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When statistical literacy really matters: understanding published information about the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa.

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Summary: Information on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Southern Africa is often interpreted through a veil of secrecy and shame and, I argue, with flawed understanding of basic statistics. This research determined the levels of statistical literacy evident in 316 future Mathematical Literacy teachers' explanations of the median in the context of HIV/AIDS survival times. Drawing on the three-tiered statistical literacy hierarchy proposed by *J. M. Watson* [in: Proceedings of the fifth international conference on teaching statistics (ICOTS 5). Vol. 2. 793–799 (1999; ME 2012a.00281); Statistical literacy at school. Growth and goals. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum (2006; ME 2014b.00721)] and the SOLO taxonomy, a categorisation framework was constructed. About half the teachers were classified below the level of basic understanding of the median. Misunderstandings included confusion of the median survival time with the maximum survival time, and a failure to consider the spread of the data along with the centre.

Classification: K40 D70 M60

Keywords: statistics education research; statistical literacy hierarchy; median; data interpretation

[http://iase-web.org/documents/SERJ/SERJ13\(2\)_Hobden.pdf](http://iase-web.org/documents/SERJ/SERJ13(2)_Hobden.pdf)