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Concerns about an article from HMS and Boston Children's Hospital (from 68 Harvard students)

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Dear Dean Daley, Ms. Fenwick, Dean Brodnicki, Dr. Churchwell, Dr. Cervini, Dr. Williams, Dr. Houman, Dr. Kohane, Dr. Ryan and Dr. Brownstein,

Hope this email finds you well.

As Chinese students studying at or graduated from Harvard, we are writing to convey our concerns about a recent article from Harvard Medical School and Boston Children's Hospital "Analysis of hospital traffic and search engine data in Wuhan China indicates early disease activity in the Fall of 2019" (Harvard Dash: [Analysis of hospital traffic and search engine data in Wuhan China indicates early disease activity in the Fall of 2019](#)), and request that Harvard Medical School and Boston Children's Hospital investigate the case and potentially retract this article.

Our concerns are:

1. The conclusion in this article is not a scientific one drawn from rigorous data sampling and analysis and potentially involves [data dredging](#). A group of us with statistics and data science backgrounds have carefully studied this article and found many problems in its methodology, sampling, and analysis. You may find more detailed reasonings in the **attachment**.
2. The not-peer-reviewed article has been widely picked up [by the media](#) (even before the preprint was published), and circulated in social media (including [President Trump's twitter](#)). The inconclusive or unscientific statement in the title and abstract has been cited as a fact and used to vilify China, provoking hatred against Chinese, especially Chinese students in the US. This not only hurts the feeling of Chinese students at Harvard, but also denigrates Harvard's reputation as an institution that is known for her research integrity.

As members of the Harvard community, we were very concerned to see such a misleading paper affiliated with Harvard. We respect scientific investigations and understand that some hard truths might be disturbing, but to the best of our judgment, this article is misleading to the public. Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, the Chinese and Asian community in the US has been under continuous racial and xenophobic discrimination, and there is an increasing number of reported racism attacks against Asians despite many collaboration commitments ([Harvard Gazette](#)). We are deeply concerned that the situation is exacerbated by this article, published and endorsed by a prestigious institute like Harvard Medical School.

We sincerely hope that you will consider our concerns, and request the Harvard Medical School and Boston Children's Hospital to investigate the case. We believe that HMS has the responsibility to maintain research integrity among faculty members. The title of Harvard Medical School lends substantial credibility to this paper despite its substandard analysis. It is in the interest of the school and the wider Harvard community to maintain high academic standards to protect Harvard's academic reputation.

Sincerely,

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