

Missing analyses and uncritical citations: The alleged 20:1 benefit-to-cost ratio of cycling

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It is often stated that the health benefits of cycling outweigh the risks by a ratio of 20:1. This figure arises from three publications of one author, but none of these provide clear calculations in support of this claim. Nevertheless, the 20:1 ratio is frequently cited in scientific publications and then used in public policy discussions, often as evidence to oppose bicycle helmet laws. Uncritical and frequent citation of an unverified source can have long-lasting negative consequences. This is especially true if such published research is used in policymaking. Public policy should always be evidence-based. All writers, including scientists and journalists, are obliged to verify their sources especially if these sources are used in policymaking or in other issues open to debate.