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Bridge Data Sources

Camilla Barnet and Samantha Punch

Introduction

To our knowledge, there are currently three large scale surveys about bridge players a study by the University of Stirling in partnership with EBED, a study by Fun bridge (in partnership with World Bridge Federation, ACBL, FFB, NBF, FSB, BBO, Le Bridgeur, Bridgerama and Jouer Bridge), and a study by Robert Todd in partnership with ACBL Educational Foundation. One further study is about to be conducted in Hebrew in Israel by IBF. We are also aware of one study of bridge Teachers and Club Managers in America conducted by the ABL. In addition, we know of several club level surveys that took place in 2020 focusing on issues surrounding online bridge during Covid-19. This blog will describe these data sources and what they tell us about bridge and its players.

Bridge data sources overview

In partnership with [EBED](#) in 2016 researchers from [Stirling University](#) sought to gather evidence on the link between bridge playing and well-being. They sampled over 7000 individuals the majority of which were bridge players from England and Scotland. The survey captured demographic, social, subjective wellbeing, and bridge playing characteristics of individuals. This data can be linked with ELSA data to compare this sample of bridge players with non-bridge players.

We are aware that in 2017 the ACBL conducted a survey of club owners and teachers, they had 443 participants out of a possible 5200. They asked a mixed of closed and open ended questions about these individuals experiences of ACBL membership. To our knowledge this was an internal survey and the results were not made public.

In 2019 many major players of the bridge world collaborated to launch an [international survey of bridge players](#). This was a partnership between World Bridge Federation, ACBL, FFB, NBF, Funbridge.com, FSB, BBO, Le Bridgeur, Bridgerama and Jouer Bridge and resulted in a sample of 14498 individuals. The aim of the survey was to establish the profile of the average bridge player and understand the attraction of bridge around the globe.

In 2019 [Robert Todd and the ACBL Educational Foundation](#) used survey monkey to generate a sample of Americans aged over 45 who had some college level education. The resulting sample size was approximately 2550. Of which about 20% (555 respondents) reported they knew how to play bridge. Different questions were asked of these 555 people than the non-bridge players. The bridge players were asked when they learned to play bridge, how often they currently play bridge, and what types of bridge they play. The non-bridge players were asked if they knew about bridge, knew people who played bridge, were interested in learning to play, and if so, how they would like to learn to play. The motivation for the survey was to collect information about the game of bridge in the US including Americans awareness, interest, and play of the game.



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In 2020 several clubs surveyed members about the move to online play due to Covid-19. For example, in August 2020 the [Manchester Contract Bridge Association's BBO Committee](#) conducted the survey of its members and 416 of around 960 members whose BBO ID were accessible were asked to take part in the survey. They received 145 responses. Their main focus was on what kinds of online events their members might want. In addition, The New Melville Bridge Club in Edinburgh conducted a survey of its members in responses to Covid-19. 348 people took part in the survey. That is 64% of the club membership of 542.

What does the data tell us about bridge and its players

Gender

In all surveys that asked about participants gender there were roughly equal numbers of male and female players. However it is worth noting a recent focus group conducted as part of [BAMSA's Bridging Gender project](#) found that some players had concerns about the lack of women playing at an elite level and bridge losing potential good players due to everyday sexism in the game. Thus while equal numbers of men and women are playing bridge over all this does not mean there is equality across all level of bridge play.

Social background

The surveys suggest that bridge players are well educated, for example the [University of Stirling and EBED](#) survey found that even in an older sample two-thirds were degree educated. There is also a perception that bridge players are quite advantaged but we currently have no data to support this as although [ACBL Educational Foundation](#) study collected data on income they have not published it publicly.

Age

Two of the large bridge surveys limit their samples to those in older age groups but an [international survey of over 14000 bridge players](#) found that the majority of players were 65+ (Aged 13-24: 1.5%, Aged 25-44: 5%, Aged 45-64: 27.7%, Aged 65+: 65.8%). Bridge associations have also reported that the average age of their players is increasing:

Unfortunately, the average age of our Members is increasing. In March 2001, the average age of an ACBL Member was 65.59. In 2006, the average age was 67.61 and in 2011 the average age currently stands at 69.55. The trend is not our friend. It should be noted that the average US life expectancy has also increased over the past decade (76.7 to 78.2 years of age). ([Robert Hartman](#))

However, there is a younger side to bridge that may not be captured via these surveys. Bridge tournaments often feature a 'youth bridge' league. Indeed, recently the Netherlands have improved in the world rankings, by assigning much of their funding and sponsorship towards nurturing youth bridge, and as a consequence, have one of the youngest [national teams](#) in the world. Additionally, many bridge organisations are attempting to attract younger populations through outreach at [schools or other education programs](#).

Bridge community

As it is always played in pairs by its nature bridge is a game requiring teamwork between players. The survey by the [University of Stirling and EBED](#) found that 94% of bridge players had regular playing partners and that these relationships commonly lasted several years.



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Given the requirement for partners, and sometimes for team-mates, bridge involves building and maintaining relationships between players, both at and away from the table. Thus, bridge can foster a sense of community with many players participating regularly in bridge clubs or at bridge events. Several surveys show that the majority of bridge players play at least once a week ([MCBA](#), [Funbridge](#), and [University of Stirling and EBED](#)).

Benefits of bridge

Two surveys have asked bridge players to report what they see as the benefits of playing bridge ([Funbridge](#), and [University of Stirling and EBED](#)). Aside from finding it enjoyable and entertaining, players also thought it was mentally stimulating and improved memory. Additionally, they found value in the social element of bridge enjoying the committed partnerships they had built and the opportunity to get to know new people from different generations. Research by the [University of Stirling and EBED](#), found that playing bridge had a small but statistically significant positive effect on well-being. See [BAMSA's Bridging Wellbeing](#) project for more on the links between bridge and wellbeing.

How many people play bridge?

It is difficult to accurately report the number of bridge players worldwide for several reasons. Firstly there are no data sets to our knowledge that ask questions about bridge playing to a representative global sample and without this information, we cannot estimate the overall number of people playing bridge. There is one North American study of those thought to be the most common bridge playing demographic (45+ with at least some college education) which asked this question and found that 20% of respondents were bridge players ([ACBL Educational Foundation](#)).

While, we could collate numbers of those who are affiliated with a national bridge organisation (E.g. the [World Bridge Federation](#) reports there are 719349 affiliated bridge players in 103 countries). However, local variations in how affiliation is defined will impact upon the reported numbers of members thus global comparisons between the numbers of members are not necessarily accurate. Additionally, affiliation does not necessarily mean that an individual is regularly playing bridge as some may continue to pay dues which give them membership without actually playing bridge regularly and some may have been granted lifetime membership. Some affiliated clubs may have quite a few members but struggle to get two tables playing regularly.

While the [Funbridge](#), survey found that the majority of respondents were in a bridge federation (Have been: 14.4%, Have never been: 32.2%, Are currently 53.4%), this may be due to the sample being collected in partnership with bridge organisations and thus those with affiliated memberships being more likely to be sampled. Due to bridge politics there are many unaffiliated clubs and players still playing bridge regularly and to a high standard. Aside from clubs and members purposefully not obtaining affiliations, there are also groups that may play regularly at an affiliated club without having a membership, for example, youth bridge players. Thus we cannot assume that associated members represent the majority of serious bridge players.

Online bridge

There is mixed evidence about online bridge play prior to Covid-19, the [Funbridge](#) survey found that 45% of respondents played online bridge, in contrast to the ([ACBL Educational](#)



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[Foundation](#) study which found only around 10% played online. This is likely due to the different samples these surveys had, Funbridge is an online bridge platform thus its association with and promotion of the survey is likely to have reached more online players than the ABCL survey which sampled Americans over the age of 45.

The closure of many bridge clubs around the world in 2020 may have resulted in many players taking up online play. The [MCBA](#) survey found that 76% of the respondents who now played online had not done so prior to the national lockdown. Around two thirds of the on-line players found it relatively easy to acquire the skills needed to play on-line. The New Melville Bridge Club survey found that 83% of their respondents had played bridge online since the start of the national lockdown. The most common reason for not playing online was a lack of confidence in using technology. However, it remains to be seen how far this trend will continue into the future. [BAMSA's Bridging Covid](#) project has found that while players welcome online bridge in the short term players vary in their love of online bridge.

What are the gaps in the existing data

With the exception of the ACBL survey of club owners and teachers which has not been publicly published there has been very little research on bridge organisations and clubs with most surveys focusing on bridge players. This knowledge gap could be filled by conducting an international survey of bridge organisations.