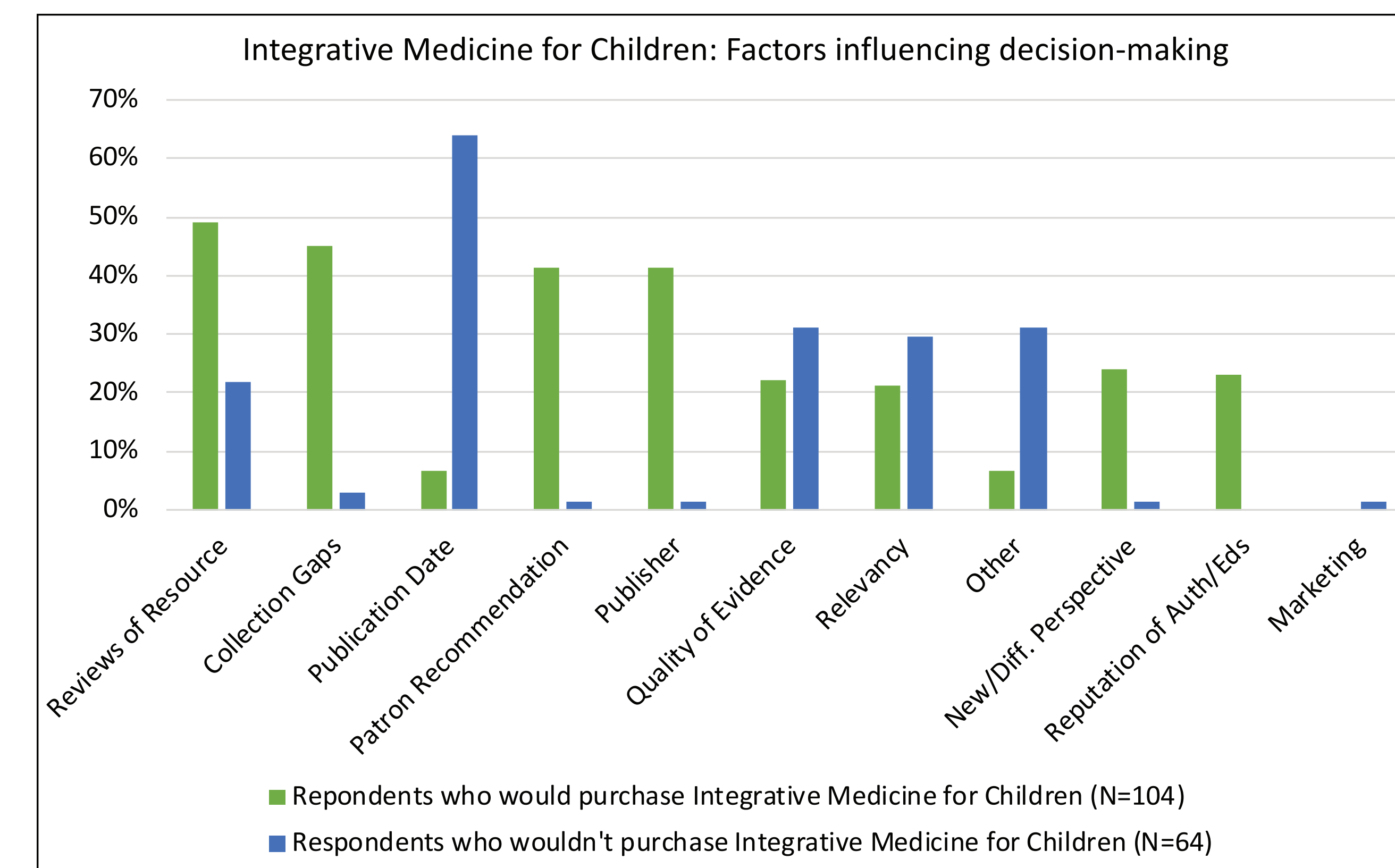
While this research is preliminary, it can offer guidance for the librarian—health sciences or otherwise—faced with the decision about whether to purchase a book that is popular or requested but not necessarily science-based. Our job as librarians includes helping patrons evaluate information, not necessarily doing it for them. Additionally, and in health sciences libraries particularly, this information may be of use to practitioners who want to know what patients may be doing in addition to standard treatment and how the two may interact, as opposed to learning how to use these interventions.

Further research, particularly qualitative research, is warranted to get a more in-depth look at the decision-making process that goes into collecting complementary and alternative medicine resources. What, specifically, about a CAM resource makes a librarian more or less likely to purchase it? How much individual purchasing of these kinds of materials is actually done, as opposed to purchasing done through package deals? In a “post-truth” era, it is essential to further explore how librarians’ approach their twin responsibilities regarding intellectual freedom and high quality information.

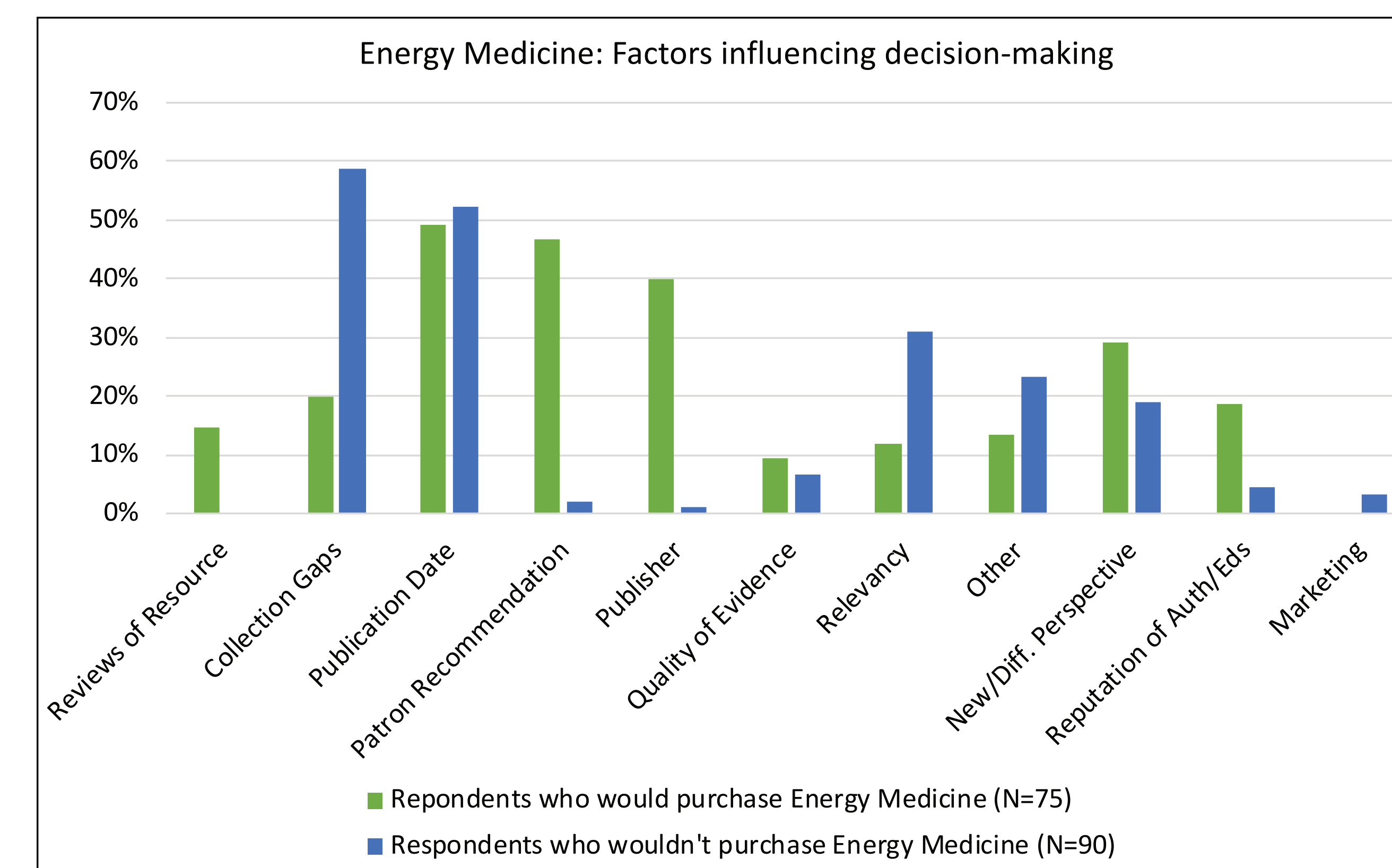
RESULTS

Patron recommendation was selected by respondents more often than accuracy and consistency with evidence base as a key factor in their collection development decisions. This held true for the three titles they were asked to make a decision about:

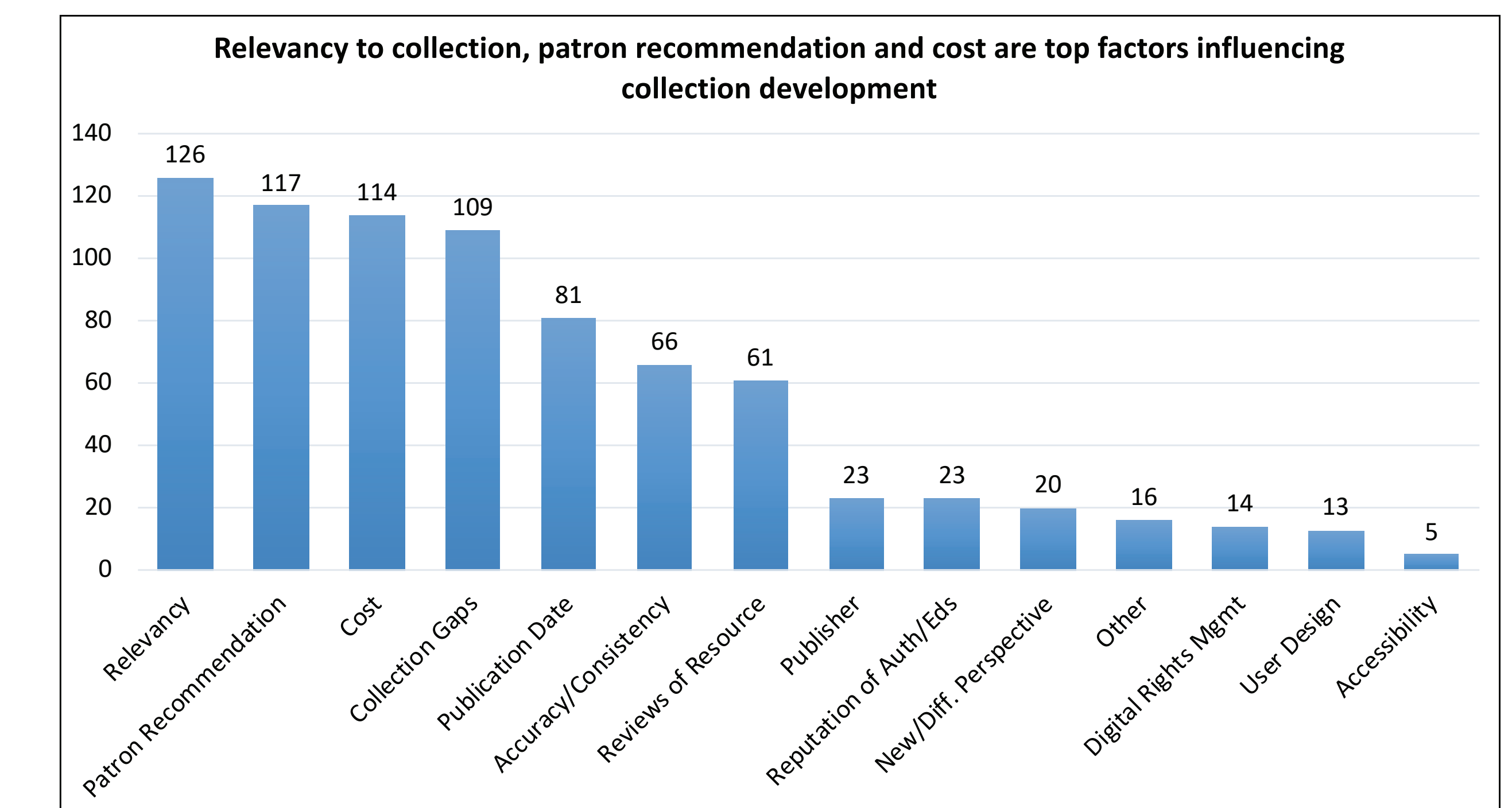
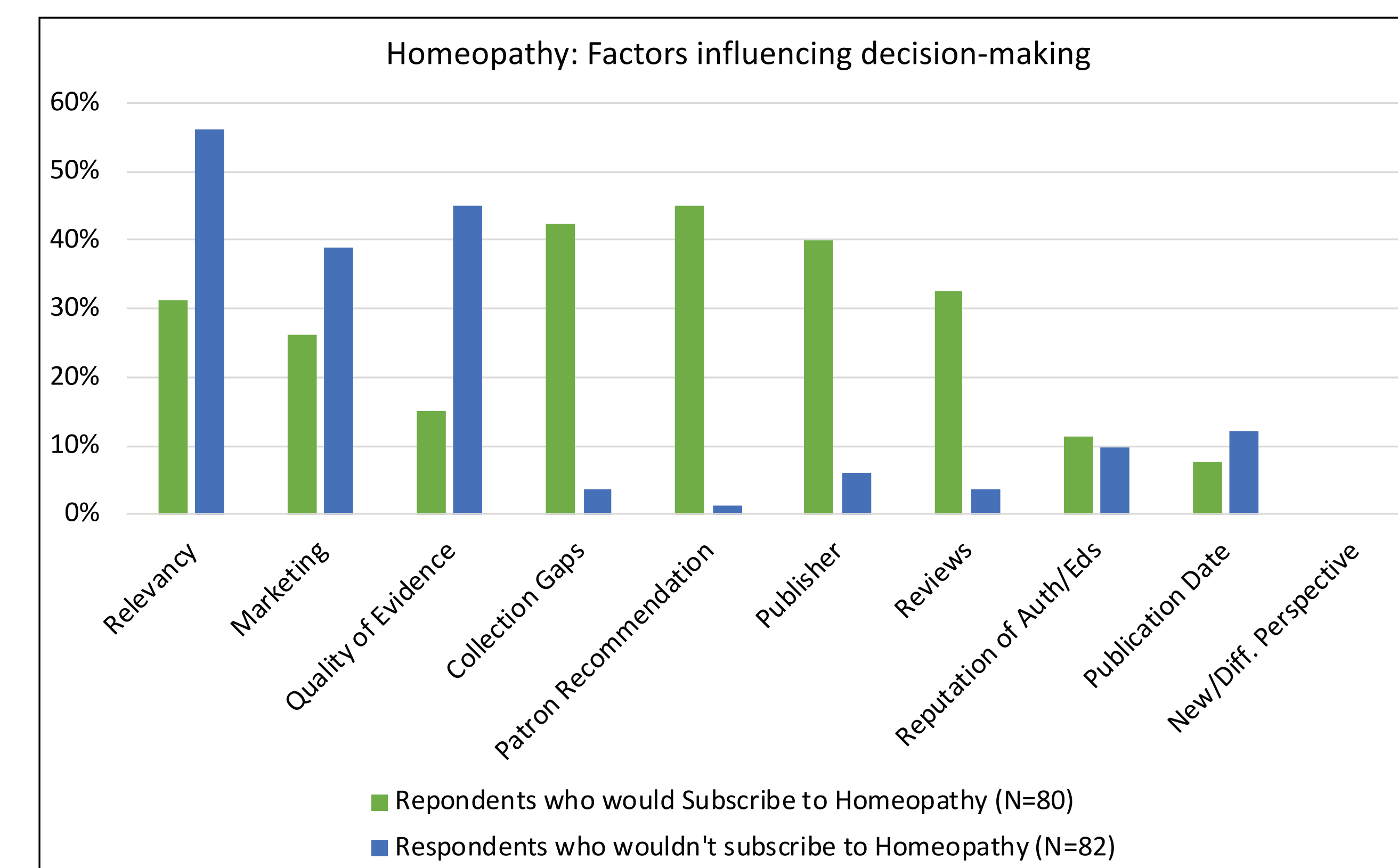
1. Integrative Medicine for Children (2008), May Loo



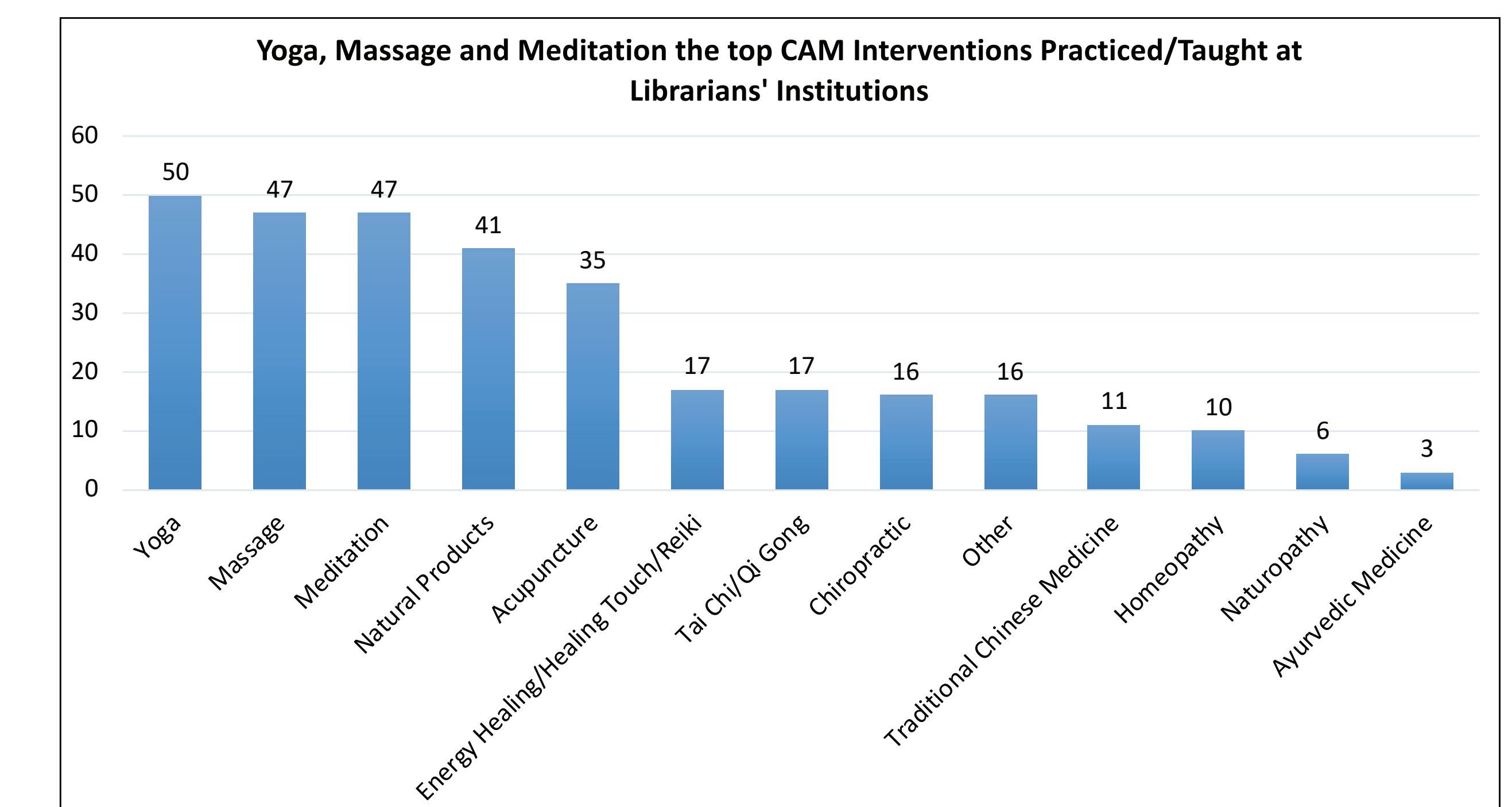
2. Energy Medicine: The Scientific Basis (2015), James Oschman



3. Homeopathy (Journal)



Interestingly, a number of librarians indicated they would purchase, on patron recommendation, the previous titles, despite the fact that complementary and alternative treatments such as energy healing or homeopathy were not indicated as interventions that were practiced or taught at their institutions.



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