

# The untapped potential of women's wealth

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Our research shows women are under-advised and under-engaged with investing compared to men. This is despite the fact that over the coming years, women are likely to control greater proportions of UK wealth.

Yet, advice is still largely characterised by a majority of male advisers\* dealing with mainly male clients or male-introduced couples.

Engaging greater numbers of women is a significant opportunity for advisers looking to build their business with the wealth 'growth' clients of the future. The challenge is to proactively engage with women and understand their different needs and pain points.

Our survey reveals:

- **Investing:** women are more conscious than men about losing money and pay more attention to negative outcomes
- **Advice:** women want advice but are less trusting of it than men and have greater initial concerns to overcome
- **Inheritance:** women want advice on passing on wealth but are less likely to have spoken to an adviser.

The 'wealth transfer' has been mostly defined as the passing of assets from the old to the young. Less attention has been paid to the critical role women play in managing family wealth, given their greater longevity. Before advisers learn to connect with the 'TikTok' generation, the urgent unmet need is to build greater engagement with women.

The wealth pendulum is swinging towards women. The pressing challenge for advisers is to reflect on the balance of their client books and do the same.

## Survey

We surveyed 1,000 men and women, aged 26 and over, with £150,000 or more in investable assets or who expect an inheritance of £300,000 or more. The survey was carried out by Censuswide and was in the field between 31.01.25 and 11.02.25.

\*Alina Khan from the Financial Times reported that just 18% of UK advisers are women – **Number of advisers grows by just 2%.**

# Women and investing



## Women are more worried about losing money

Our survey reveals significant differences in how men and women think about investing and risk-taking. These differences have important implications for advice.

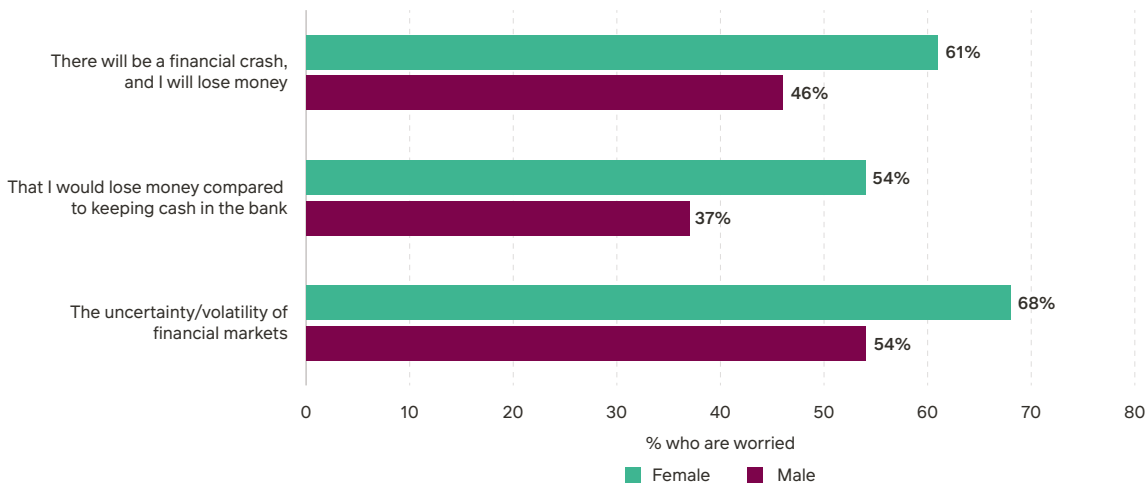
Women are more worried than men about losing money. 61% of women are worried there will be a financial crash compared to 46% of men. In a similar vein, 68% of women are concerned about the volatility of financial markets versus 54% of men.



- Women are more worried than men about losing money in investing.
- Women make ideal multi-asset, 'buy and hold' and smooth fund investors.
- Women want a good outcome, smooth journey, and their investments to have a positive impact.

### Women have greater concerns about investing

To what extent, if at all, do the following worry you about investing?

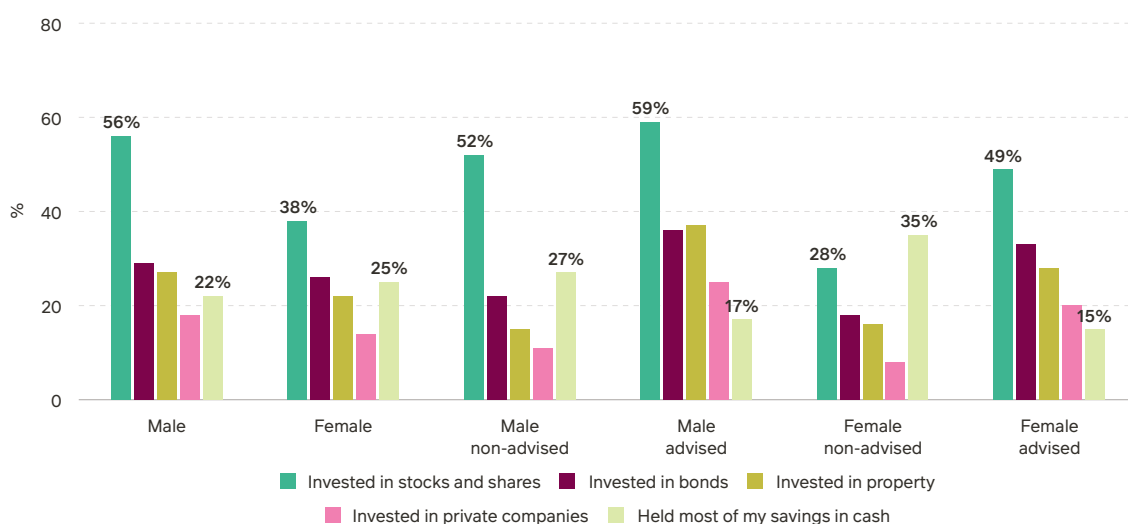


Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

These differences in how men and women weight negative outcomes carry over into investing behaviour. A higher proportion of men invest in the riskiest assets; this holds true whether they are advised or not. Women are more wary, especially non-advised women, the only group who are still investing more in cash than in equities.

### Men take more risk... but advice closes the gap

What, if anything, have you done with your finances in the last five years?



Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

The face-value interpretation is that a greater amount of men recognise that taking investment risk over time beats returns on money in the bank. When advisers articulate the benefits of investing and the need to take sensible risk to non-advised women, we see the benefit of advice come through in the higher female advised equity allocation of 49%. This is, invariably, a critical advice intervention, given many women will take career breaks to have children. In fact, given the significant impact of pay breaks on pension accumulation, the imperative is to go further and explore whether women can take higher equity risk than men to close the gender pension gap<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> **Government data** shows a private pension gender gap of 35%.

## Women pay more attention to what could go wrong

We should not fall into the trap of thinking differences in investment confidence and risk taking are purely explained by gaps in knowledge. While advice is a great leveller, advised women still invest materially less in risk assets than advised (and non-advised) men. Why is this?

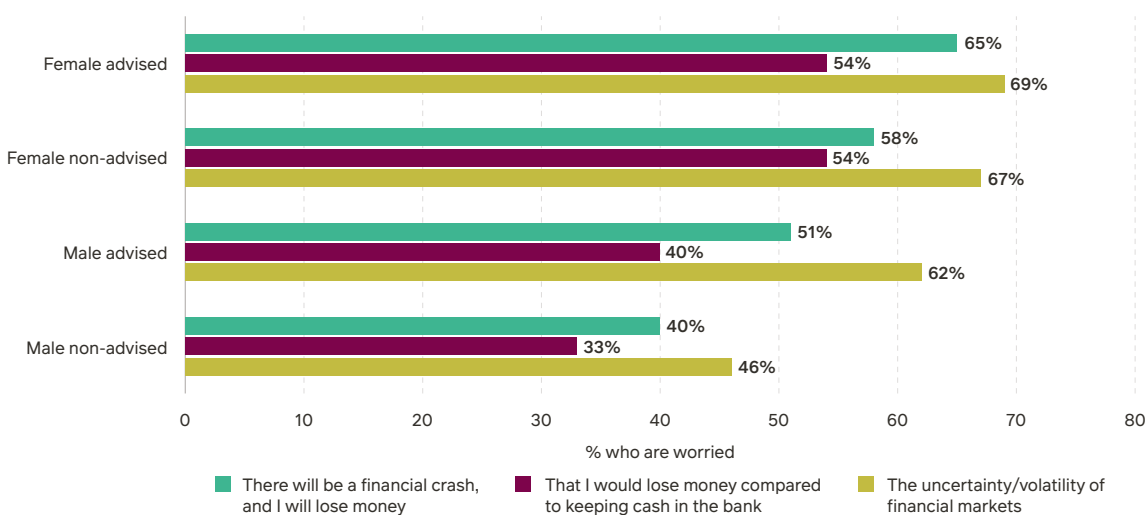
There may be other factors at work. Evidence from the behavioural and physiological fields indicate there are systematic differences in risk processing between men and women. Women typically display a higher degree of loss aversion than men and tend to estimate the incidence of negative outcomes more highly<sup>2</sup>.

With this in mind, let's look at the first chart again, this time filtered for advice. We know advice improves the willingness to take risk, but it does not alleviate worry. This makes sense – it is perfectly rational to worry about losing money the more of it one puts at risk, which is why we see greater levels of worry on the part of both male and female advised investors. The fact that women worry more than men holds true however, reinforcing the idea there are systematic differences.

This insight has key consequences for advice, not just in terms of the investment recommendation but particularly for the investment 'journey' a woman experiences in getting to a great outcome. If women show systematically higher levels of worry and aversion to losses than men – as this survey makes clear – then the smoothness of the 'journey' becomes much a greater consideration.

### Women have greater investing concerns, irrespective of advice

To what extent, if at all, do the following worry you when it comes to investing?



Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

<sup>2</sup> Dawson, C. Gender differences in optimism, loss aversion and attitudes towards risk. British Journal of Psychology. Using data from 13,575 people, losses were found to be more painful for women, with no differences in the psychological response to gains between the sexes.

## Are women less confident about investing or are men too confident?

The fact that women pay greater attention than men to what could go wrong in investing is another way of saying men are more confident, and, this is borne out in another of our survey findings. On a 12-month equity market view, men show greater optimism, with 48% taking a bullish outlook compared to 39% of women. A greater proportion of women (30%) are bearish versus men (23%).

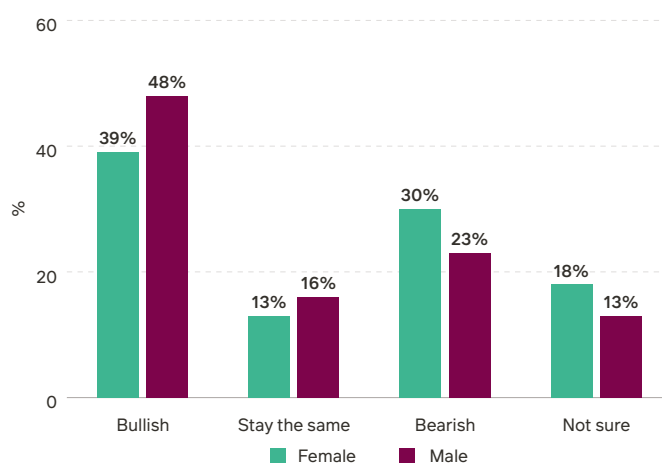
Unfortunately (for men), a growing body of evidence indicates that male confidence in investing often tips into overconfidence, which can be a headwind for building portfolio wealth. Retail brokerage studies consistently show that women are better investors than men<sup>3</sup>. Male overconfidence, and the fact men pay less attention to negative outcomes than women, drives overtrading (and higher transaction fees) and overly-concentrated bets relative to women, who display a greater willingness to buy and hold diversified, multi asset funds in their portfolios<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> **Barber and Odean's** study of 35,000 retail brokerage accounts in 'Boys will be boys: gender, overconfidence and common stock investment' (The Quarterly Journal of Economics) revealed that men trade 45% more than women as result of overconfidence and that this trading reduced men's net returns by 2.65% annually as opposed to only 1.72% for women.

<sup>4</sup> A similar study by **Warwick Business School** showed that women outperform men by 1.8% annually. The Warwick study found women were also more likely to invest in diverse portfolios and in funds with a consistent track record of high returns rather than opt for the volatility of a less likely big win in individual stocks. A number of other studies show similar results. Further studies by Revolut, Fidelity and HL have all showed that women outperform male investors.

### Men are more confident about investing

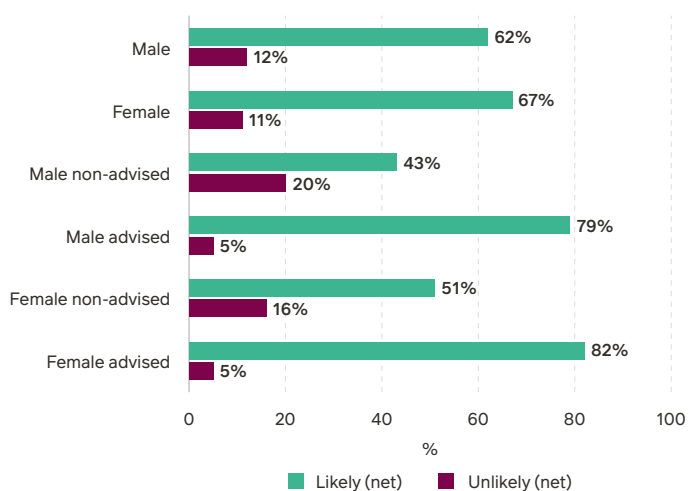
What movement, if any, do you expect in equity markets over the next 12 months?



Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

### There is high interest in smooth funds

How likely or unlikely would you be to invest in a smooth fund (explanation given)?



Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

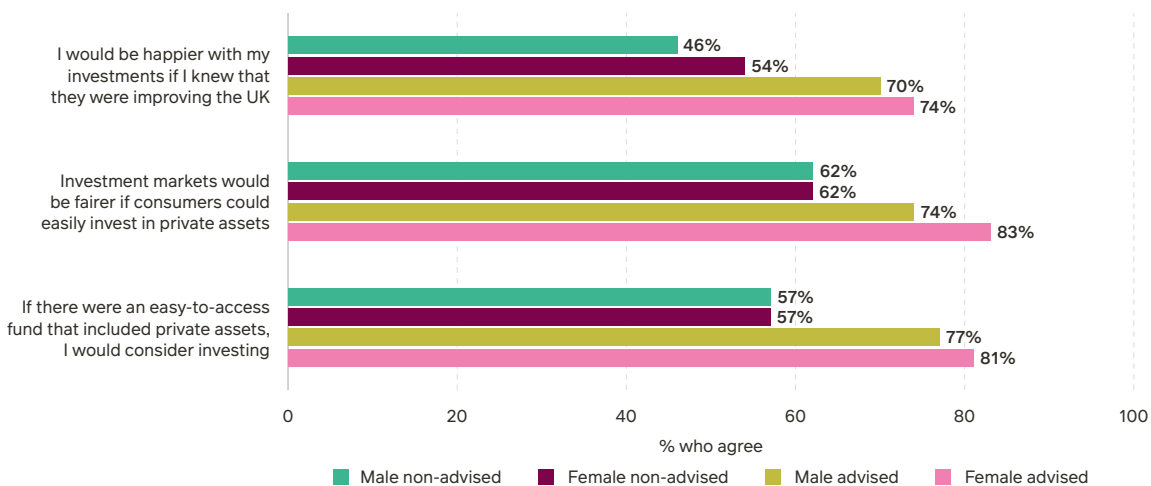
## The appeal of smooth funds

Given that women may be more worried about volatility, and may have a higher sensitivity to losses, they may make particularly suitable candidates for smooth funds. Indeed, our survey shows more women recognise the appeal of smooth funds and are slightly more likely than men to invest. The fact that both advised men (79%) and women (82%) are even more likely to invest shows the valuable role that advisers play in fully explaining the benefits of the smooth fund category. Whether that is, for example, in reducing the overall volatility of a blended portfolio in the approach to retirement, or as a decumulation option that mitigates the sequencing risk of selling units at market lows when taking an income. Interestingly, the appeal of smooth funds is strongest with our youngest cohort of investors, with the 26-34 group showing a 90% level of interest. This suggests that advisers also have considerable scope to engage with a new generation of investors.

When it comes to impact investing, we find that it resonates more highly with women than men, but it also resonates more strongly with advised investors. Similarly, we find that access to private assets, such as infrastructure, real estate and private companies, often the reserve of institutional investors, is something that the majority of consumers want, but especially advised investors. 81% of advised women and 77% of advised men would consider investing in an easy-to-access fund that includes private assets.

### Advice plays a key role in boosting interest in private markets

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

What is remarkable about these findings is the powerful role that advice plays in significantly boosting the strength of the results across the board. It is evident that advisers play a critical role in articulating the benefits of diversifying into unlisted assets and in helping clients to understand how those investments can make a difference to UK economy and society.

## Adviser takeaways



- Probe for and acknowledge women's potentially greater concerns around loss and volatility in discussions about appetite for risk, capacity for loss and market composure.
- Address women's concerns by discussing the importance of the investing journey as well as the outcome in providing ongoing peace of mind.
- Discuss how smooth, multi-asset funds can offer an elegant solution that provides an attractive outcome via moderate to high levels of equity risk, achieved in a way that alleviates the impact of volatility and drawdowns.
- Bear in mind that men who show similar concern over volatility can also benefit from smooth funds in the approach to retirement as well as in mitigating sequencing risk when taking a retirement income.

# Women and advice



## Women tend to have greater barriers to advice

Our survey reveals unequivocally that women have greater initial concerns about advice. Indeed, we find some surprisingly large differences.

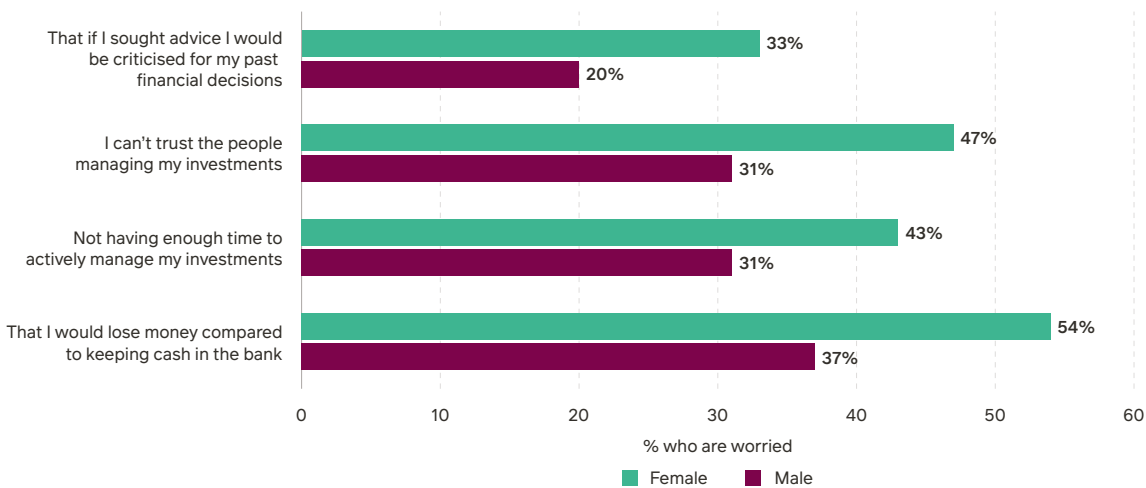
- **47%** of women worry about trusting those managing their investments versus 31% of men
- **1 in 3** women fear being judged for past mistakes versus only 1 in 5 men
- **Over half** of women are concerned with losing money versus 37% of men
- **43%** of women do not have time to actively manage investments versus 31% of men.



- Women have greater concerns about financial planning than men.
- Yet, women want advice. Advisers have a significant opportunity to engage women as they create and control more wealth by proactively facing into women's concerns.
- Women want to be informed about the value of advice so they can invest with confidence.

### Women have greater concerns about financial planning

To what extent, if at all, do the following worry you about financial planning?



Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

Trust is the foundation stone of any enduring adviser-client relationship. The fact that 47% of women do not trust investing versus only 31% of men, and women feel they might be judged about past financial mistakes (1 in 3 women versus only 1 in 5 men) are surprisingly strong results.

<sup>5</sup> An eye tracking study of financial advice meetings found that both male and female advisers focused 60% of their time on men investors when meeting heterosexual couples. [Merrill, 2024](#), 'Seeing the Unseen: the role gender plays in wealth management'.

We have to consider these findings in context: the wealth industry is still tilted towards men and has a skew towards transactional approaches that can resonate more with men. This can be compounded by outdated gender stereotypes, some of which operate at an unconscious level. For example, unconscious bias may mean advisers unintentionally focus more attention on the man in meetings with mixed sex couples<sup>5</sup>.

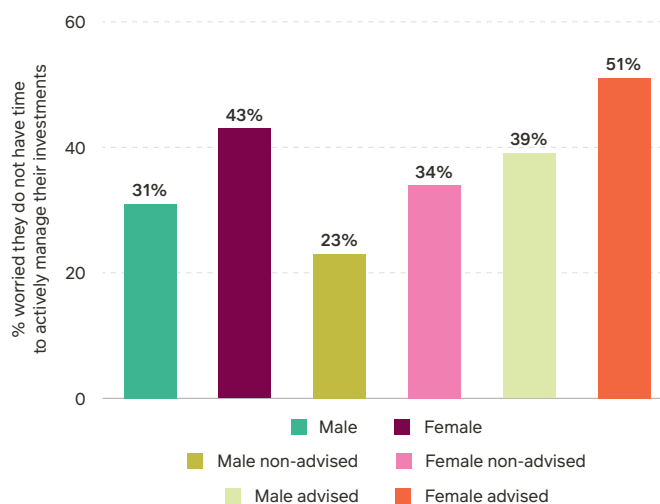
It could also mean assuming the man is the decision-maker or that women are less knowledgeable about investing. Or that a couple has joint finances; our survey shows only 30% of investor couples have completely joint finances, 47% have some joint finances while 20% of couples have separate finances. Similarly, our finding that women have greater fears about being criticised for past financial decisions can be understood through this lens of unconscious gender bias. And, it underlines how carefully advice needs to be delivered by male advisers to female investors.

54% of women versus only 37% of men are concerned they would lose money compared to keeping cash in the bank. As our first article points out, women show higher aversion to losses and pay more attention to negative outcomes than men, who tend to be more opportunistic. Yet, women's higher aversion to losses need not be a barrier to investing. Rather, it is a key insight for advisers to engage with women, particularly in conversations about capacity for loss and market composure.

Women are more concerned than men about not having enough time to actively manage their investments. Given the many demands on women who are juggling careers, career breaks, parenting, family and household responsibilities, this is hardly a surprising result.

Again, it is not necessarily a barrier to advice however, since the corollary to this result is that, once convinced of its value, women are more likely to outsource the job of investing to an adviser. This is consistent with the finding that 51% of advised women do not have time to actively manage their investments. Men are more likely to be non-advised 'hobby' investors as well as 'very engaged' clients. And, when we consider this result in the light of research that indicates women are more likely than men to recommend their adviser<sup>6</sup>, it suggests that advisers who put in the groundwork to win female clients can reap the rewards of long-lasting advice relationships.

### Women have less time to actively manage their investments



Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

<sup>6</sup> Merrill, 2024, 'Seeing the Unseen: the role gender plays in wealth management'.

## Does an adviser's gender matter?

Is an adviser's gender a barrier to advice for women? The bare data suggest it is not a significant issue, but the data for advised women suggests it probably matters.

82% of men and 73% of women feel that an adviser's gender makes no difference. Interestingly, non-advised women show a greater degree of gender ambivalence, while advised women have the least agreement. This suggests adviser gender matters a little more in practice than it does in theory, with poor outcomes likely driven by unconscious bias in interactions with female investors.

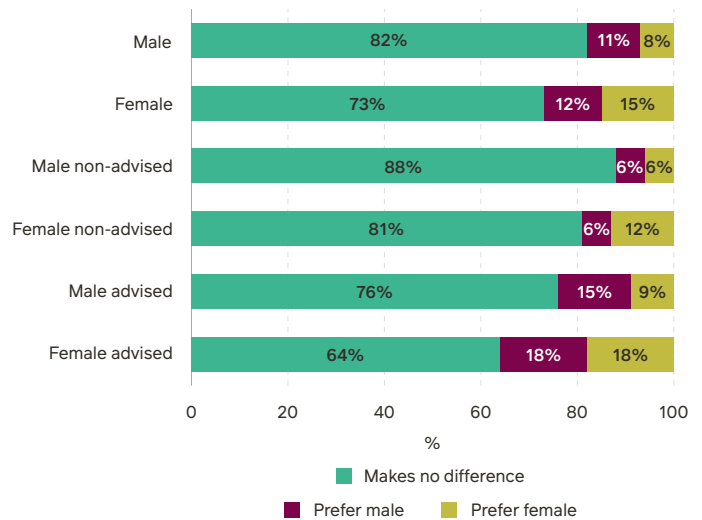
18% of advised women would feel more confident if their adviser was a woman, but a further 18% would prefer a man. So, the advice industry certainly needs more women, but it would appear there is still plenty of scope for male advisers to build trusted relationships with women clients. Age is an interesting factor too: older women, for example in the 65-74 bracket, generally showed greater agreement (85%) that gender does not matter, while younger women in the 35-44 cohort showed the highest preference (27%) for female advisers.

## The drivers of engagement

It turns out that women are a bit more demanding than men when it comes to seeing the value of advice. However, these statistical differences are not as large as those concerned with women's greater worries about financial planning.

Nevertheless, the fact women have very high levels of agreement on "seeing proof their fees provide for value" (92%) and "feeling they [advisers] would listen intently to, and understand, my needs" (92%) both reinforce the need for advisers to build trust and establish the emotional context behind women's financial objectives and their personal investing journeys. This can help to inform the way in which goals can be met, while emphasising the peace of mind and emotional benefits that advice can deliver in addition to an attractive value-for-money outcome.

### Does an adviser's gender matter?



Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

Some of our age related results point to a generational shift in preferences, similar to what we saw in the stronger preferences of young women on adviser gender. While 76% of women feel that "knowing they [advisers] will save me time", agreement was lower amongst older women and higher amongst younger women (92% of 26-34 year olds), underlining the impact of greater career and family demands on the time of young women. We see a similar pattern on "knowing they would instruct me on exactly what to do with my wealth", with 98% agreement among young females versus 85% among young males (26-34 year olds).

## Women really want to see the value of advice

How important are the following in making you consider, or increase your engagement with, a financial adviser?



Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

## Adviser takeaways



- Women want advice but have greater concerns around trust and being judged.
- It's important for male advisers to be aware of a higher risk of unconscious gender bias in advice conversations with women and mixed sex couples.
- Be careful not to assume that: the man in a couple is the decision maker; a couple has joint finances; women have less investing knowledge; women are more risk averse.
- Face into women's greater concerns around loss by giving greater weight to the 'EQ' of investing alongside the traditional 'IQ' tools. This might mean emphasising the peace of mind investing provides when showing projected returns with cashflow modelling tools.

# Women and passing on wealth



## Women hold the keys to passing on intergenerational wealth

Women in the UK typically live four years longer than men, often outliving their partner. Allied to women's improved ability to generate wealth via career progress, house ownership and financial planning, the fact that they are also likely to outlive their spouse puts women in the decision-making seat for passing on considerable wealth to the younger generation like never before<sup>7</sup>.

Our survey reveals this is something that women are aware of, since 31% of our surveyed women expect to inherit the majority of wealth from their partner compared to only 17% of men.

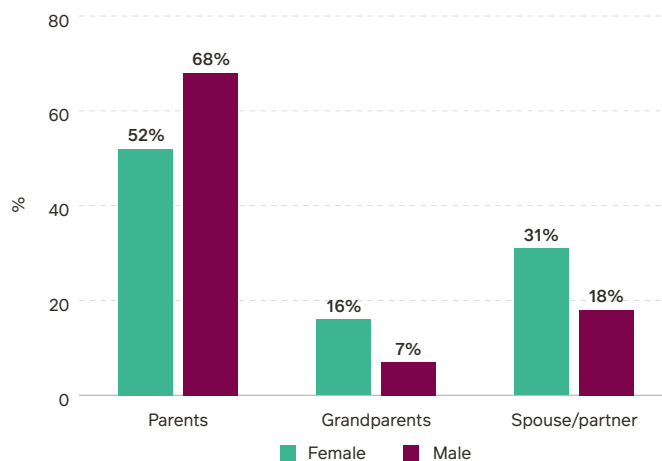
In reality, these numbers significantly understate the pre-eminent role women will actually play in passing on wealth. As time passes, we will see a cascade effect where wealth passes from grandparents (and latterly grandmothers) to parents (and latterly mothers) to couples and ultimately to widows. This gives women an increasingly critical role in passing on evermore significant wealth from one generation to the next.



- Women have a greater need for advice around inheritance, yet are underserved by advisers. This suggests there is a significant unmet advice need.
- Women will play a critical role in passing on wealth to younger generations.
- Women want tailored, timely advice that gives them the confidence to leave a financial legacy.

### Women expect to inherit materially more from their partners

Where do you expect the majority of your inheritance value to come from?



Source: Censuswide, 241 investors who expect to receive an inheritance of £300,000 or more.

<sup>7</sup> Gov.uk, Office for National Statistics, **National Life Tables** – life expectancy at birth in the UK: 2020 to 2022 was 78.6 for males and 82.6 years for females.

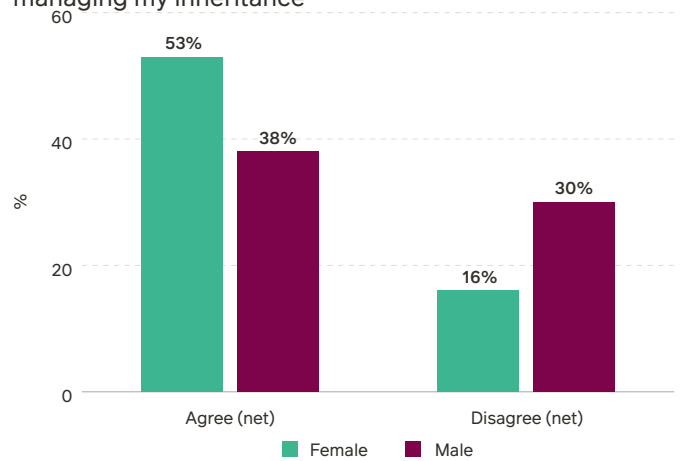
## Women passing on wealth is an expanding unmet advice need

Women feel the need for advice strongly. 53% of women say they will need financial advice to feel confident about managing their inheritance, compared with only 38% of men. Yet, men are more likely than women to have actually spoken to an adviser about their inheritance. 69% of men have discussed investing their inheritance with an adviser compared to 43% of women. Most significantly, a 52% majority of women haven't yet spoken to an adviser but plan to do so.

Taking these two findings together – that women have a greater need for advice yet are much less likely to have spoken to an adviser – suggests there is a significant unmet advice need for women relative to men. This unmet need is compounded by the fact that, as discussed in our first theme, women have greater initial barriers to seeking advice. With women creating and controlling ever greater proportions of UK wealth, this is an unmet need for the advice industry to face into with some urgency.

### More women want inheritance advice

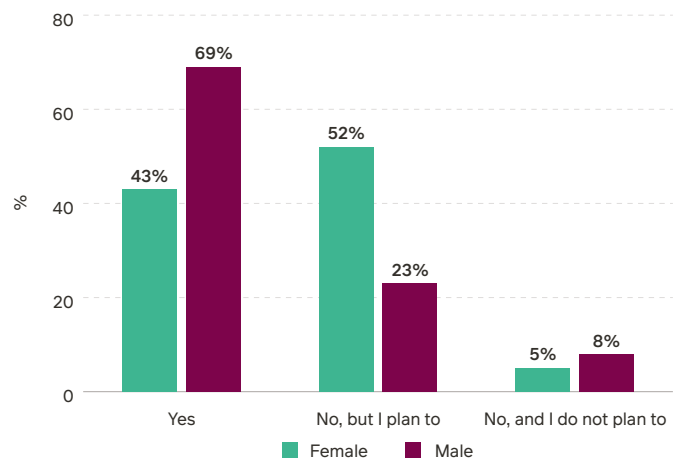
I would need financial advice to feel confident in managing my inheritance



Source: Censuswide, 241 investors who expect to receive an inheritance of £300,000 or more.

### But fewer women have spoken to an adviser

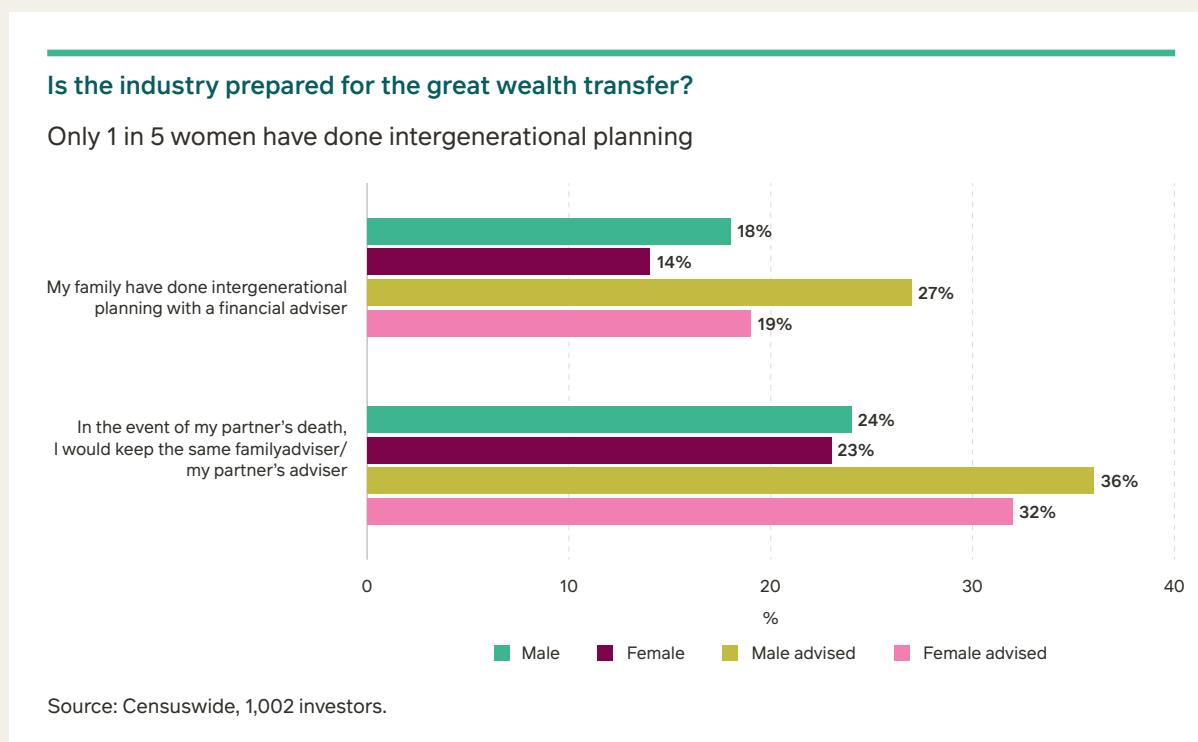
Have you spoken to an adviser about investing your inheritance?



Source: Censuswide, 241 investors who expect to receive an inheritance of £300,000 or more.

## Has the industry got to grips with women and their growing role in wealth?

The wealth industry seems underprepared for this transition, given that only 18% of our surveyed men and 14% of women report having carried out intergenerational planning with an adviser. The numbers are only modestly improved when we look at those who currently have an adviser. Only, 27% of advised men and 19% of advised women have done intergenerational planning. More worrying still is the fact that only 36% of advised men and 32% of advised women would retain their family/partner's adviser in the event of their partner's death.



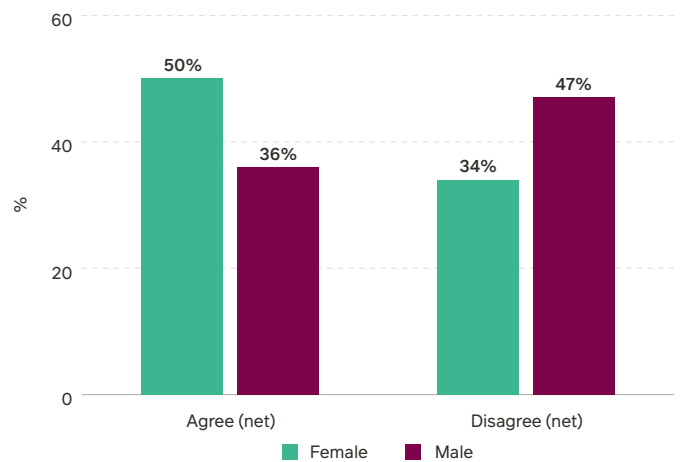
## Don't leave it too late: engage women early

Women show a greater degree of discomfort around inheritance planning than men. Half of women believe that resolving issues with investments on their partner's death was/would be a challenge, versus only 36% of men. Similarly, 49% of unadvised women are uncomfortable talking with family about their inheritance compared to only 38% of non-advised men. Interestingly, advice may play a role in reducing inheritance-related anxiety, as the proportion who are uncomfortable drops to 35% for advised women and 32% for advised men.

Bereavement can be a time of intense grief and emotion, as well as a trigger for inheritance advice conversations. Since only 23% of women would retain their partner's adviser in the event of their spouse's death, the likelihood is that for many advisers it may be too late to engage with women on a transactional advice basis.

### Women are more worried about resolving financial issues when their partner passes

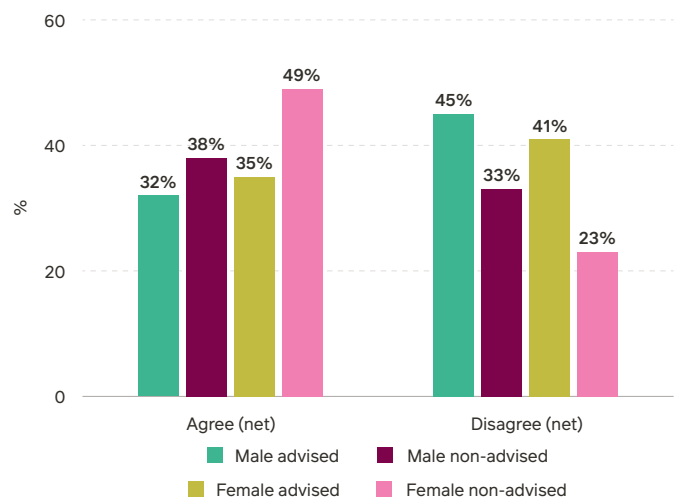
If/when my partner/former partner dies/died, resolving issues with investments would be/was a challenge



Source: Censuswide, 881 investors who are not single.

### Non-advised women are less comfortable discussing inheritance

I am uncomfortable talking with my family about the inheritance I will receive



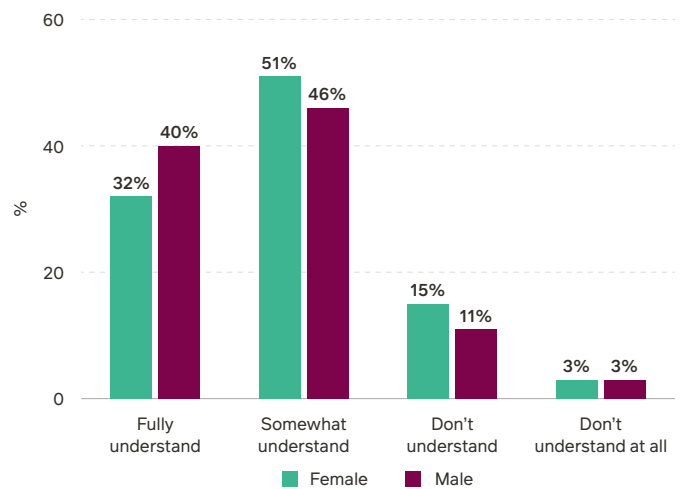
Source: Censuswide, 241 investors who expect to receive an inheritance of £300,000 or more.

## The barriers to estate planning

Inheritance is recognised as a relatively complex financial planning topic that is second only to retirement as a reason for engaging an adviser. Government proposals to include pensions in the inheritance tax regime from 2027-8 will mean many more investors become liable to inheritance tax, acting as a trigger for many to seek advice. 40% of men report that they fully understand the tax implications of bequeathing compared to 32% of women. That said, it means the majority of our respondents both male and female, have a less than full understanding.

### Most investors only partly understand inheritance tax implications

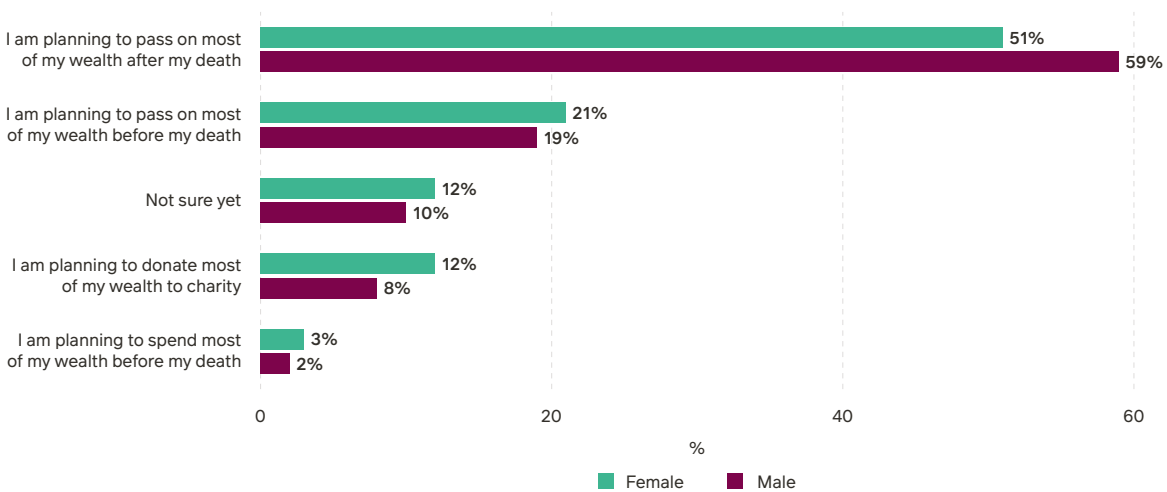
To what extent do you understand the tax implications surrounding bequeathing?



Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

### Tax benefits of passing on wealth not fully realised

What, if anything, are you planning/most likely planning to do in terms of passing on your wealth?

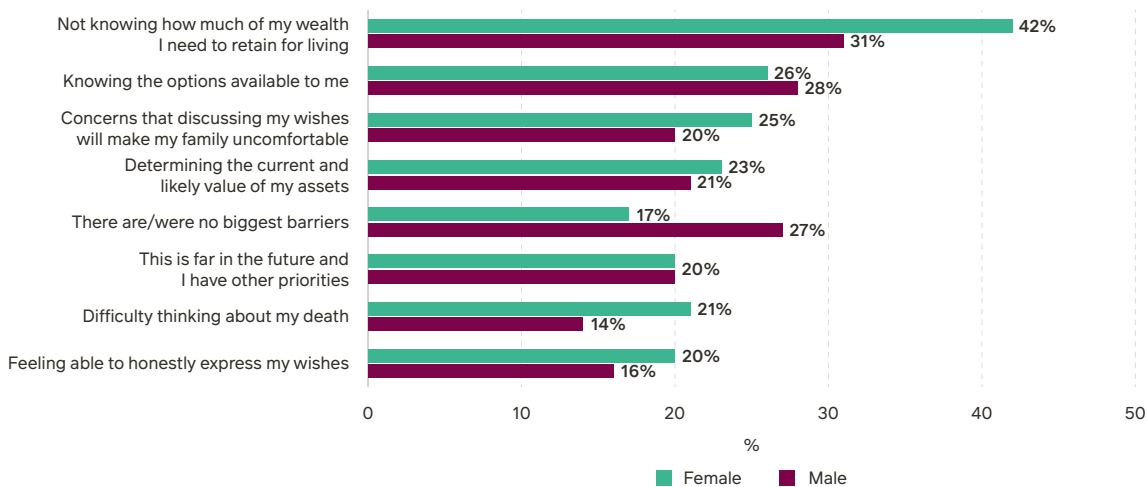


Source: Censuswide, 1,002 investors.

Despite the considerable tax efficiency of passing on wealth to beneficiaries prior to death, 59% of men and 51% of women in our survey said that they plan to pass on the majority of their wealth after their death. Conversely, only 21% of women and 19% of men plan to pass on most of their wealth before they die. At first glance, these findings – showing relatively limited plans to pass on wealth before death – seem at odds with the solid understanding of the inheritance tax implications of bequeathing. There are some other key reasons that inhibit people from passing on wealth.

### Women are more concerned about care costs

What do you see as the greatest barriers to wealth planning?



Source: Censuswide, 975 investors who expect to pass on wealth.

The top barrier to wealth planning for both men and women is ‘not knowing how much wealth they would need to retain for living or care costs’. In fact, this is a significantly greater concern for women, who are invariably the principal carers in families. 42% of women cite this as the main barrier to passing on wealth, compared to 31% of men. Given their greater longevity, women are rightfully more concerned about having the money they need to look after potentially sick spouses as well as pay for their own care costs.

The unpredictability of life and health means many people leave estate planning too late, only genuinely considering it when their health deteriorates. Unfortunately, the value of what can be achieved in a shorter timeframe is dramatically diminished.

Advice can play a key role in giving retiring women greater confidence that they will have the essential cash they need to live on, while ensuring their portfolios are still exposed to the growth required to cover care costs in later life. With pensions moving into the inheritance tax regime, advisers can also encourage the use of tax-free cash for efficient estate planning for the right clients. Similarly, advisers will also encourage many retirees to enjoy their pension savings and take a more active approach to running down their pension funds given their reduced suitability for passing on wealth.

## Adviser takeaways



- There is a significant growth opportunity to engage more women as they create and control more and more wealth.
- Do you have a segmented view of your client base by gender, age and household with strategies for each segment and are you measuring progress against targets?
- Have you reviewed your marketing, new business and retention strategies from a female perspective and considered the use of targeted content and events for each segment (eg, affluent divorcees; executives approaching retirement; female partners of male clients)?
- Engage women early to help them prepare for key life events and consider the use of essential, discretionary income and growth strategies to give them the confidence to leave a financial legacy for their families.



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