

# Portland Press Herald

## Letter: Basis of Balentine column bogus at best

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Balentine claims that a “Johns Hopkins study” reviewing “thousands” of research articles showed that shutdowns had no effect on COVID deaths (“Here’s Something: COVID lockdown story points to media’s failings,” Feb. 11).

The study is not a Johns Hopkins study. The lead author is a part-time professor there and a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. The other two authors have no Hopkins affiliations. Further, the paper contains this disclaimer: “The views expressed in each working paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the institutions that the authors are affiliated with.” Claiming that it is a Johns Hopkins study is a tactic intended to give the report the appearance of more gravitas than it deserves.

Balentine says the study’s results are based on “thousands” of studies. The statement at best is misleading. The paper identified 18,590 studies that addressed the issue, yet included only 24 studies in the meta-analysis. It is a working paper, not a peer-reviewed study, so the methods for winnowing 18,590 articles down to 24 have not been rigorously reviewed. Some critics suggest the authors excluded studies that did not fit their preconceived notions. Whatever the reasons, their process excluded many studies showing benefits from lockdowns.

The authors did not demonstrate that lockdowns had no effect. Even they admitted that shelter-in-place orders reduced mortality by 2.9%. This means lockdowns could have prevented over 26,000 deaths from our current total of over 911,000 COVID deaths.

The study makes no reference to economic loss from lockdowns, yet Balentine bashes lockdowns, claiming they caused significant, albeit unspecified, economic loss. Balentine ignores the fact that economic losses would have occurred without lockdowns and does not consider that economic and other losses might have been even worse without lockdowns. Instead, he hopes that gullible readers will blame all economic losses during the pandemic on lockdown measures.

*Mel Tremper*

*Topsham*