

Lies, damned lies and statistics

About 15 members attended (via zoom) this mathematics lecture on statistics by Neil Sheldon, ex vice-president of Royal Statistical Society. The real purpose of statistics is to convey information, understand that information and what it means (insight). He gave various illustrations to prove that they can be misleading, misunderstood and even misused. Understanding statistics helps us make better decisions. Averages can be useful, but statistics is mostly about variation. What is true of the totals is not necessarily true for the parts as other variables need to be considered. He said we must be aware of spurious correlations. Mediums frequently do not describe the true picture. If a fact looks wrong then it probably is. People use statistics usually to prove their own ends. He concluded by mentioning various types of statistics for Covid-19 infections (age relation, ethnicity etc) to encourage people to believe that progress is being made to combat this dreadful virus.

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number of attendees increased to 20.