

Use of academic social research by public officials: exploring preferences and constraints that impact on research use

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ARC Linkage project: “The Utilisation of Social Science Research in Policy Development and Program Review” LP 100100380

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Presentation outline

- **Background to ARC linkage project.**
- **Preferences, access, accessibility and workplace culture & evidence-based policy.**
- **Results from public sector survey.**
- **Concluding remarks.**

ARC Linkage Partners

- **Four governments: Federal, QLD, NSW, VIC.**
- **Line departments in human services (education, family/community services, public health).**
- **Central agencies plus ‘knowledge specialist’ agencies.**
- **Nine funding partners plus another 12 supporting agencies.**

Data sources for ARC Linkage Project

- Targeted survey of Australian social scientists n=693
- Targeted survey of policy relevant personnel in 21 agencies n=2084
- Interviews with a selection of academic respondents n=100
- Interviews with a selection of policy personnel n=125

Public sector agencies and evidence-based policy (EBP)

- Perceived gap between research production and uptake by governments.
- Understanding access / accessibility important to closing this gap.
- Preferences and organisational context impacts on choices to seek out and access research-based knowledge.

Table 1: Agencies who participated in survey	Freq.	Percent (of total PSS)	No. of staff survey distributed to	Response rate %
Productivity Commission (Commonwealth)	60	2.88	≈ 100	≈ 60.00
Australian Bureau of Statistics (Commonwealth)	228	10.94	772	29.53
Treasury (Commonwealth)	123	5.9	≈ 400	≈ 30.75
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Commonwealth)	14	0.67	≈ 300-400	-----
Department of Families, Housing, Communities & Indigenous Affairs (Commonwealth)	252	12.09	1115	22.60
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Commonwealth)	88	4.22	≈ 1200	≈ 7.33
Queensland Health	112	5.37	916	12.23
Queensland Department of Communities	100	4.8	Not known	-----
Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development & Innovation	73	3.5	160	45.63
Queensland Department of the Premier and Cabinet	18	0.86	60	30.00
Queensland Treasury	13	0.62	Not known	-----
Queensland Department of Education and Training	70	3.36	230	30.43
NSW Department of Education and Communities	65	3.12	395	16.46
NSW Treasury	41	1.97	277	14.80
NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet	55	2.64	Not known	-----
NSW Department of Family and Community Services	154	7.39	548	28.10
Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development	28	1.34	108	25.93
Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development	384	18.43	Initial invitation 3023; targeted reminder to 838 central staff	≈ 12.70
Victorian Department of Human Services	102	4.90	Not known	-----
Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet	50	2.40	120	42.50
Victorian Treasury	54	2.59	Not known	-----
Total	2084	100		

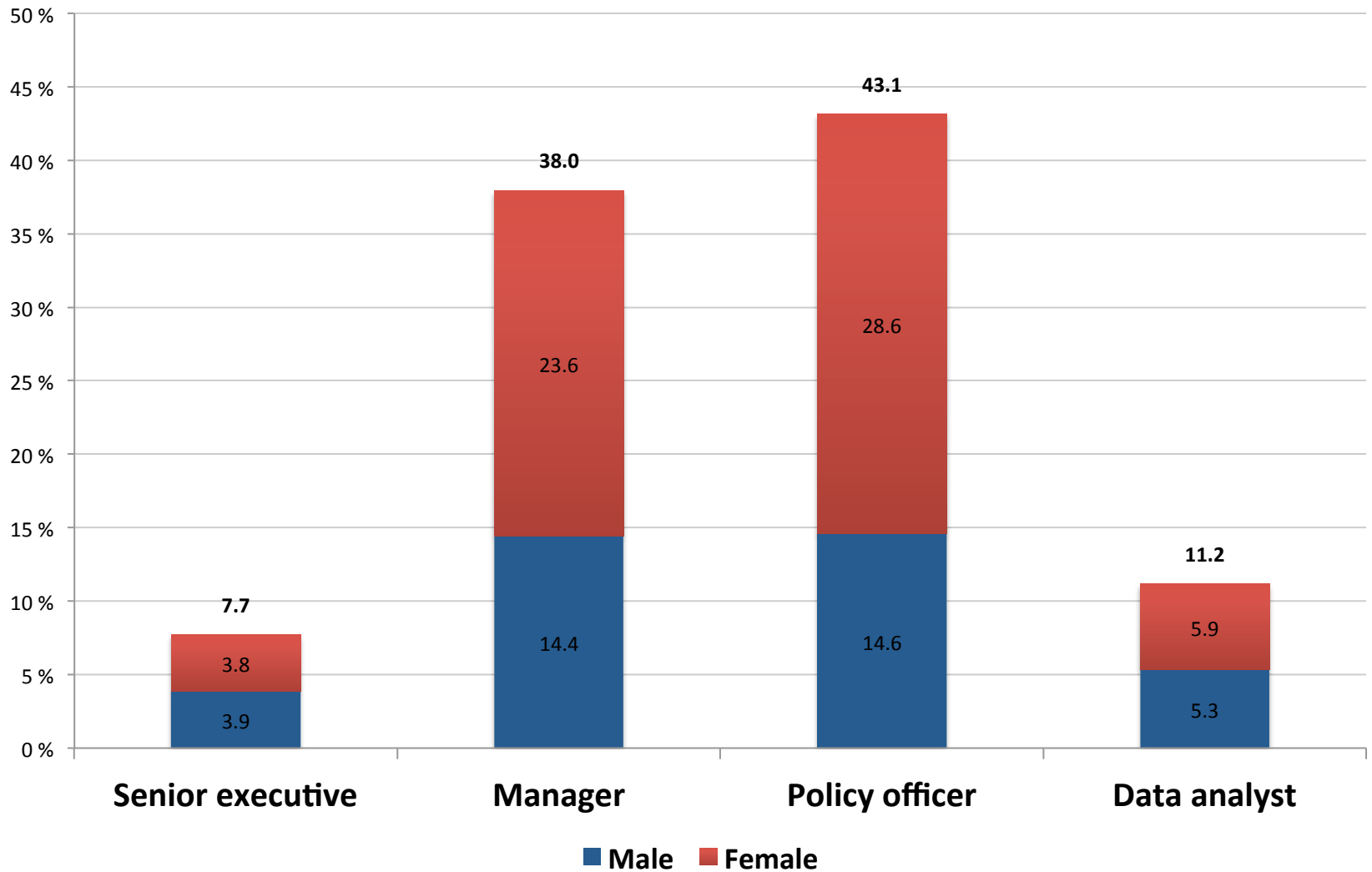
Figure 1: Gender and current position

Figure 2: Level of education

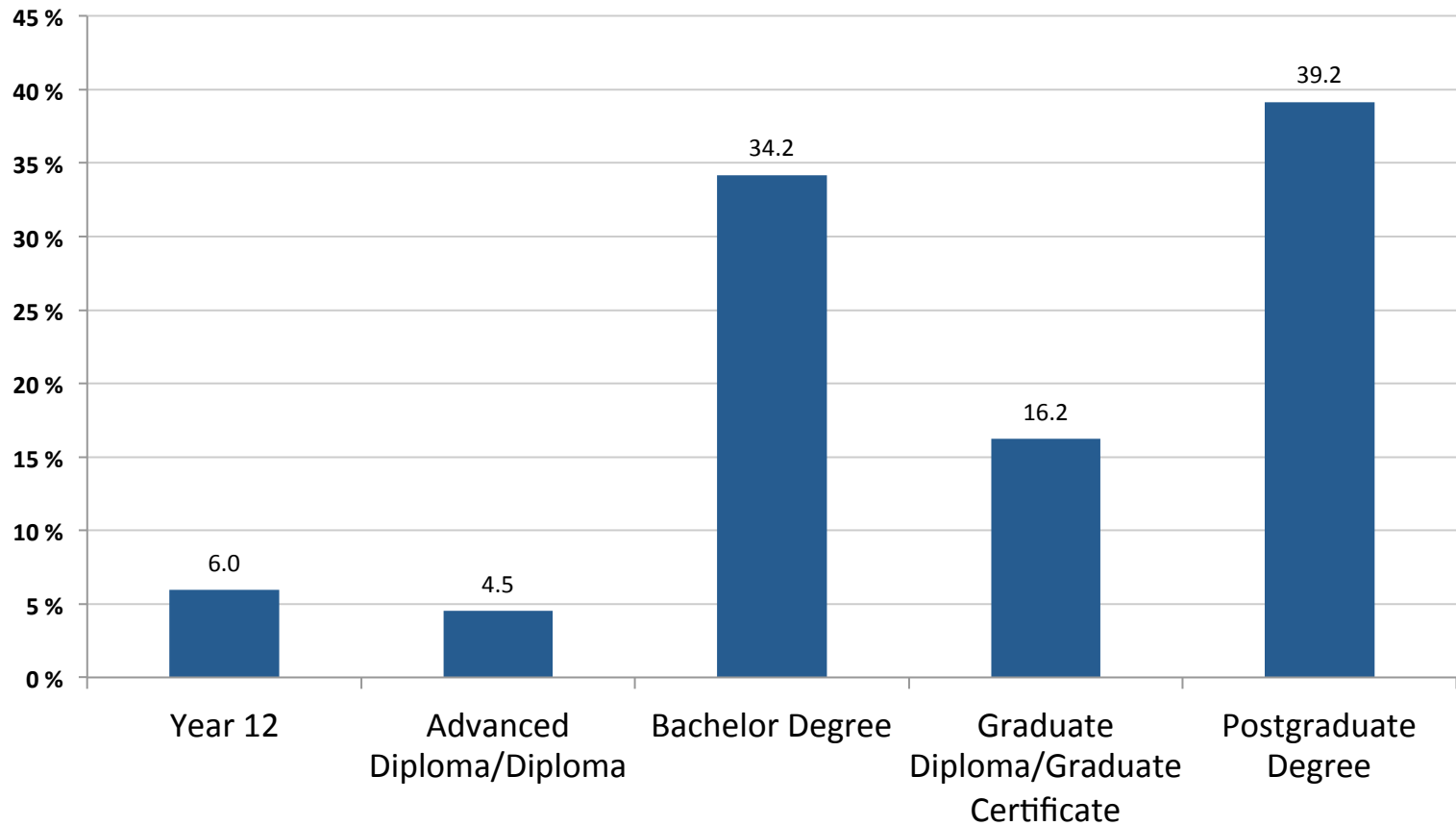
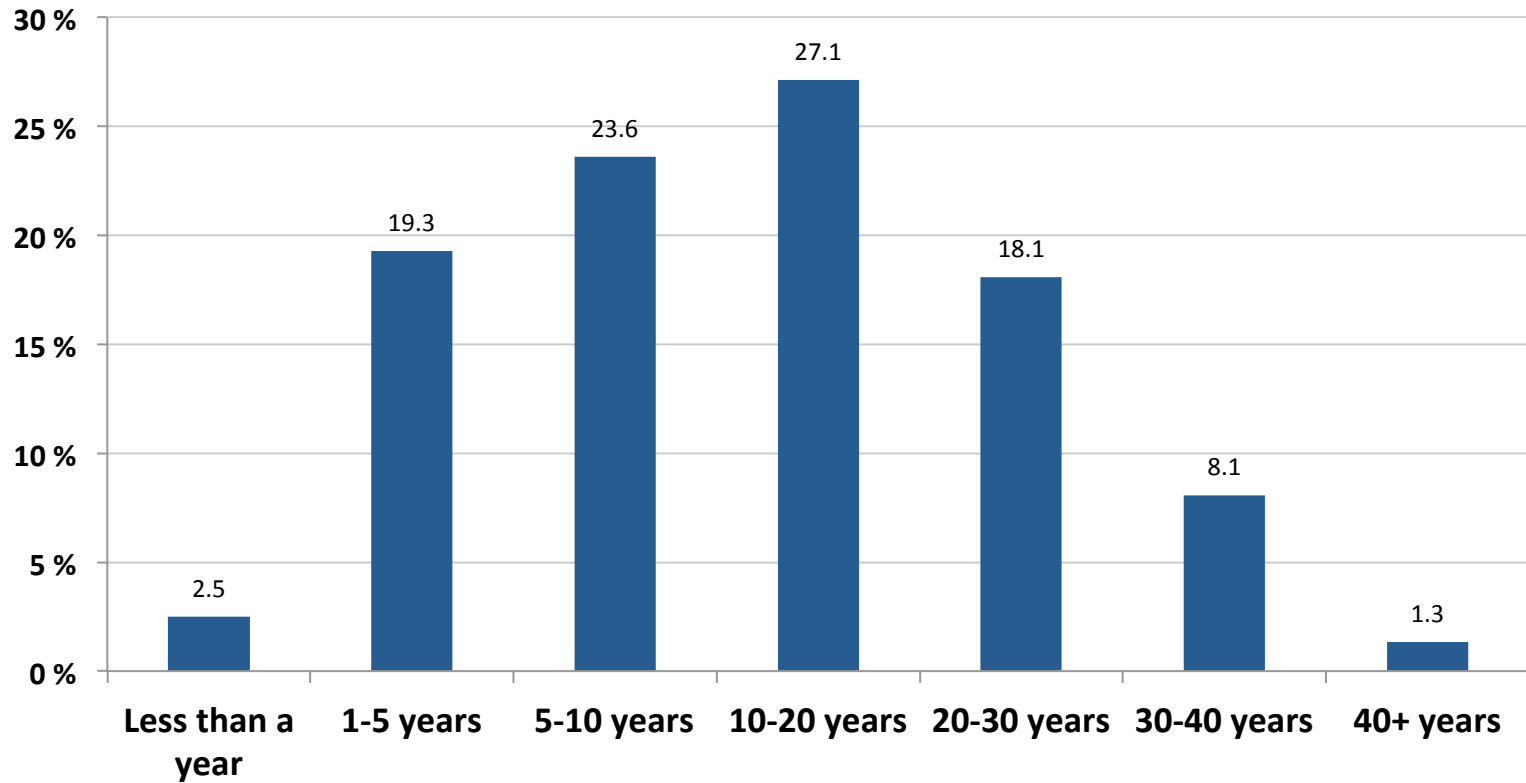


Figure 3: Years in the public service



**Figure 4: Level of importance placed on information available from particular sources to inform decision-making:
Very important/important**

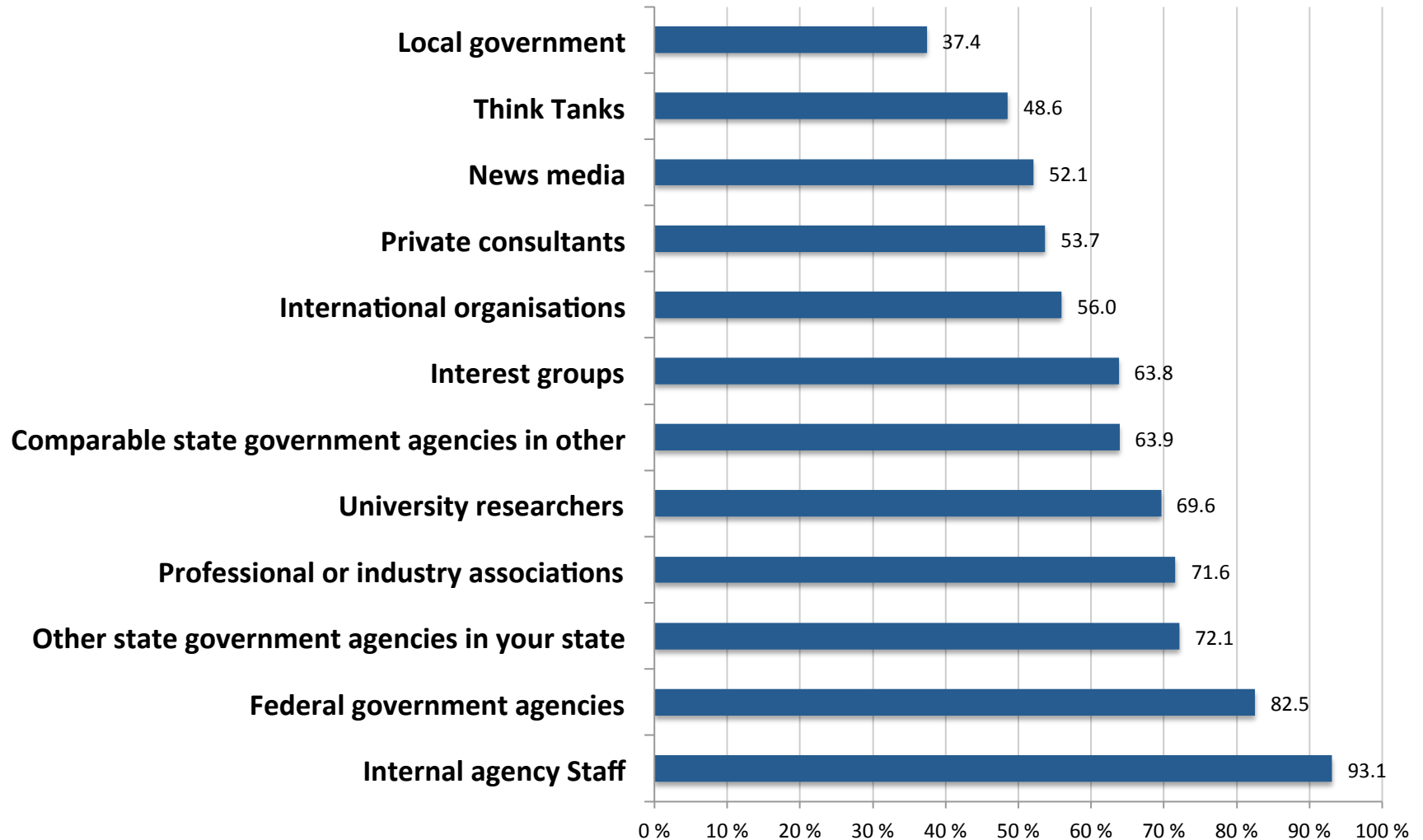


Figure 5: In the last 12 months, how often have you consulted with each source of information listed below: Very often/Often

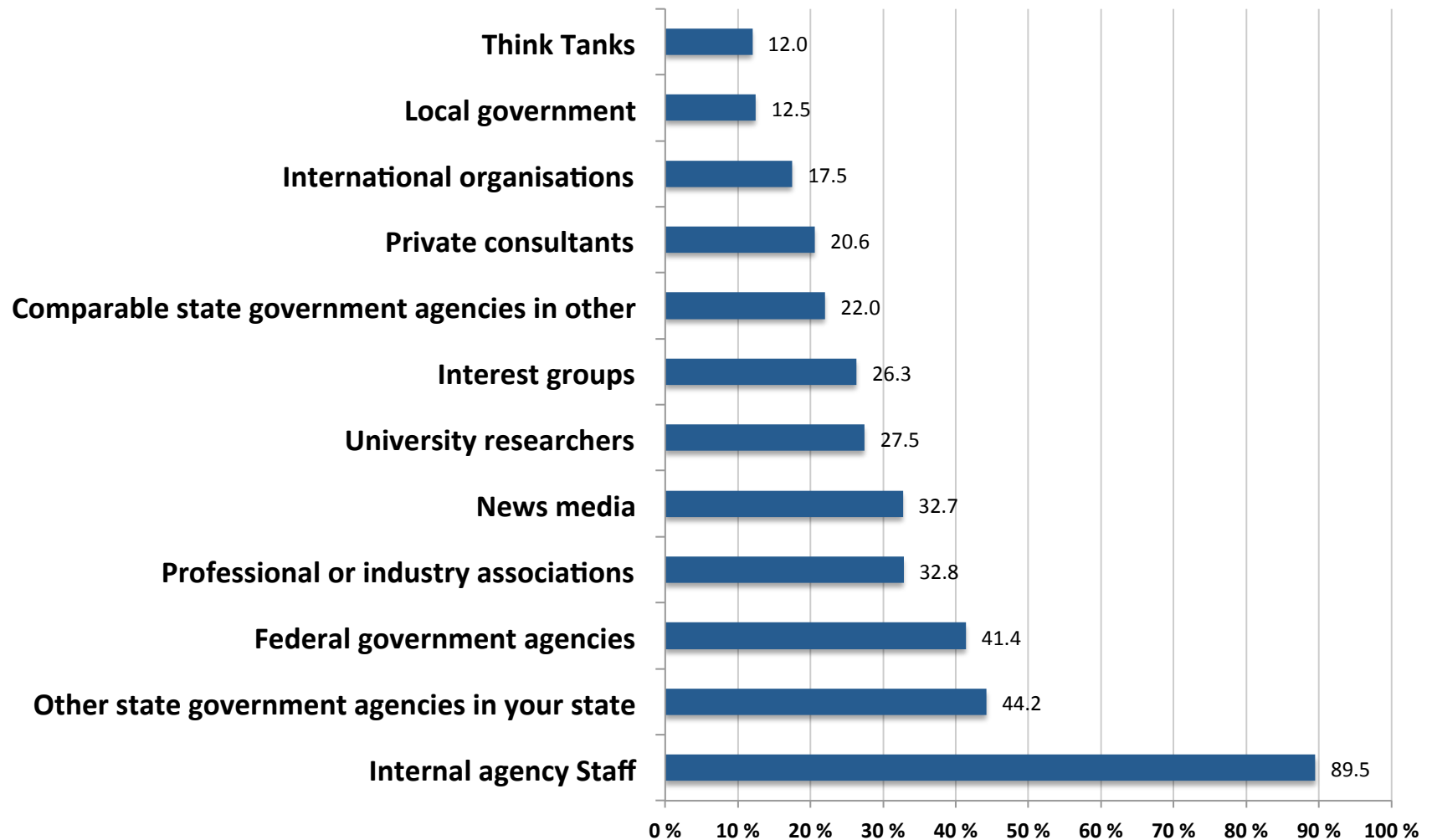


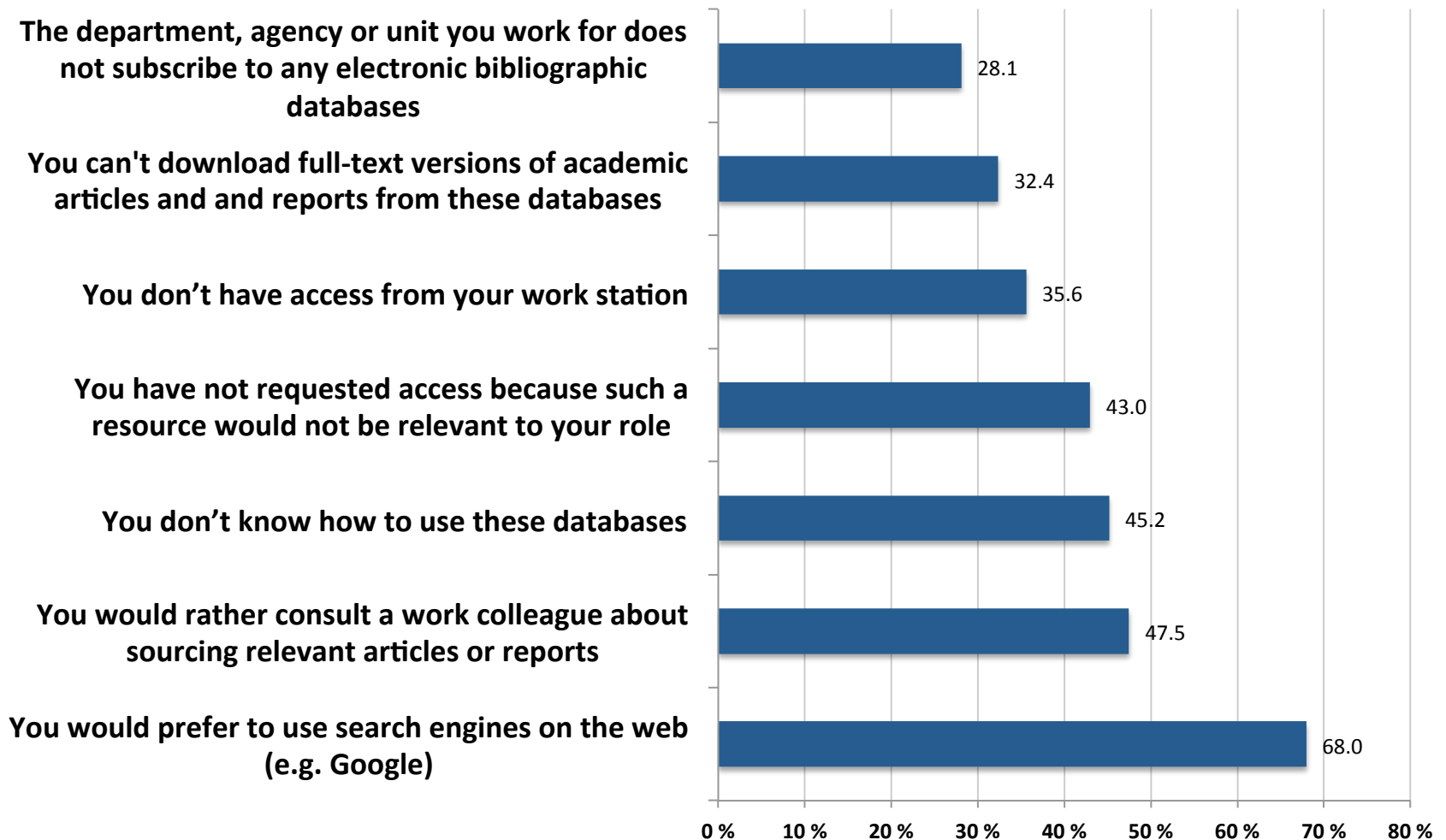
Table 2: Types of research methods relied upon

Concerning research you use to inform decision-making, please indicate whether it is based on these methodologies.	Always/ Usually	Sometimes	Never
Quantitative: e.g. survey research, analysis of secondary data	65.7	29.5	4.8
Qualitative: e.g. interviews, focus groups, ethnography, observation	45.4	43.9	10.8
Literature reviews	40.7	40.8	18.5

**Table 3: Use of Electronic databases**

Do you access electronic bibliographic databases to download or print academic journal abstracts, articles or reports?	Freq.	Percent
Yes	1216	58.4
No	868	41.7
Total	2084	100.0

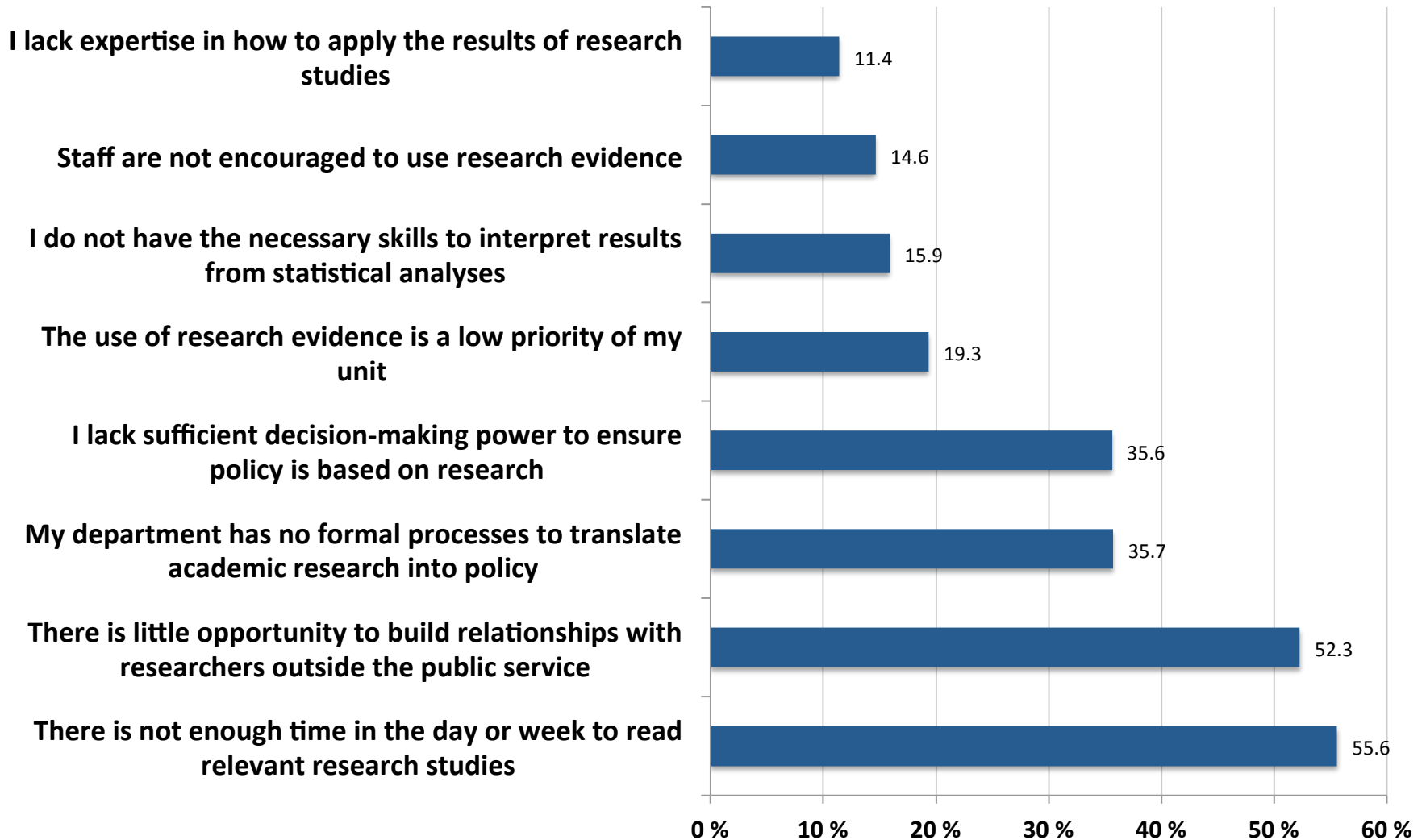
Figure 6: If you don't access bibliographical databases, is it because: (n = 868)



What might be driving these behaviours?

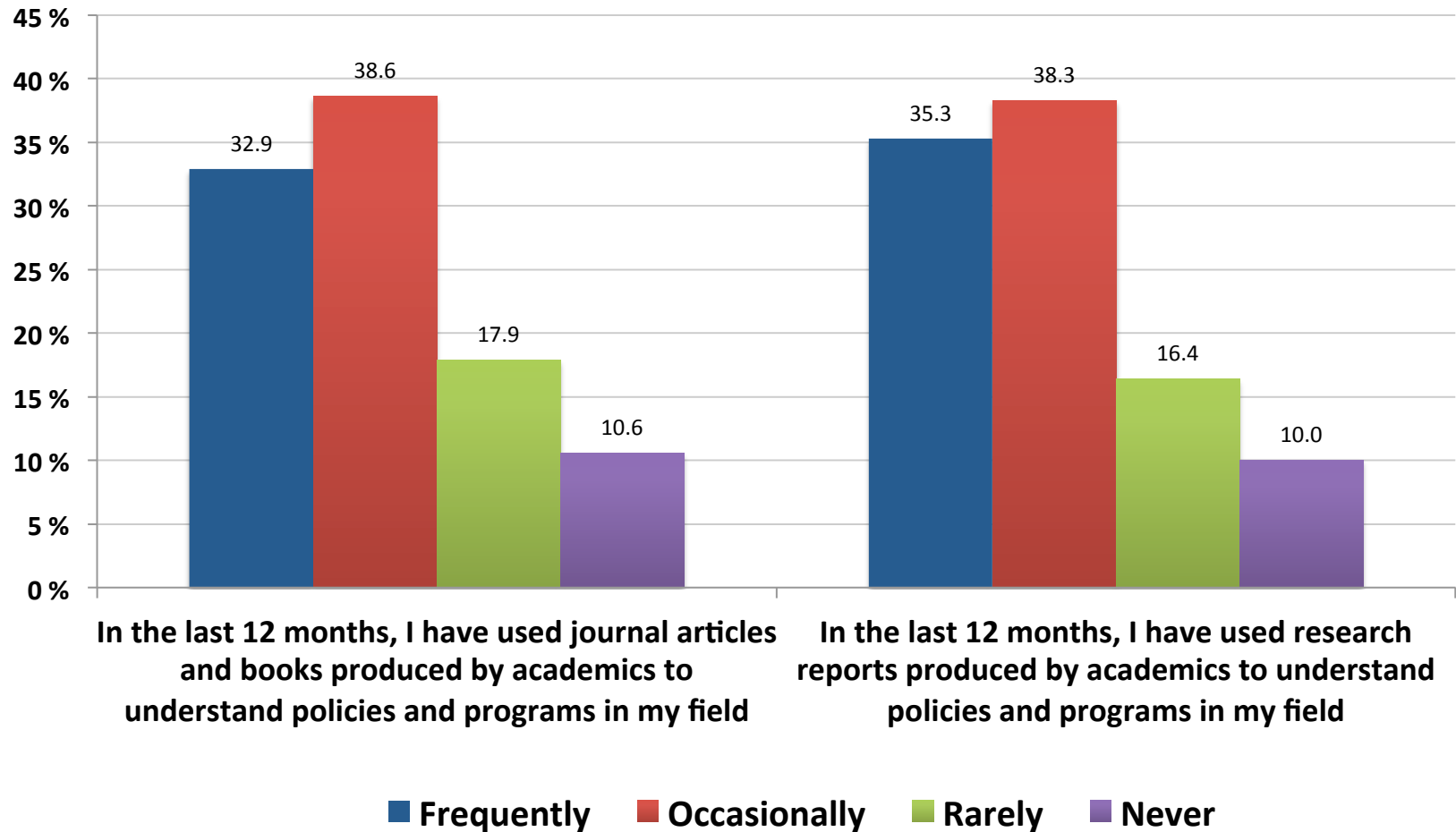
- **Trust in the source?**
- **Accessibility?**
- **Convenience?**
- **Skill sets of individuals?**
- **Few partnership opportunities with knowledge producers?**
- **Access to infrastructure?**
- **Nature of public policy-making?**
- **Workplace culture?**

**Figure 7: Accessing and using research evidence in day-to-day duties:
Strongly agree/Agree**



Impact of organisational factors

- **Logistic regression model to examine the relative strength of various organisational factors on reported levels of research use.**
- **Dependent variable measure of research use was based on questions asking respondents whether in the last 12 months they had used academic products or outputs to understand policies and programs in their field.**
- **This measure of research utilisation was divided into a dichotomous variable (0 = Don't consult academic research and 1 = consult academic research).**

Figure 8: Consultation of academic research

Independent variables – factors influencing research use

- **Items related to organisational ethos and culture**
e.g. there is not enough time in the day or week to read relevant research studies; the use of research evidence is a low priority of my unit; staff are not encouraged to use research evidence.
- **Judgements about skill levels, and impediments to access (difficulty in accessing full text versions of academic reports).**
- **Educational level and position.**



Factors impacting on the use of academic research products	β	SE	95% CI for Odds Ratio		
			Lower	Odds Ratio	Upper
Academic research results are considered relevant by my colleagues	0.75 ^{***}	(0.09)	1.78	2.11	2.50
Research is important in my professional field	0.74 ^{***}	(0.09)	1.77	2.09	2.47
Lack research skills	0.09	(0.08)	0.94	1.09	1.27
Lack a research culture	-0.33 ^{**}	(0.11)	0.58	0.72	0.90
Policy making based on sound evidence	-0.09	(0.10)	0.75	0.91	1.11
Difficulty accessing full text	0.64 ^{***}	(0.09)	1.59	1.90	2.27
Advanced diploma	0.34	(0.37)	0.68	1.41	2.92
BA	0.45	(0.26)	0.94	1.57	2.63
Graduate diploma	0.71 [*]	(0.29)	1.16	2.04	3.59
Postgraduate degree	0.94 ^{***}	(0.27)	1.51	2.56	4.36
Senior executive	-0.12	(0.27)	0.52	0.89	1.52
Manager	-0.43 ^{**}	(0.15)	0.48	0.65	0.87
Data analyst	-0.79 ^{***}	(0.21)	0.30	0.46	0.69
Yes staff linking to researchers	0.32	(0.17)	0.99	1.38	1.92
Constant	-4.98 ^{***}	(0.76)	0.00	0.01	0.03
Observations	1996				
Pseudo R2	0.238				
Log likelihood	-761.785				
chi2 (df=20)	476.25				

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Conclusion: Public sector use of research evidence & EBP

- **Convenience and expediency matter a great deal.**
- **Physical or electronic availability important – but not overwhelmingly so.**
- **Day-to-day pressures and constraints reinforce various patterns of information seeking.**
- **Organisational ethos and professional culture help to generate behaviours that promote research use.**