

SRSM 2019 Proposal

Authors

Joshua R. Polanin, American Institutes for Research; Dorothy L. Espelage, University of Florida; Jennifer Grotzinger, Development Services Group, Inc.

Title

The ultimate haystack needle: Locating unreported outcome data for use in a systematic review and meta-analysis

Objective

Researchers suggest locating and including unpublished studies or effects in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. One popular approach, among the many available, is to contact the author of a primary study and ask for the missing data (Polanin & Williams, 2016). Asking directly for missing outcome data works relatively well when there is some indication that the outcome was collected (Polanin & Terzian, 2017).

While contacting authors works reasonably well when one knows the information is missing, we have less information to inform the answer to this question: what is the success rate for recovering outcome data when it is unclear that the authors collected the outcome measure? In other words, is it possible that outcome data is collected, not reported by the primary authors, yet still recoverable for inclusion in a meta-analysis?

The purpose of this research can be defined by three research objectives:

1. To locate studies that *might have collected* unreported outcome data.
2. To contact authors of these studies and ask for the unreported outcome data.
3. To receive and include the unreported outcome data in an ongoing meta-analysis.

Methods

We assume that some unknown proportion of studies have collected the missing outcome *failed* to (a) report any summary statistics and, more importantly, (b) report its collection. Our hypothesis, that some proportion of studies collected outcome data that was never reported, is tested by the survey of primary study authors. The context of the project, and the testing of our hypothesis, is the synthesis of intervention studies where one of the outcomes potentially measured was cyberbullying.

Search for Related Meta-Analyses

To locate effects that are not reported by study authors, we conducted a search for studies that *could* potentially measure our outcome of interest, cyberbullying. The process started by searching for meta-analyses of intervention studies that implemented a program or measured an outcome that is similar to cyberbullying. A pertinent example is a study that implemented a bullying prevention program - they authors may have collected the cyberbullying outcome data but failed to report that collection.

Search for Related Studies and Study Authors

We collected the primary study citations and the study author's contact information. For each included meta-analysis, we extracted each identified and included primary study citation. We attempted to locate an email address for the first author of each study.

Survey of Primary Study Authors

Lastly, we reached out to the primary study authors via a direct email. We created an email template that explained the project, its purpose, and our purpose for contacting them. We created a SurveyMonkey survey, with an embedded link, where the primary study authors respond to a few short questions and provide the missing cyberbullying data, if available.

Results

For the search of studies from meta-analyses, we searched 11 traditional online databases. The search resulted in 511 potential citations, of which, 89 were included. From the 89 meta-analyses, we extracted 894 primary study citations. Of these 894 citations, we located an email address for 818 authors. Of the 818, 593 authors did not respond in any way, 34 returned an out of office reply, and 110 emails were returned as old or no longer active.

The remaining 81 (12% of active emails) individuals responded in some way. We received various responses which we will discuss in the presentation. Most importantly, we retrieved and included **four** additional studies from this broad search.

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