Secondary Data in Doctoral Research
Program Transcript

DR. PETER ANDERSON: In general, I think using secondary data is an outstanding way to conduct dissertation research.

DR. DANIEL SALTER: We highly, highly, highly encourage folks to publish their research, so that it goes out into the research stream, so that other people can see what you found.

NARRATOR: Dr. Daniel Salter is the director for strategic research initiatives in the Center for Research Quality at Walden University.

Dr. Peter Anderson serves as a full-time faculty member in Walden's College of Health Sciences. Dr. Salter and Dr. Anderson discuss the use of secondary data in doctoral research.

DR. DANIEL SALTER: Research really needs to follow the question, and the type of question you're wanting to answer. Often the type of question you ask will demand that you collect data that doesn't exist already. But for many research questions we do in Applied Sciences and Health Sciences, and Education, and in Management, there are tons of information already being collected that can answer good research questions.

The issue’s going to be the quality of how it's collected, knowing what they did to get that information. That's where collaborating with a agency or something as a researcher is advantageous, in the sense that you can be a part of that process. We do work with students who use data that have already been collected. But some students work with an agency from before that data is even collected in the first place. So they may be collecting operational data in a health services agency, and you as a researcher may have a chance to collaborate with them before they even start the process. So you know on the other side that they've collected some good information that is amenable to being studied later.

There's no reason for everybody to be doing the same thing. It saves time and money. And those companies have a vested interest in it as well. But those are arrangements to make right up front, and be clear on who uses what and how.

DR. PETER ANDERSON: In public health and health sciences in particular, there are lots of great data sets available through the Centers for Disease Control and other big national organizations that have exceptional, clean, wonderful data sets that have been gathered in the most ethical way possible, that are available to our students to use. And I would encourage them to use them.

DR. DANIEL SALTER: A challenge that comes with secondary data is that sometimes initially students think there's this perfect SPSS file sitting out there on
somebody's computer that I can just download. And off I go to run my data. It does not work like that at all.

I would say that a problem-- a red flag, if you will-- for a data set is if there's no documentation around it, that you have to figure this out. Because you need to know in working with secondary data, how those data were originally collected in some way. And if the researcher, or the people who were collecting that data, didn't document that process, then that right there is a big red flag.

DR. PETER ANDERSON: In order to access the actual data in a secondary data set, they have to have IRB approval. So in the process of getting IRB approval, they can look at the data list variables. And they can look at the coding schema. And at that point in time, when all we know is the list of variables and the coding schema, then we might pick and choose. And data sets will come and go. But once we've made our decision based upon the variables available and the coding schema that we see, and then we open the data set, that's it. We're using this data set.

The best way to present your results to the public depend upon your particular aspect of public health or health sciences that you're working in, and what public you're intending to provide your information to. So it could be that it will be a publication in a peer-reviewed professional journal. It could be that it would be a series of written white papers. It could be it will be oral presentations to the military, or to the local public health branch.

DR. DANIEL SALTER: Lots of different venues for presenting research. From very local kinds of things, to the very people that may be affected by the type of research you've been doing. The practitioners, the policy makers, whoever are local. But there's also the need for you to take it to your professional group, many times, and say, here's what I found. And you share with other like-minded researchers and people who are interested in your topic.

A challenge that comes with doing research, and especially happens at the end of the dissertation process, is that a student is so immersed in it, and they understand it at such a level that it's hard to step back a little bit and realize that people have not addressed it in the same up close and personal way that you have. So there is that challenge there. I would say that it's about knowing your audience, and for many doctoral students, getting back in touch with your practitioner role.

Say, OK now. You know, I was a practitioner at this before I became a doctoral student. What would I want to hear? And what would I want to know? And why do people keep slamming the door?
I had a very humbling moment as a doctoral student. Right after I was done, I took my research to a conference. I presented. And one of the biggest senior scholars in my whole field was sitting in the room. Which was a little intimidating.

And I gave my presentation. And afterwards she pulled me aside, and she said, Daniel, you need to talk to us like we were second graders. And it was just sort of this nice little way of saying, it's easy to get into the language. It's easy to get so immersed in it that you forget that you're doing it for somebody else in the first place.

So making it palatable, making it-- we often joke-- how would you explain it to your grandmother? Those kinds of strategies really do work. When you have to go back and present it in an oral kind of way, you have to know it on a different kind of level.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Secondary Data in Doctoral Research
Additional Content Attribution

MUSIC:
Creative Support Services
Los Angeles, CA

Dimension Sound Effects Library
Newnan, GA

Narrator Tracks Music Library
Stevens Point, WI

Signature Music, Inc
Chesterton, IN

Studio Cutz Music Library
Carrollton, TX