**The following appeared in a health newsletter.**

**"A ten-year nationwide study of the effectiveness of wearing a helmet while bicycling indicates that ten years ago, approximately 35 percent of all bicyclists reported wearing helmets, whereas today that number is nearly 80 percent. Another study, however, suggests that during the same ten-year period, the number of bicycle-related accidents has increased 200 percent. These results demonstrate that bicyclists feel safer because they are wearing helmets, and they take more risks as a result. Thus, to reduce the number of serious injuries from bicycle accidents, the government should concentrate more on educating people about bicycle safety and less on encouraging or requiring bicyclists to wear helmets."**

**Write a response in which you examine the stated and/or unstated assumptions of the argument. Be sure to explain how the argument depends on these assumptions and what the implications are for the argument if the assumptions prove unwarranted.**

Essay Response:

The argument reaches the conclusion that the government should concentrate more on bicycle safety education, as opposed to mandates on wearing helmets for bicyclists. This conclusion is based on the premise that an increase in helmet use did not lead to a decrease in bicycle-related accidents. However, the author of the argument makes three unstated assumptions, which, if found to be false, could dramatically affect the veracity of the argument’s logic.

First, the argument assumes that the efficacy of helmet use is contingent on the number of associated accidents. However, the author has provided no information on the exact severity of injuries in the accidents where citizens wore helmets. It may be the case that almost all of the past years’ recorded incidents led to minimal injuries, with helmets possibly preventing more death. If the author is able to provide evidence to show that the average severity and degree of casualties worsened over the past decade, only then can their argument be strengthened. In the absence of such evidence, as it stands now, there is a chance that evidence arises against this assumption, thus falsifying the argument’s logic.

Second, the argument fails to consider the exact findings of the second study. Furthermore, it makes the weak assumption that all other factors have stayed the same over the past 10 years, by attributing the increase in accidents to the helmets. It has assumed that bicyclists are feeling safer due to the increased usage of helmets, while providing no concrete evidence for the same. The study does not necessarily ‘suggest’ this claim, as stated by the author. It is possible that other road users are feeling safer, and hence are taking less precautions around bicyclists. It may also be the case that the conditions of the roads themselves have worsened over the years, hence leading to a climb in the number of bicycle-related accidents. If external factors like obsolete road infrastructure or inadequate maintenance of bicycle lanes are found to have affected the number of such casualties, then the author’s claims would not hold water.

Finally, the author of the argument assumes that safety education without mandated helmet use would be effective in curbing incidences of bicycle accidents. By providing no data to support the idea that such a measure would work better than compulsory helmets, the author is unable to assure us that the argument’s recommendation would work successfully, in solving existing issues. It is possible that a majority of drivers and cyclists already know about the necessary safety measures, and that on-road enforcement of rules has not been done. It may also be the case that education simply would not decrease the frequency of serious injuries; the author could have addressed this by, perhaps, pointing to the efficacy of such methods in sufficiently similar countries. Hence, the current form of the argument does not adequately justify that its proposal is the best solution possible, and that it will, indeed, lead to a safer road system.

In conclusion, the argument, as it stands now, is considerably flawed. By making the unstated assumptions discussed above, it jumps to conclusions without building upon strong, concrete evidence to back itself up. For the argument to be valid, the author would likely need to consult a comprehensive study of the road habits in the country, and explain, with certainty, the validity of their claims. Only with substantiative evidence can the argument be persuasive enough to move the government to accept the proposal made.