

The impact of COVID on bridge players

A STUDY OF SOME UK BASED PLAYERS

Abstract from a 2020 paper by Tony Hasler (haslertony@gmail.com)

Background

During COVID lockdown, playing bridge in the physical company of others (live bridge) has become impossible for most players; playing online has been the only option. This survey, conducted as part of a master's degree in data science at the University of London, investigates the impact of lockdown on players' bridge lives.

Research questions

1. Are UK bridge enthusiasts playing more or less frequently now that bridge clubs are physically shut, and does the answer to that question depend on age?
2. Has COVID changed the proportions of social and organised bridge?
3. Will COVID have a permanent effect on people's bridge lives once COVID recedes?

For the purposes of this survey, I defined **organised** as "tournaments, club events, lessons etc.", i.e., pretty much anything other than a few friends getting together.

The final question recognises the intriguing possibility that newly computer literate people using newly provided online bridge offerings will continue to take advantage of them once COVID recedes.

Methods

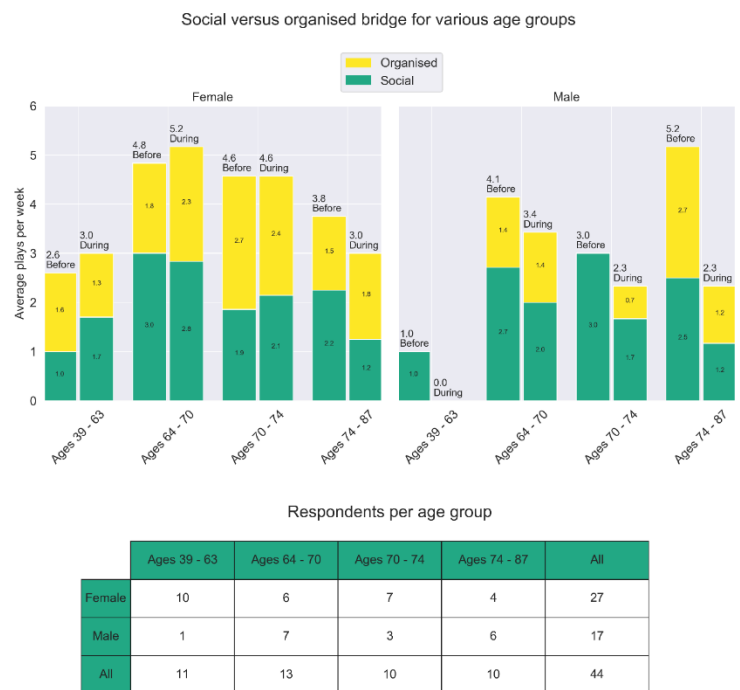
The research was conducted with a snowball survey, with respondents from my own local bridge club and Facebook.

There were **44 respondents** (excluding two responses with no answers) made up of **27 females** and **17 males**.

Given the small size of the sample and its potential bias, further research would be required to verify and quantify the conclusions.

I was very surprised that 5 respondents claimed to be able to play live bridge during lockdown. I am unsure how they achieved this. Had I anticipated such a high number I would have asked more questions. However, the analysis that follows ignores live play during lockdown.

Main conclusions



The figure to the left shows the average number of times people play bridge per week for each age quartile¹ and gender. It also shows a breakdown between play before and during lockdown and between social and organised bridge.

Perhaps surprisingly, most **female** players, except for the 74+ age group, are playing **more bridge during lockdown** than they were previously. On the other hand, **male players of all age groups are playing less during lockdown** than they were previously.

Some people are clearly playing a greater proportion of social bridge and some a greater proportion of organised bridge. But there does not seem to any recognisable pattern.

Additional findings

- 31 of the 44 respondents of both sexes and all ages indicated that lack of live bridge has had a negative impact on their social lives. One male and one female indicated that their social life had improved during lockdown.
- 5 respondents felt that their bridge lives would be worse after lockdown, whereas 8 felt it would be better. The remaining 31 felt that their bridge lives would be neither better nor worse, although 15 of the 31 thought that it would be different.
- 5 of the 44 respondents felt that they would be playing less live bridge after lockdown with 2 indicating that they would be playing more. These figures are not conclusive enough to dismiss a null hypothesis that COVID will have no long-term impact on live bridge.
- 14 of the 27 female respondents and 4 of the 17 male respondents felt that they would be playing more online bridge after lockdown than they played before lockdown. With a p-value of 6.28% there is a weak indication that female players will be increasing their levels of online bridge more than males.

Summary

Given the small sample size, it is questionable if any of the findings from this survey are statistically significant. Given that caveat, it seems that males and elderly females are playing less bridge during lockdown and females under the age of 74 are playing more. Although only 16 of the 44 respondents felt that lockdown would have no long-term impact on their bridge lives, it does seem that participation in live bridge, including club events, should eventually return to pre-lockdown levels. Increased participation in online bridge, perhaps more so by female players, is expected to continue, to some extent at least, as restrictions are lifted.

¹ The quartile ranges were calculated across all respondents, male and female, so that the resulting age groups could be compared fairly.