

Statement Regarding Alleged Plagiarism

March 21, 2024

We are writing in response to the recent (and public) accusation that Harvard University Assistant Professor of Sociology Christina Cross plagiarized a description of a public dataset. We all serve in leadership roles on large publicly funded datasets, including the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), which are used by tens of thousands of researchers around the world.

We are deeply concerned about this false allegation of research misconduct. The purpose of these public data resources is to provide a shared platform for the conduct of innovative and rigorous research. They are a public good. In that context, we fully expect that researchers who use these data will accurately and consistently describe and represent these resources, exactly as in the manner reported by Dr. Cross. Part of the alleged misconduct was Dr. Cross's accurate usage of a data resource's proper name. We, of course, do not want researchers renaming public datasets, just as astronomers would not want researchers to rename the Hubble Telescope. In addition, basic descriptions of a dataset's sample, measures, changes in sample size over time, and the study background need to be discussed and described consistently.

It's not simply that Dr. Cross's writings do not constitute plagiarism. Rather, her description of a large public dataset in this standardized way is simply good research practice - helping to ensure replicability and transparency. Indeed, this is a common practice among our user communities, and it should remain so to ensure high quality scientific research.

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