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Letter to the Editor, concerning

Swartout et al., "Trajectory Analysis of the Campus Serial Rapist Assumption"

Word count: 400

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23 October 23, 2015

24 **Trajectory analysis of the campus serial rapist assumption**

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28 To the Editor

29 We have major concerns about the scientific validity of “A Trajectory Analysis of the Campus

30 Serial Rapist Assumption,” by Kevin Swartout and colleagues (1).

31 Contacted one week after publication, Swartout provided the dataset he used and his analysis

32 code. It is a bare-minimum dataset, consisting of five simple dichotomous (yes/no) rape

33 variables, derived from two datasets – one [publicly available](#) (co-author Jackie White is principal

34 investigator), and another that has not been made available despite requests (co-author Martie

35 Thompson is P.I.).

36 Swartout and colleagues’ methodology systematically suppresses the number of serial

37 offenders. They excluded attempted rapes and defined “serial rape” as committing rape during

38 more than one assessment period, such that men who raped more than twice – even more

39 than five times – during one assessment period were not defined as serial rapists. Simple

40 frequency analyses of the publicly available dataset show that, for every period assessed, at

41 least 50% of rapists were serial rapists (i.e., men who had committed more than one rape) and

42 the vast majority of rapes were committed by serial rapists.

43 Swartout acknowledged (after we alerted him) that his analysis dataset had large amounts of

44 incorrectly missing data. Inspection of White’s full public dataset revealed major data integrity

45 issues for the sexual assault variables used to derive dichotomous variables for their analyses.  
46 For example, all sexual assault variables had been created by a command that recoded values  
47 of “missing” and “no response” into “never” (see page 513 of the [publicly available](#) PDF  
48 *Codebook for Male Data*). In short, errors piled upon errors plague the data used in the paper’s  
49 analyses.

50 Using the original analysis code, we reviewed the analyses and their results. Again, major  
51 problems were uncovered. The analyses included data that the authors explicitly stated in their  
52 article had not been included (i.e., senior year of the derivation dataset). The models  
53 themselves are based on untenable assumptions (e.g., the validity of imposing smooth  
54 trajectory curves to describe the probability of rape over time), and they fail to meet standard  
55 criteria of model fit (e.g., models were under-identified, requiring critical parameters to be  
56 fixed rather than estimated).

57 These major problems – and more – are clear to anyone who inspects the available data and,  
58 among those qualified, to analysts who perform the latent class analyses.

59 In support of the critique outline above, we direct you and readers to our extensive critique,  
60 and technical report [posted on PubPeer.com](#).

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71 1. Swartout KM, Koss MP, White JW, Thompson MP, Abbey A, Bellis AL. Trajectory analysis of  
72 the campus serial rapist assumption. JAMA Pediatrics, 2015 Jul 13. doi:  
73 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.0707. [Epub ahead of print]