Welcome to the Secondary Data Analysis tutorial.

This tutorial explains what secondary data analysis is. It also explains how to determine whether secondary data analysis is appropriate for your research project, how to find and obtain secondary data, and how to evaluate and handle the data once you have access to it. Audiences for this tutorial include, but are not limited to, pre-dissertation, doctoral, and post-doctorate researchers.

Upon successful completion of this tutorial, you will be able to:

- Explain what secondary data analysis is
- Summarize the strengths and limitations of secondary data analysis
- Determine the appropriateness of secondary data analysis for a research purpose and research questions
- Explain how to find and obtain data for secondary data analysis
- Explain how to evaluate and handle secondary data

This tutorial consists of seven sections. Most sections focus on the core content of this tutorial, whereas while other sections provide useful supporting information:

- Introduction to Secondary Data Analysis
- Overview of Secondary Data Analysis
- Determining When to Use Secondary Data Analysis
- Finding and Obtaining Secondary Data
- Evaluating and Handling Secondary Data
- Additional Resources
- Evaluation

You have completed this section of the tutorial.
Secondary Data Analysis

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Secondary Data Analysis

Section 2: Overview of Secondary Data Analysis

This section of the tutorial provides background information on secondary data analysis, including a definition of the approach. This section also presents details about the benefits and limitations of using secondary data analysis and provides examples of its use in various disciplines.

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Secondary Data Analysis

Section 2: Overview of Secondary Data Analysis

In this section of the tutorial, focus on the following objectives:

Describe the characteristics of secondary data analysis
Explain how quantitative and qualitative data are used in secondary data analysis
Identify the benefits and limitations of using secondary data analysis
Summarize examples of research studies that use secondary data analysis

Slide 3

Definition of Secondary Data Analysis

This tutorial defines secondary data analysis as the use of existing data; that is, data previously collected by another individual or organization.

Types of secondary data include:

Survey data (for example, polls)
Statistics (for example, population data)
Records (for example, crime reports)

Slide 4

Using Quantitative and Qualitative Data in Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary data are primarily quantitative; however, sometimes, qualitative data are sometimes available.

Because many large data sets typically contain only quantitative data, your ability to use qualitative and mixed-methods studies is limited.

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Practical Benefits of Using Secondary Data Analysis

There are practical benefits to using secondary data in your research.

Time - Because you can obtain the data relatively quickly, you are able to start analyses and interpretation earlier.
Secondary Data Analysis

Costs - Because you save time and do not have the costs of conducting primary research, you save money.

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Research-Related Benefits of Secondary Data Analysis

In addition to the practical benefits of using secondary data, important research-related benefits also exist.

Access to participant data - You can access large data samples that you could not collect as an individual.

Generalizability of results - You may be able to obtain a large sample with data on groups of individuals you could not otherwise access in a homogenous population.

Ethical considerations - Because you do not have contact with participants, you do not have to be concerned with the research affecting the participants’ mental or physical well being. (You do, however, have an obligation to read the available documentation on the data to ensure that the participants in the original study were treated in an ethical manner. Ethical considerations are covered in greater detail later in this tutorial.)

In addition, if relevant data have already been collected on a particular population, the most ethical decision is to use the existing data rather than burden participants with an additional study.

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Benefits of Familiarity With Secondary Data Analysis

To effectively plan and conduct secondary data analysis, you should become familiar with the data sources that focus on your topic of interest. Besides enabling you to identify data sets appropriate to your research, you may benefit from this familiarity in other ways. For example, exploring the data sources may help you generate new research ideas in your area of interest, or you may locate secondary data to supplement original research you are planning.

Note: Data sources are listed in the Additional Resources section of this tutorial.

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Limitations to Finding Secondary Data Analysis

The following factors may affect your ability to find secondary data for your research:

It may be difficult to determine whether the type and/or the amount of data you need for your research exists.

The data may be available but difficult to locate. (Section 4, Finding and Obtaining Secondary Data, provides guidance on how to locate secondary data.)

Researchers with data may not want to share these data due to confidentiality or other reasons.
Limitations Regarding the Use of Secondary Data

Closely examine the documentation on the data you are considering for your research as the following factors may affect your ability to use this documentation.

If the data have been coded, you may need to investigate further to understand how the original researchers coded the data.

You must take into account any limitations to the sampling procedures in the original study. For example, if there are too many limitations, you may not be able to answer key research questions.

You may have difficulty determining the quality of the data. For example, you may not have easy access to reasons for missing data, or you may not be able to appraise errors in the data.

It is important to note that it can be tempting to formulate a research question based on the existing data. Although this may be reasonable because development of a research question is an iterative process, you should be wary of changing a question simply to fit the data.

Disciplines That Use Secondary Data

Secondary data are potentially useful to researchers in all disciplines. Many sources of secondary data can be investigated. Some examples include:

- Business/management: Customer databases, marketing research data
- Education: Academic assessment data such as basic skill test data; enrollment data
- Psychology: Psychological test scores
- Public health and other health fields: Public health databases
- Public policy fields: Crime reports, political poll data

Do not limit your search to data sources typically used by researchers in your own field; search other sources for relevant data. (Section 4 of this tutorial addresses how to locate and obtain data.)

Examples of Research Studies That Use Secondary Data

Here are several examples of studies that use secondary data analysis:

The Hussein, Manthorpe, and Stevens (2011) secondary data analysis (quantitative) of data from the National Minimum Data Set for Social Care (NMDSSC) uses a data set collected from social care employers in England. It compares white Britons with those in other ethnic groups in order to determine the different profiles of migrant workers.

The secondary data analysis by Rose, Hopton, Featherstone, and Edwards (2012) uses qualitative interview data from a previous study. Its authors analyzed previously collected interview data using thematic analyses.

Secondary survey data (quantitative) were used by Manning and Smock (2005) to inform interview topics for their study about cohabitation.

A list of additional research study examples is provided in the Additional Resources section of this tutorial.
Secondary Data Analysis

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Self-Assessment

Next, you will take a short self-assessment to check your comprehension of the information presented in this section.

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**True/False**

Read the statement below and then choose whether it is true or false.

You can conduct secondary data analysis with quantitative data but not qualitative data.

a) True
b) False
Answer:
You can conduct secondary data analysis with quantitative data but not qualitative data.
b) False

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**Multiple Choice**

From the multiple choice options listed below, please select the correct answer to the question.

Which of the following is NOT a benefit of using secondary data analysis?

a) It requires less time than primary research.
b) You have access to large data samples you could not collect as an individual.
c) Research results are more accurate than results from primary research.
d) It tends to be less expensive than conducting primary research.
Answer:
Which of the following is NOT a benefit of using secondary data analysis?
c) Research results are more accurate than results from primary research.

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**True/False**

Read the statement below and then choose whether it is true or false.

Ethical considerations are not an issue in secondary data analysis as researchers have no direct contact with study participants.

a) True
b) False
Answer:
Ethical considerations are not an issue in secondary data analysis as researchers have no direct contact with study participants.
b) False
Secondary Data Analysis

**True/False**

Read the statement below and then choose whether it is true or false.

Becoming familiar with secondary data sources may help you to generate new research ideas.

a) True  
b) False
Answer:
Becoming familiar with secondary data sources may help you to generate new research ideas.  
a) True

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**Multiple Choice**

From the multiple choice options listed below, please select the correct answer to the question.

Which of the following is a limitation of secondary data analysis?

a) There is little useable data available in archives.  
b) Researchers who own data sets may be unwilling to share their data.  
c) The only data available for secondary data analysis are longitudinal studies.  
d) Universities discourage the use of secondary data analysis.
Answer:
Which of the following is a limitation of secondary data analysis?  
b) Researchers who own data sets may be unwilling to share their data
Secondary Data Analysis

Slide 1

Secondary Data Analysis

Section 3: Determining When to Use Secondary Data Analysis

Welcome to the Determining When to Use Secondary Data Analysis section.

This section of the tutorial explains what types of research projects may be appropriate for you to consider using secondary data analysis.

Slide 2

Secondary Data Analysis

Section 3: Overview of Secondary Data Analysis

In this section of the tutorial, focus on the following objective:

How to determine the appropriateness of using secondary data analysis for your research purpose and research questions

Slide 3

Are There Existing Data on Your Research Topic?

Secondary data analysis may be appropriate if an organization or entity has collected data on your research topic but used the data to answer a different research question.

For example Spanier et al. (2012) used existing data from the “Health Outcomes and Measures of the Environment (HOME)” study. Women who had participated in the HOME study were contacted for this study and their infants were eligible for this study.

Slide 4

Can You Answer Your Research Question By Comparing Two Existing Data Sets?

It is possible that you may be able to analyze two existing data sets to answer your research question. For example, Feld (1982) looked at one existing dataset that answered one of the research questions and then looked at another dataset that had similar components that could be used to answer a further research question when used with the first.

Slide 5

Will You Need Longitudinal Research to Answer Your Research Question?

Conducting longitudinal research is difficult because it takes long periods of time to collect the data and participants may drop out for a variety of reasons. If you need data collected over a long period of time, you may find existing data sets that apply to your research question, as many longitudinal data sets are available.

For example the study by Tellez (2012) includes a secondary data analysis of survey data from the California Board of Registered Nursing (BRN). Researchers compared survey data collected before 1997, in 2004, in 2006, and in 2008 in order to study the changes in the workforce due to the minimum nurse-to-patient staffing ratio law passed in 1999.
Are You Attempting to Replicate Previous Research Results?

You may consider using secondary data analysis to try to replicate previous primary research. In this case, you use secondary data to confirm or refute previous research claims.

Manning and Smock (2005) used secondary survey data (quantitative) to inform interview topics for this study about cohabitation. The authors found that the interview data supported the previous quantitative survey results and added insight into those results.

Types of Research Appropriate for Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary researchers identify data needs based on their research questions. The following are situations that may be appropriate for secondary data analysis.

The research question requires you to access a specific population to which you do not have personal access.
The fit between the research question and data is strong (e.g., you plan to test a researcher’s hypotheses).
The secondary data analysis is combined with a primary data analysis.
You want to extend the depth of research by including additional information.
You may find secondary data analysis useful if you are planning to use particular research designs including trend, cohort, time-series, and comparative studies.

Self-Assessment

Next, you will take a short self-assessment to check your comprehension of the information presented in this section.

True/False

Read the statement below and then choose whether it is true or false.

You may supplement a secondary data analysis with primary research.

a) True
b) False

Answer:
You may supplement a secondary data analysis with primary research.
a) True
True/False
Read the statement below and then choose whether it is true or false.
You should avoid using longitudinal studies as a secondary data source.

a) True
b) False
Answer:
You should avoid using longitudinal studies as a secondary data source.
b) False

Multiple Choice
From the multiple choice options listed below, please select the correct answer to the question.

Which of the following research projects would be the LEAST appropriate for secondary data analysis?

a) You can answer your research question by comparing two existing data sets.
b) Your study requires that you obtain data collected over a long period of time.
c) Your study requires a large data sample that you do not have the resources to obtain.
d) Your research question requires data related to public opinion about a current event.
Answer:
Which of the following research projects would be the LEAST appropriate for secondary data analysis?
d) Your research question requires data related to public opinion about a current event.
Secondary Data Analysis

Slide 1

Secondary Data Analysis

Section 4: Finding and Obtaining Secondary Data

Welcome to the Finding and Obtaining Secondary Data section.

This section of the tutorial describes how to find and obtain data for secondary data analysis. This section also explains issues you should consider as you search for and obtain data, including addressing ethical issues and communicating appropriately with your institution, as well as with the institution from which you are obtaining data.

Slide 2

Secondary Data Analysis

Section 4: Finding and Obtaining Secondary Data

In this section of the tutorial, focus on the following objectives:

Describe sources of data for secondary data analysis
Explain how to obtain data for secondary data analysis
Explain considerations when obtaining data for secondary data analysis

Slide 3

Sources of Secondary Data

If you plan to conduct secondary data analysis, it is important to become familiar with data sources related to your research topic. Consider a variety of possible sources and explore possibilities outside of your discipline.

You may already be familiar with a popular source of secondary data—the university library. In addition to searching any archives housed at your own institution, find out what other institutions conduct research on your topic of interest.

Government agencies often conduct large surveys, so searching government websites may enable you to find data sources for your secondary data.

Section 6 provides a list of secondary data sources, including some universities and government agencies.

Slide 4

Sources of Secondary Data: Literature

You may discover sources of secondary data by reading literature related to your topic of interest. This literature includes scholarly articles, trade journals, literature review articles, and technical reports.
Sources of Secondary Data: Major Archives

Although researchers tend to rely on academic institutions for secondary data, non-academic archives are also excellent data sources. If you are considering secondary data analysis, you should explore major archives that contain large volumes of data sets on a variety of topics.

Major archives include the following:

- Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), a repository of secondary data sets for the social sciences
- The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, a major archive of social science data that also specializes in data from public opinion surveys
- Council of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA), a network of European social science data archives

Obtaining Data: Initiating Contact With Archives

After you determine which archives may contain the data you need, you are ready to take steps to obtain these data. Many archives provide listings of their data sets, so you may be able to identify the data you need from one of these lists. If you are not able to identify a particular data set, you may want to contact more than one archive to search for the data you need. You may write to an archive to request a catalogue or brochure of their holdings, if applicable.

Also, contact the archive to find out what steps you need to follow to obtain data. In general, you should expect to have more than one correspondence with archive staff.

Obtaining Data: Completing a Request for Data

You provide the archive with information about the data you are seeking. The archive may give you a form to complete to accomplish this. Be aware that many archives charge a fee for their data, so find out what fees may apply in your situation. In addition, some archives only loan or provide data to members, and, in some cases, you may be able to purchase a membership in order to obtain data. Other organizations provide data to anyone for a fee but provide members with discounts.

The archive may ask you for additional information in an attempt to locate appropriate data, or it may refer you to a different archive.

Obtaining Data: How Archives Provide Data

Archives may store their data in a variety of formats. You may need to change the data format to match the requirements for the software program you plan to use for your data analysis.

In some situations, the organization providing the data may require you to complete training before you handle the data in your analysis. In addition, a supervisor, such as an expert in the data content area, may supervise you to help you avoid data misinterpretations that a novice might make.
Obtaining Data: Additional Archive Services

Larger archives may provide additional services to assist you in your research. Keep in mind that the archive may charge for these services, which may include data search assistance, technical assistance with data file extraction and formatting, and educational activities related to archival data search and retrieval.

Additional Contacts for Secondary Data

In addition to contacting archives, you may consider contacting one of the following when planning a secondary data analysis:

- Original data collectors, if available
- Agencies and organizations with data sources; many organizations allow researchers to analyze their data
- Professional networks, formal and informal in your discipline or field

Ethical Issues and Your Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Follow your institutional review board’s (IRB) process. Be sure to check the ethics review policies and procedures for secondary analyses at both your institution and at the institution that owns the dataset. Never assume secondary analyses are automatically exempt from IRB review or other ethical reviews.

To view Walden University’s current requirements, visit http://researchcenter.waldenu.edu/Application-and-General-Materials.htm.

Prepare to Complete a Data Request

When approaching a contact for secondary data analysis, make your initial requests to specific roles/persons, if known (e.g., grants administrators).

Be prepared to describe:

- Your background, including institutional affiliation and the support of a faculty mentor
- A brief research proposal that includes:
  - Your specific research questions
  - Types of data you are seeking (to the degree known)
  - How you will protect the data (including IRB documentation such as a letter of cooperation)

Clarify Roles

Clarify the agency’s or organization’s role in supporting your studies by discussing:

- What the agency or organization will have to do to support your research effort
Secondary Data Analysis

How the agency/organization will benefit from your research effort (e.g., by having professional research performed on a topic of interest, from an association with higher education)

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Keep the Agency/Organization’s Perspective in Mind

As you communicate with an agency or organization regarding secondary data analysis, keep its perspective in mind. Remember that the agency or organization must protect itself from:

Poorly performed data analysis or dissemination
Violation of data protection
Needless expenditures of scarce resources (staff, money, etc.)

Be sure you are aware of the agency’s or organization’s expectations. For example, the organization may want you to notify it of any changes in your research, to view your data before you publish them, or to own your findings. In addition, be sure to protect the organization’s confidentiality and intellectual property rights.

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Self-Assessment

Next, you will take a short self-assessment to check your comprehension of the information presented in this section.

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True/False

Read the statement below and then choose whether it is true or false.

Universities and government agencies are typically excellent sources of data.

a) True
b) False

Answer:

Universities and government agencies are typically excellent sources of data.
a) True
Matching

Match each term in the first column with the correct statement from the second column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Matching Statement</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
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<td>Repository of secondary data sets for the social sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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True/False

Read the statement below and then choose whether it is true or false.

Researchers typically obtain data sets at no cost.

a) True
b) False
Answer:
Researchers typically obtain data sets at no cost.
b) False

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Multiple Choice

Which of the following information should you expect to submit when you officially request data?

a) Information about your institutional sponsor
b) Information about your research question
c) Information about the types of data you are seeking
d) All of the above
Answer:
Which of the following information should you expect to submit when you officially request data?
d) All of the above
True/False

Read the statement below and then choose whether it is true or false.

It is not necessary for you to consult your institution’s IRB when conducting secondary data analysis.

a) True
b) False

Answer:
It is not necessary for you to consult your institution’s IRB when conducting secondary data analysis.
b) False
Welcome to the Evaluating and Handling Secondary Data section.

This section of the tutorial identifies what researchers should consider when examining a potential data source to determine whether it is usable. This section also addresses general ethical considerations when handling data.

In this section of the tutorial, focus on the following objectives:
- Explain how to ensure the validity of data to be used in secondary data analysis
- Explain ethical considerations when conducting secondary data analysis

Are There Existing Data on Your Research Topic?

When you obtain data to use in secondary data analysis, you must evaluate the quality of the data. To affirm the quality of the data, address the following questions about the data and its source:

- Why were the data collected? Did this purpose influence how the data were collected?
- Who collected the data? Does the source or author have sound credentials? What is the data collector’s relationship to the data?
- For whom were the data collected?
- Were the methods used to collect the data sound?
- When were the data collected? What time intervals were covered? Was the study retrospective?
- Is the document or report well referenced? Do the numbers in the data make sense?

Data Sources That Conflict

You may encounter two data sources that conflict regarding a particular topic. In this situation, look for more data sources covering the topic to determine the consensus on the topic in question. You may also consider consulting an expert in the topic area.

Verify That Data Are Complete

Look for missing data, checking for patterns within the missing data to ensure the missing data are random. If the presence of missing data is not a random occurrence, determine if the missing data may influence your secondary data analysis. Ascertain that there are enough data to conduct the statistical analysis you have planned.
Considerations for Sample Size

You must carefully consider sample size when using secondary data analysis. Your research question should guide the type of analyses you use with the data (e.g., correlation, regression, ANOVA). That said, you must also consider the number of variables being used when determining if a sample size is large enough.

General Ethical Considerations

In designing a secondary data analysis study, keep in mind these general ethical principles that apply to all human subject research.

Respect for Persons: Subjects should give proper and informed consent. Certain subject populations, such as children, prisoners, and the mentally disabled, should receive additional protections.

Beneficence: Maximize anticipated benefits from the research while minimizing possible harm to participants. Examine the design of your study so that the risks are justified by the benefits of the research.

Justice: Be sure to treat subjects fairly. Do not select or exclude particular people or classes of people unless you have a scientifically valid reason to do so. Do not include subjects who are not likely to benefit from the research.

For more information on general ethical considerations in research, visit Walden’s Center for Research Quality at [http://researchcenter.waldenu.edu/Office-of-Research-Integrity-and-Compliance.htm](http://researchcenter.waldenu.edu/Office-of-Research-Integrity-and-Compliance.htm)

Ethical Considerations for the Secondary Researcher

You should act ethically by using the data appropriately. Questions you should consider as you handle the data include:

- Are the interpretations and conclusions of the secondary data analysis in line with the primary data? If not, justify your use of the data.
- Does the data collection method of the primary researcher support the interpretation of the data in the secondary data analysis?
- Are the validity and reliability of the data kept intact with the new interpretation?
- Do the analysis or write-up plans include all possible measures to ensure that participant identities are not directly or indirectly disclosed?
Next, you will take a short self-assessment to check your comprehension of the information presented in this section.

True/False
Read the statement below and then choose whether it is true or false.
If an archive stores data you are interested in using for secondary data analysis, you can assume that the data are of good quality and appropriate for your research.
a) True
b) False
Answer:
If an archive stores data you are interested in using for secondary data analysis, you can assume that the data are of good quality and appropriate for your research.
b) False

Multiple Choice
From the multiple choice options listed below, please select the correct answer to the question.
If two of your data sources conflict, you should ________________________________.
a) throw out the data; you cannot use them for your research project
b) change your research question
c) obtain more data to determine a consensus on the topic
d) all of the above
Answer:
If two of your data sources conflict, you should ________________________________.
c) obtain more data to determine a consensus on the topic

True/False
Read the statement below and then choose whether it is true or false.
You cannot use a data set if you discover it contains missing data.
a) True
b) False
Answer:
You cannot use a data set if you discover it contains missing data.
b) False
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Section 6: Additional Resources

Welcome to the Additional Resources section.

This section of the tutorial presents a summary of the tutorial content, a list of references used in this tutorial, a list of resources for more information on secondary data analysis, and a list of research study examples.

Slide 2

Summary

In secondary data analysis, you use existing data that an individual or organization previously collected to answer your research question rather than collecting the data yourself. Types of secondary data include survey data, statistics, and records, and although most secondary data is quantitative, it may be qualitative as well.

Secondary data analysis has benefits and limitations. It is less costly than primary research, and data can be collected in a shorter amount of time. Secondary data may provide you with access to data you may not be able to collect on your own such as large sample sizes and information collected over long time periods. On the other hand, finding the appropriate data to answer your research question can be a challenge. In some cases, the owner of the data you want to use may not be willing to share it. Also, the data set in which you are interested may have limitations or missing data that make it unusable for your analysis.

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Summary

Secondary data analysis is not appropriate for all types of research projects. Situations in which secondary data analysis may be appropriate include when you know existing data are available to answer your research question, when you want to replicate a study to confirm or refute the findings, or when you need longitudinal studies to answer your research question.

You may obtain secondary data from a variety of sources including universities, government agencies, and foundation and advocacy organizations. You can increase your awareness of data sources by reading literature, trade journals, and scholarly articles that address your topic of interest. In addition, major archives typically provide listings of their data sets.

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Summary

Before you begin contacting organizations to obtain data, be sure to contact your institutional review board (IRB) and follow its policies for conducting secondary data analysis. When you contact an archive or other organization, expect to share appropriate IRB documentation as well as information about yourself, your institution and faculty sponsor, your research questions and design, and the type of data you are seeking. Many organizations charge fees when they loan or sell data, so be sure to find out what fees may apply in your situation.

Besides ensuring that the data you obtain fit your research question, you must also validate the quality of the data. Read any documentation regarding the data you are planning to use to
become aware of any missing data or limitations to the data that may affect their usefulness in your research. Also, confirm that the sample size and research methods used in the original research are appropriate for the secondary data analysis you have planned.

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Additional Resources

There are numerous resources on secondary data analysis are available.

General


Secondary Data Analysis

These are resources you may use to learn more about secondary data analysis.

Books


Articles


These are examples of research studies that used secondary data analysis.


**HIGHER EDUCATION**


**FOUNDATIONS AND ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS**


**U.S. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

Secondary Data Analysis


**INTERNATIONAL SOURCES**


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Secondary Data Analysis

Section 7: Evaluation

Welcome to the Evaluation section.

This section of the tutorial contains a survey for you to provide feedback on this tutorial.

Slide 2

Tutorial Survey

Please click on http://waldenir.us2.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_cLNZoySe0cl2v2Y to complete an evaluation of this course. Your feedback is appreciated.