

# THE FINANCIAL GLOW UP

The Fluency Gap in Women's Wealth  
and Why the Advice Hasn't Kept Up



# The Fluency Gap in Women's Wealth and Why the Advice Hasn't Kept Up

For years, the conversation about women and wealth has centered on confidence.

**Teach** women to feel more confident.

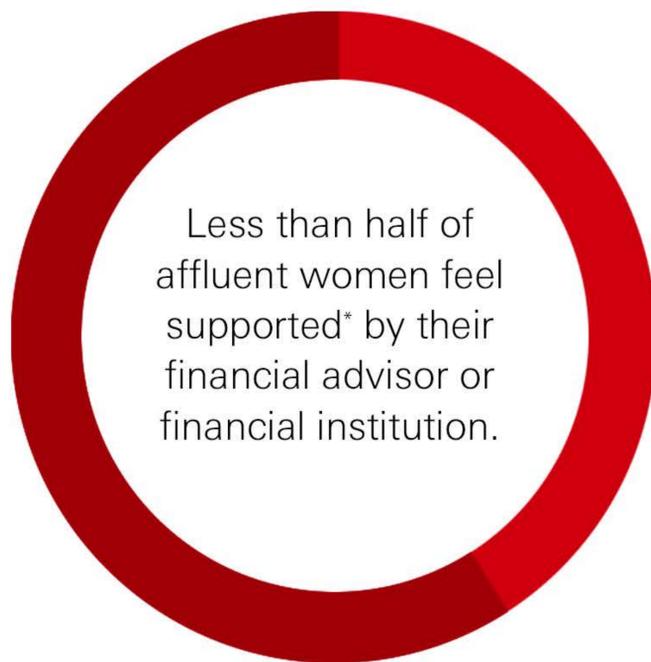
**Encourage** women to take more risk.

**Remind** women they "can do this."

But our research reveals a different, more structural problem.

In a new HSBC study conducted in partnership with Ipsos, we surveyed 2,056 people with investable assets greater than \$100,000, including 1,045 women, to understand how affluent women really feel about their financial lives.

**One thing is clear:** these women are not disengaged from wealth, they are intentional. Nearly half (45%) of affluent women surveyed began taking finances seriously in their 20s or earlier.



*Despite this engagement, our research reveals another striking truth: fewer than half of affluent women feel supported by their financial institution or advisor. This disconnect is what we call the **Fluency Gap**.*

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## What is the Fluency Gap?

HSBC defines the Fluency Gap as the space between financial education and real understanding matched by precise financial guidance.

It emerges when static advice meets dynamic realities, like career changes, caregiving, health, and increasing responsibility for others. What works in your 20s doesn't work in your 40s. What feels optional in your 30s becomes urgent in your 50s. Even the definition of success shifts over time. When women have education without fluency, decisions feel uncertain. When women have a static plan without consideration of their life stage, it feels ad hoc. Knowledge alone doesn't provide direction.

### From Education to Action

Fluency is built through a clear, adaptable plan, one that translates education into action and evolves alongside life stages. In fact,

**70% of affluent women say financial education tailored to their current life stage would improve the quality of their financial decisions,** underscoring the importance of guidance that connects knowledge to planning. When education is paired with a plan that reflects their lives, fluency follows. The problem isn't women. It's advice that hasn't kept up.

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\* Percentage of affluent women who say their financial advisor/institution support(s) them "extremely" or "very" well in planning as they prepare for different life stages.

# The Financial Glow Up

## Redefining Financial Progress for Women



In today's culture, a "glow up" often refers to visible transformation in skincare, fashion or fitness. But one of the most consequential transformations is financial.

A financial glow up is not about sudden wealth or dramatic change. It is the shift that happens when women move from knowing the basics to navigating complexity with clarity. It is when they can understand their options, make intentional decisions, and adjust their strategy as life evolves.

Illustrated by our survey findings, we discover financial priorities are deeply tied to life stages, caregiving, health, and responsibility for others. It is the movement from information to intention, from accumulation to alignment, grounded in a plan that keeps pace with change.

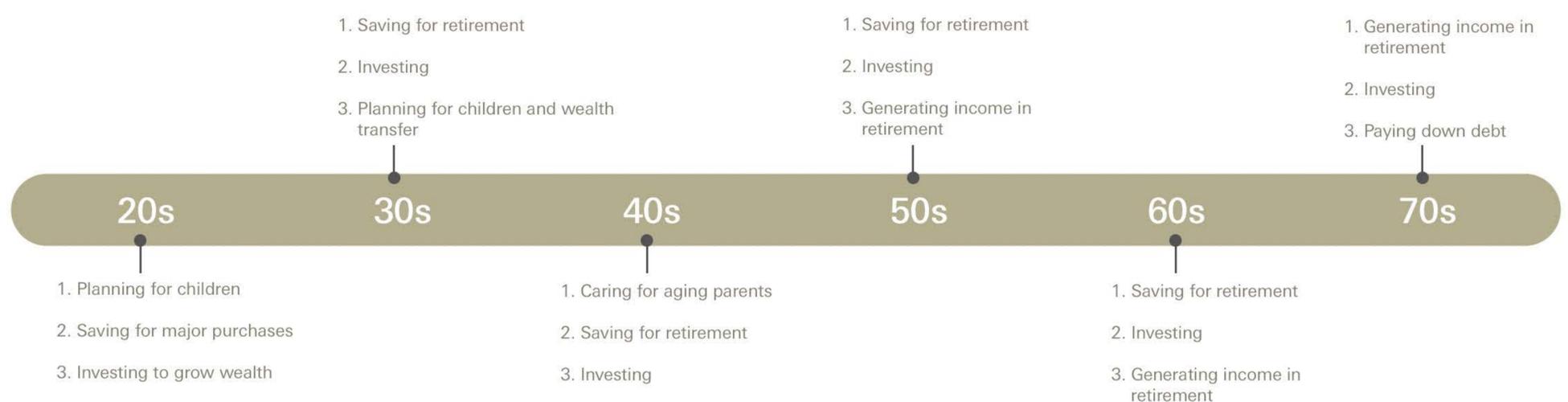
## The Fluency Gap in Priorities

**Myth:** Women have a single financial priority, such as caring for family or saving for retirement.

**Reality:** Women's priorities shift sharply by decade and ethnicity, revealing a Fluency Gap in how financial planning is framed.

Overall, affluent women's top financial priorities appear straightforward: saving for retirement, investing to grow wealth, and generating income in retirement. But this surface view masks a more nuanced, life-stage-driven reality. An affluent woman's definition of financial success also evolves with each decade: from supporting her family in her 20s, to ensuring a comfortable retirement in her 60s.

### Top Financial Priority by Decade



#### By ethnicity:

**One in four Black women\*** rank saving for a major purchase as their top financial priority.

**Hispanic women** are significantly more focused on starting or growing a business than White women.

*The Fluency Gap appears when advice assumes a single goal, while women are navigating multiple, shifting responsibilities at once.*

\* Low base size (n=93); use data directionally.

# The Fluency Gap in Preparedness

**Myth:** The financial formula for a secure future is the same for men and women.

**Reality:** Women require strategies built for longer timelines, higher savings goals, and the realities of caregiving.

Women live longer than men, which brings both opportunity and complexity. Longer lives mean more years of expense, higher healthcare costs, and a greater likelihood of managing finances independently later in life.

Even among women with more than \$100k in investable assets, these realities leave affluent women feeling unprepared; less than a third feel prepared for aging costs (29%) or long-term care needs (32%). Even more surprising, 17%, particularly Gen Z and Millennials, experience daily financial worry.

Nearly two-thirds of affluent women consider others in their financial planning, and 43% prioritize leaving financial security to loved ones, significantly more than men.

## Financial Legacy: Providing Financial Security to Loved Ones (Top 2 Box)

43%  
Women

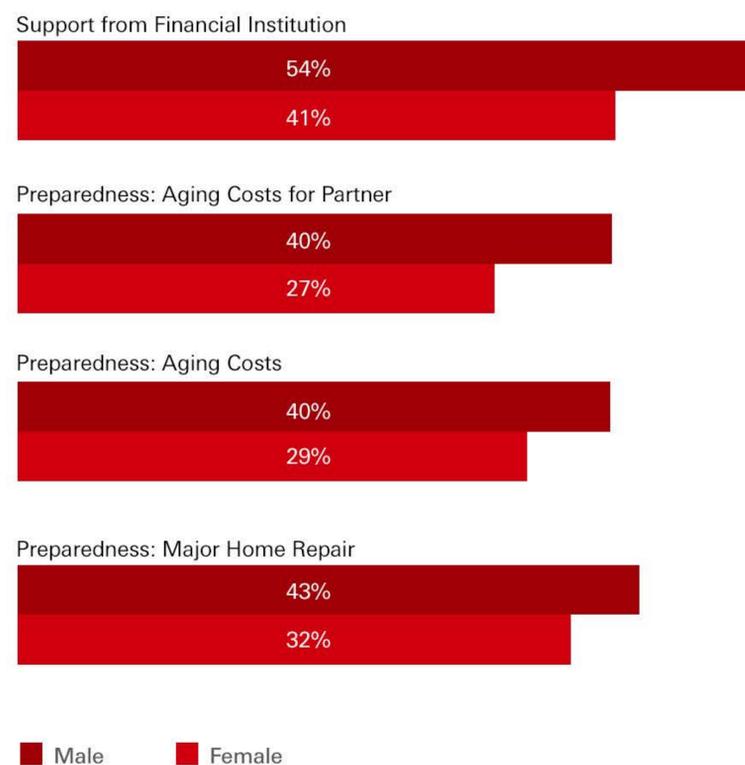
33%  
Men

### Our data reveals other significant gender differences as well:

- Men feel more prepared than women for major home repairs (+11%), aging costs for themselves (+11%), and long-term care needs for a spouse or partner (+13%).
- Men feel significantly more supported by their financial institution than women (+13%).

*This is not a failure to plan. It is a signal that guidance lacks fluency in women's complex financial realities.*

### Financial Outlook by Gender (Top 2 Box)



# The Fluency Gap in Confidence

**Myth:** Financial confidence grows steadily with age.

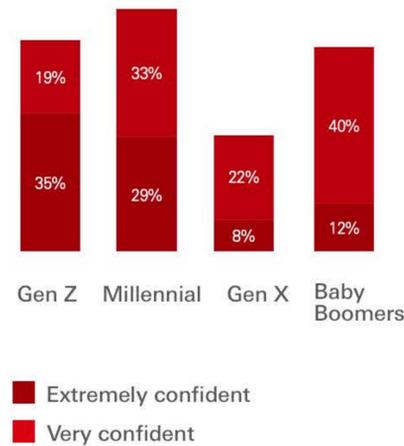
**Reality:** Confidence peaks early and drops when fluency becomes critical.

Overall, 49% of affluent women say they are extremely or very confident in their financial plan. However, confidence follows a surprising curve. Gen Z and Millennial report being 'extremely confident' significantly more than Baby Boomers, and women with \$500K–\$5M in investable assets are significantly more confident than those with \$100K–\$500K.

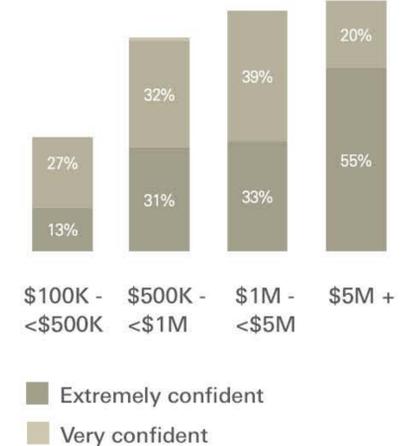
Early confidence is fueled by time and possibility. Later-stage confidence requires precision and proof.

As retirement moves from theoretical to imminent, confidence is tested — not because women lack courage, but because generic advice no longer applies. This is a signal that fluency, not encouragement, is what's missing.

Financial Confidence by Generation (Top 2 Box)



Financial Confidence by Asset Level (Top 2 Box)



## Closing the Fluency Gap The Financial Glow Up

When asked what they would do differently, women most often say they would start saving for retirement earlier (30%) and invest sooner (27%).

**Women don't want more information. They want relevant, timely fluency. It is financial institutions' responsibility to provide it.**

Closing the Fluency Gap requires more than encouragement or confidence. It requires advice that is life-stage specific, adaptable, and grounded in planning precision. Financial institutions must move beyond static models and deliver guidance that evolves alongside the women they serve. And women should feel empowered to seek partners who provide clarity, precision, and a plan built for the complexity of their lives.

The Financial Glow Up re-frames women's wealth planning as it truly is:

**Dynamic, not static**

**Intentional, not reactive**

**Intergenerational, not individual**

“ This research makes clear that women are already doing the work: emotionally, mentally, and financially. Closing the Fluency Gap means giving women advice that evolves with their lives. The Financial Glow Up isn't about doing more. It's about knowing what matters now, what's next, and having a plan that grows with you. ”

- Racquel Oden, U.S. Head of International Wealth Management and Private Banking

This report details some of the findings of a HSBC survey conducted by Ipsos from January 5-8, 2026. For this survey, a sample of 2,056 participants (including 1,045 women) age 18+, with investable assets ≥ \$100k, from the U.S. was interviewed online in English. The starting sample was weighted to be representative of the U.S. population on age, race/ethnicity, education, and Census region.

The credibility interval, a measure of precision used for non-probability-based online polls, is +/- 3.7 percentage points.

Generational definitions used in this report: Gen Z (born 1997-2012), Millennials (1981-1996), Gen X (1965-1980), Baby Boomers (1946-1964).



# The Financial Glow Up



**Racquel Oden**

U.S. Head of International Wealth Management and Private Banking

**Q: What do women misunderstand most about their relationship with wealth?**

“ **Racquel Oden:** Many women assume the challenge is confidence. The data tells a different story. Women are already engaged and intentional. What’s missing is fluency: a plan that translates knowledge into action and evolves with life stage. When women understand how the levers work together, confidence follows.

**Q: What is the “Fluency Gap”?**

“ **Racquel Oden:** The Fluency Gap is the space between doing the right things like saving, investing, diversifying, and feeling certain your strategy will hold up as life becomes more complex. It often appears at inflection points: caregiving, retirement planning, supporting multiple generations. Closing that gap means moving from general advice to precision aligned to your life.

**Q: What’s one shift women can make today?**

“ **Racquel Oden:** Stop asking, “Am I doing enough?” and start asking, “Is this aligned with my life stage?” That re-frames planning from a checklist into a strategy. Fluency means understanding why you’re making decisions and adjusting as your life evolves.



**Mika Brzezinski**

Co-host of Morning Joe, MSNOW;  
Founder, Know Your Value

**Q: You’ve spoken openly about struggling with money. How does that connect to financial fluency?**

“ **Mika Brzezinski:** I grew up in a highly educated, bilingual household. I received every opportunity. And yet I made terrible financial decisions. I didn’t fully understand my value, and I didn’t know how to manage money strategically. That disconnect stayed with me for years. What I’ve learned, sometimes the hard way, is that knowledge isn’t enough. Fluency is what turns education into empowerment.

**Q: Why do so many capable women still feel uncertain about money?**

“ **Mika Brzezinski:** Because engagement isn’t the same as empowerment. Women are smart and informed, but often not encouraged to speak openly about money, with advisors, with partners, even with themselves. Financial fluency creates that space. It allows women to ask better questions, challenge assumptions, and stay in the conversation.

**Q: What would you tell women who feel behind financially?**

**Mika Brzezinski:** Start the conversation now, out loud. With yourself. With a trusted advisor. With the people who matter to you. Financial fluency is a consistent practice, not a single decision. I’m still learning. But once you commit to understanding your numbers and your options, the fear starts to fade and clarity takes its place.

