



A GROUNDBREAKING NEW STUDY BY

PARADIGM[®]
for PARITY

The Invisible Weight

The Impact of Personal Financial Stress
on Black Women in the Workplace



Executive Summary

Wellness, flexibility, and financial stress are among the top trends impacting how employees can show up for work. Companies need to listen to their employees' unique challenges around these issues to maintain retention and productivity. Benefits and policies around these issues are not one size fits all. The unique or exacerbated challenges facing Black women are often overlooked.

Black women are often heads of households responsible for everything from debt management (their own and family members') to caregiving to finances to emotional support. By better understanding the perspectives and realities of the pressures Black women feel, society and employers can help disrupt the systemic burdens preventing Black women from thriving and advancing in the workplace.

Paradigm for Parity surveyed Black women ages 18-65 across the United States. The survey of 12 quantitative questions and one qualitative question was sent to approximately 10,000 Black women in the continental United States and territories and was completed by 4,600 women. Results were analyzed by Equilar, a leading provider of executive intelligence solutions. Nearly 80% of respondents (approximately 3,800 women) opted to answer the open-ended qualitative question, sharing their personal experiences around financial stress. Each qualitative response was read and reviewed to further inform the extent and type of support most desired by Black women to alleviate the financial stress that impacts their ability to focus, maintain productivity, and achieve financial stability. This research was made possible by the Black Women Impact grant through the Goldman Sachs One Million Black Women initiative.

Paradigm for Parity is leveraging insights from the survey to provide actionable solutions for companies to best support Black women so that this important talent pool can be retained, advance, and thrive at all levels of the organization. There is no comprehensive research that focuses solely on Black women's experiences regarding financial burdens.





Key Takeaways

Analysis of the quantitative data, combined with responses to the question, “To what extent does financial stress impact your ability to focus at work?” revealed several key findings:

Financial stressors interfere with the ability to focus at work and can hinder the career advancement of Black women. The three biggest stressors reported were cost of living/ household bills (62.5%), living paycheck to paycheck (47.9%) and credit card debt (46.8%).

Support is needed to mitigate negative impacts on the mental and physical health of Black women. 62.8% of respondents said they would like to receive support in maximizing health insurance benefits, while 51.8% said they would like employer support for mental health counseling.

Lack of financial wellness impedes Black women's ability to retire securely or leave a legacy, with 51.2% of respondents seeking employer support on wealth building.

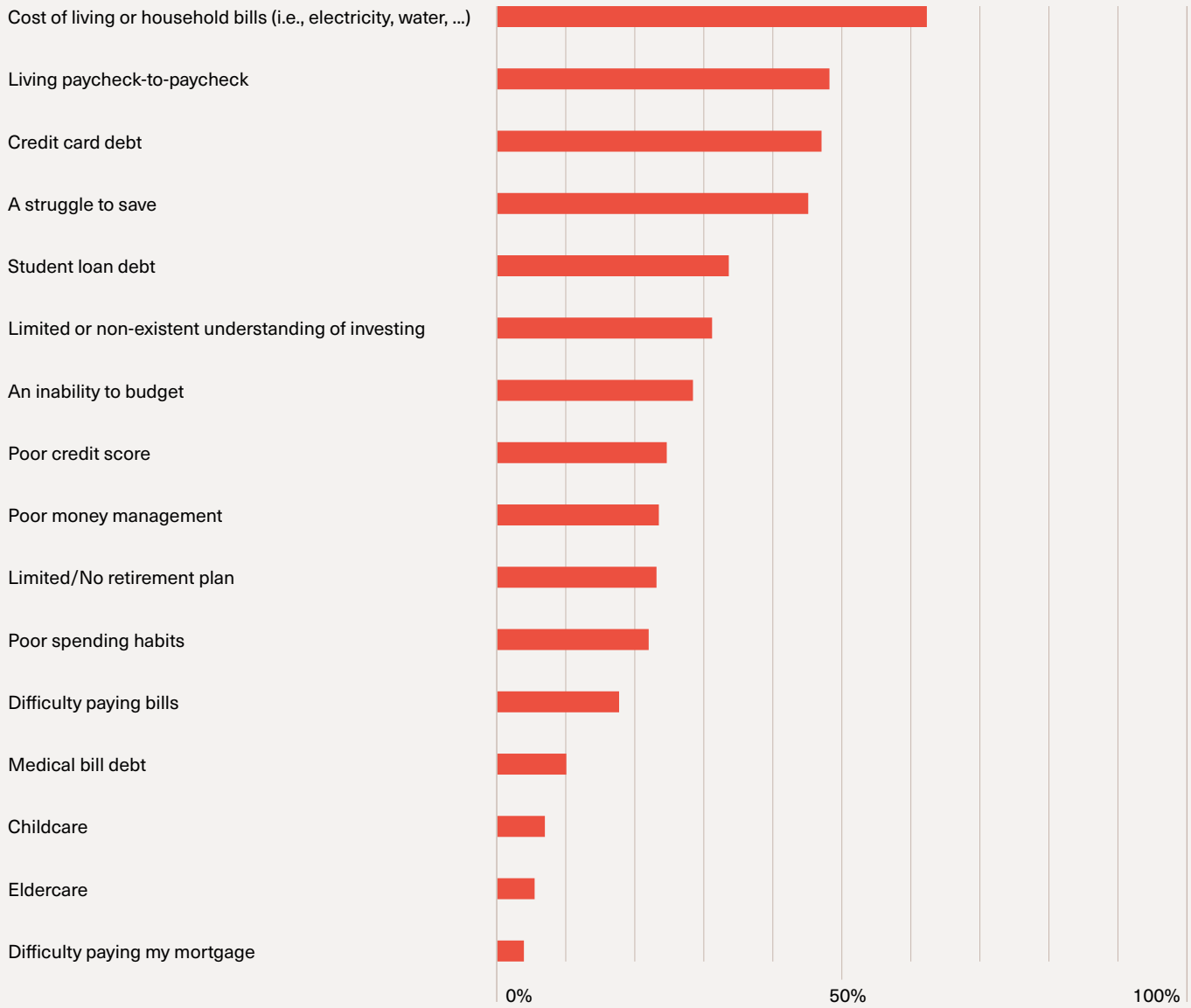
Employers' widespread lack of awareness of Black women's financial stress is significant. The vast majority of respondents, 83.2%, said their employer was not aware of their own financial circumstances.

Employer support is needed and appreciated by Black women, but it is not meeting them where they are. 52.1% of survey respondents said their employer does not offer information to help with personal finances. The three biggest forms of support employers could provide are financial counseling (27.7%), student loan repayment (19.8%), and workplace flexibility (16.5%).

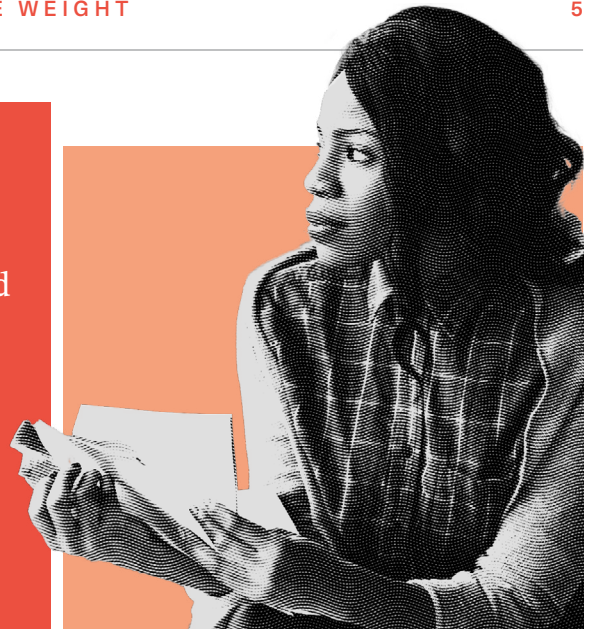
While the survey and findings are from the perspective of Black women, the findings and recommendations broadly resonate with all communities of women. Regarding the use of the term “women” in this document, 99.1% of respondents identified as women. Sample sizes were small for other gender categories and should not be used to misinterpret or draw further conclusions about gender.

What are your biggest financial stressors?

GRAPH 1



“For me, it’s like there’s like this constant background noise in my head, distracting me from what I need to do. It’s like trying to concentrate on work while someone is shouting in your ear about all of the things you’re worried about. It can be exhausting and overwhelming.”



Impact of Financial Stress on Ability to Focus or Perform at Work:

- Women responded that their lack of focus due to financial stress ranges from “Not at All” to “To the Ultimate Extent.”
- Inability to focus manifests as pausing to check personal finances, inhibiting decision-making, and making errors while completing tasks.
- The financial stress can be debilitating, lowering productivity and hampering creativity.

The Impact of Financial Stress on Black Women’s Physical and Mental Wellbeing

Women report a variety of physical and mental health challenges stemming from their financial stress. These range from migraines to anxiety, depression, elevated blood pressure, and hospitalizations.

- Women report being so overwhelmed by their financial stress that they have taken medical leave.
- Women shared feeling tired, particularly after payday, and experiencing regular sleep disruption.

Many women who did report feeling secure in their financial health shared their ability to “compartmentalize,” using stress as a motivator to work harder and their job as a distraction from their financial worries. These women relayed that they push through the stress.

They reported leaving personal stress at the door while others shared that they cry on their breaks.



“The financial stress is impacting my ability to focus at work and causing hair loss, depression and now Chronic Idiopathic Urticaria for the last 5 months. Financial stress is real, and no one wants to admit it or help people out in reference to employers.”

Financial Stress Hinders Respondents’ Career Advancement

The women surveyed are highly motivated and hardworking, with aspirations for advancement. However, many shared that their financial stress is an impediment to promotions and advancement opportunities. Financial stress impacts their self-esteem and riddles their thoughts with self-doubt.

- What should concern employers most is a common sentiment that women share about their financial stress: it is a significant motivator for looking for new employment.
- Respondents are frustrated by the lack of upward mobility.
- Women feel stuck in their roles, undervalued, underdeveloped, and unequally compensated.
- Some women expressed that the embarrassment of their personal financial circumstances prevents them from feeling confident in taking on new or expanded roles.

“I’ve decided to leave a job that I genuinely love to increase my income and pursue certifications that my employer wouldn’t pay for.”

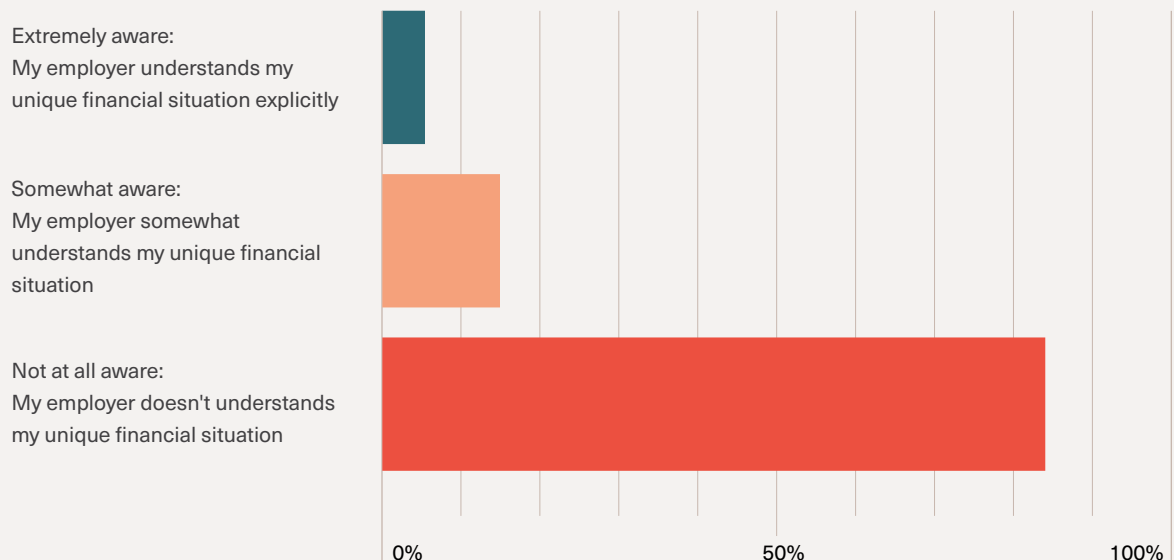
Employer Support for Managing Financial Stress of Black Women

Some women reported appreciation for the benefits and resources provided by employers. However, within those benefits, they felt that more could be done to support an enhanced explanation of the resources, providing time to take advantage of the resources, or offering deeper education around additional opportunities for investments, medical expense planning, and more. Some women particularly highlighted the desire for support around navigating options for student loan forgiveness.

- Many shared a lack of trust in their employer not to judge them or hold their personal financial situation against them. This distrust impacts their willingness to reach out.
- There were also managers in the group of respondents who shared that the financial stress of individuals on their teams causes them to take on their stress, especially when it comes to approving overtime opportunities.
- Others who work in the financial services industry report feeling triggered when coping with their own financial challenges while consulting with clients.

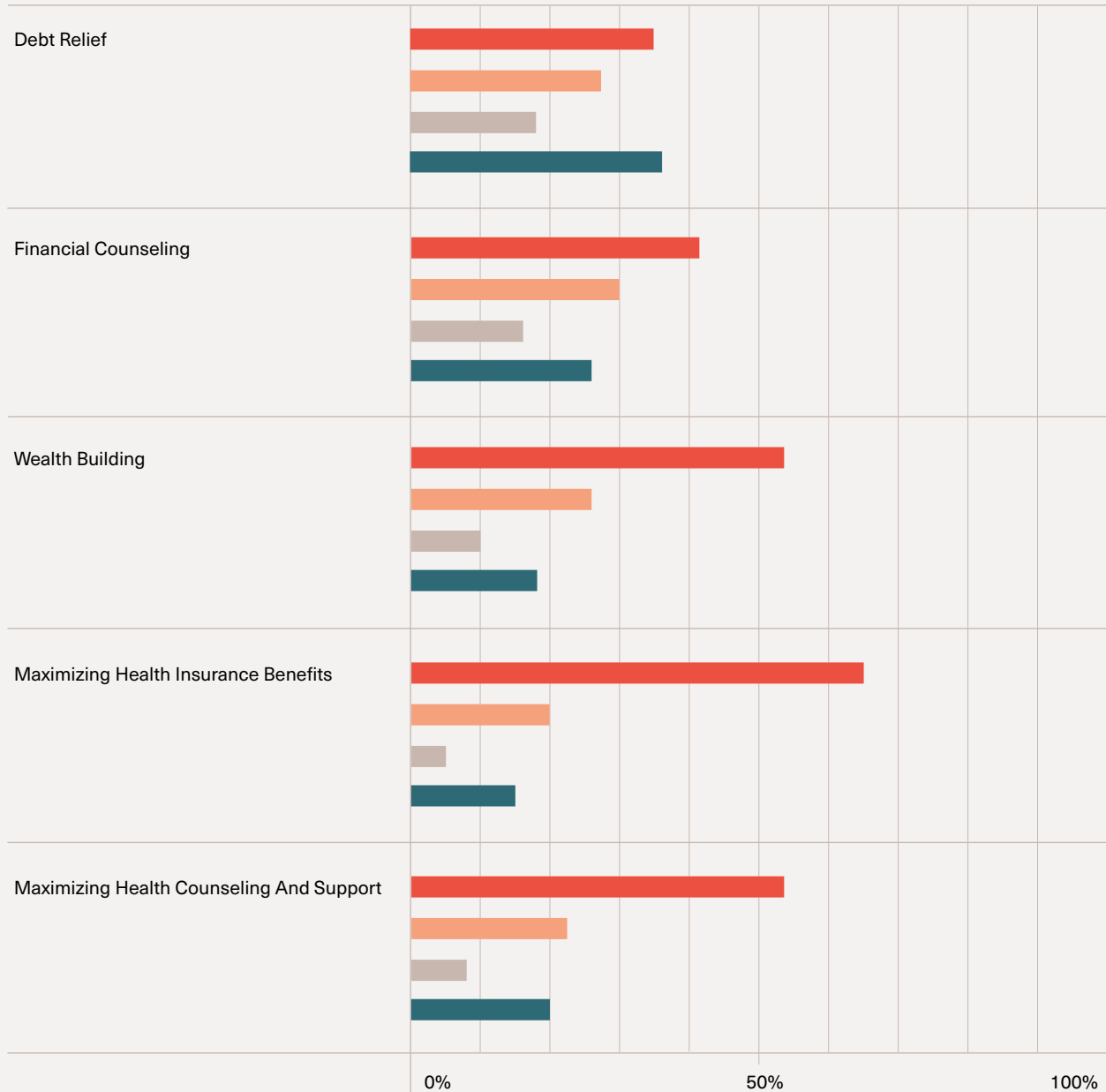
To what extent is your employer aware of your financial circumstances?

GRAPH 2



To what extent would you like to receive support from your employer in these areas?

GRAPH 3



■ I would like to receive support on this from my employer
 ■ I would not want to receive support on this from my employer on this
■ I would like to receive some support from my employer on this
 ■ Indifferent or N/A

Meeting Black women where they are to alleviate financial stress

Respondents candidly shared feelings and detailed examples of small and more intentional ways employers can support them.

- Women find some counseling and courses difficult to understand or geared toward older employees.
- Employees would appreciate time out of their schedules to be able to take advantage of the resources available.
- The wealth of information is overwhelming and too time-consuming to comb through with all their demands at home and work.
- Workplace flexibility and/or transportation subsidies were flagged as helpful.

“I wish employers cared about the financial struggles of their employees and was able to support them because I believe it would help productivity and create loyal employees.”

How Financial Stress Impacts the Wealth and Retirement of Black Women

Respondents transparently shared circumstances that prevent them from saving and getting ahead.

- As the data showed, living paycheck to paycheck is a large contributing factor. Also flagged were inflation and pay inequity.
- They described fears of sudden or unplanned expenses and job loss.

Many are taking on the financial mistakes of family members, or caring for family members, while feeling stuck in their current roles.

These circumstances contribute to additional stress, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed, with a significant number of women indicating the need to take on second jobs to make ends meet.

Many women also feel concerned about not having enough money for retirement, not building wealth, or leaving a financial legacy.

“I check my stock portfolio several times a day to get the status update. I fear running out of money in retirement.”



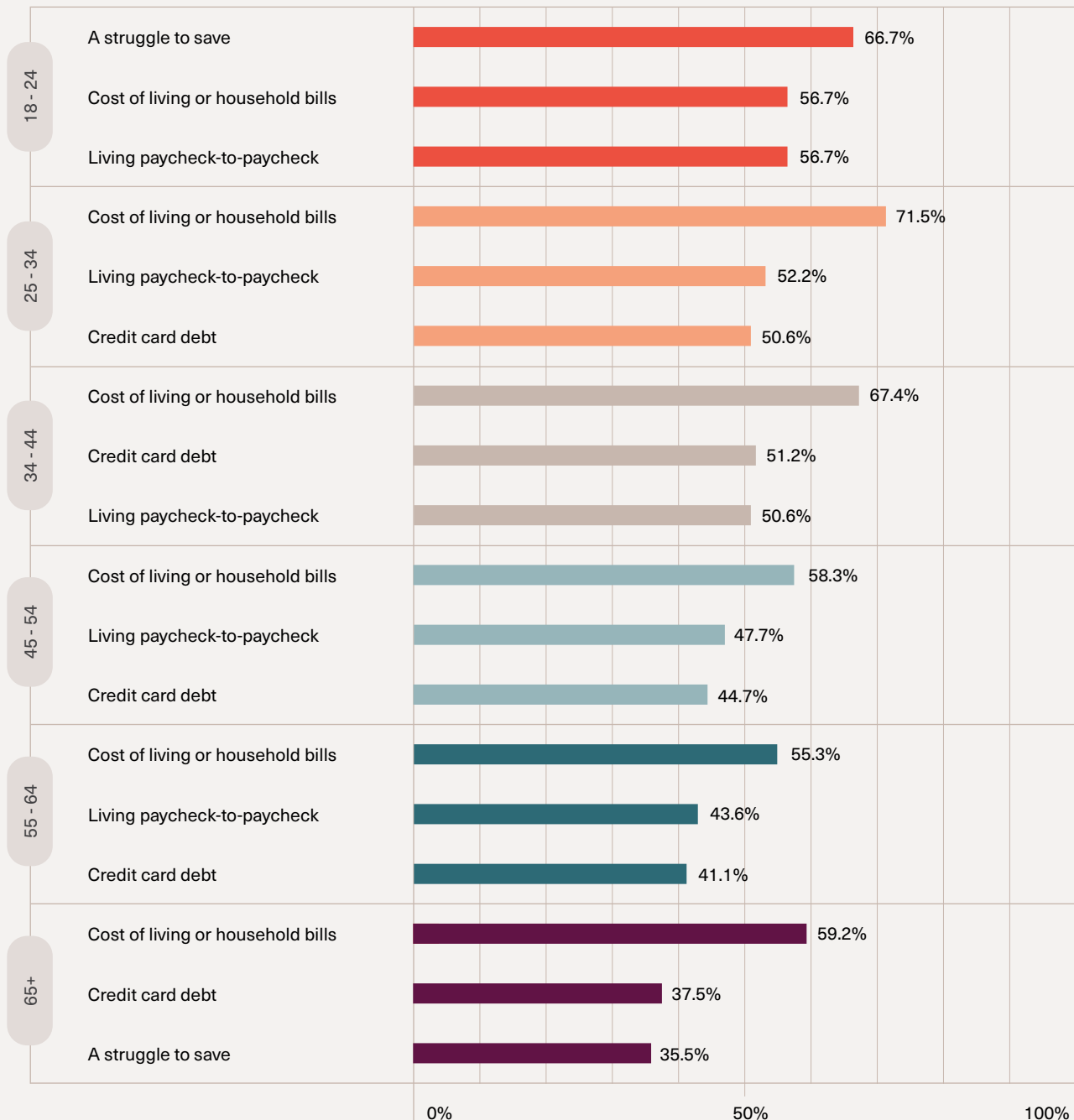
What's Age Got To Do With It?

Nearly two-thirds of respondents were aged 35-54, while less than 4% were 18-24 or 65 and older. Between recently reported stress and anxiety around finances and the findings of this survey, there is much to attend to if we want to reverse the trend of Gen Z and Gen X not having a better life than their parents. These demographics comprise an important talent pool of Black women.

- The biggest financial stressor for those 18-24 was struggling to save money (66.7%), whereas it was cost of living or household bills for all other age groups. However, cost of living or household bills becomes less prevalent as respondents increase in age.
- Younger respondents were less likely to say their employer was not aware of their financial circumstances compared to older respondents.
- Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to want at least some support from employers on debt relief and financial counseling. Older respondents were more likely to feel indifferent about the various forms of support.
- Student loan repayment was one of the top two answers for ages 25-54 for what would be the most helpful offerings to help manage personal finances. Ages 55 and older start to care more about estate planning than student loan repayments.

Which of the following are your biggest financial stressors? (Top three answers)

GRAPH 4





Recommendations

Employers can implement several strategies and access to EAPs (Employee Assistance Programs) that offer counseling and support for personal and work-related issues, including financial stress to help alleviate the financial stress of Black women in the workplace. Here are some recommendations:

On Financial Education and Counseling

Women expressed interest in diving deeper into financial literacy information and raised concerns about group counseling settings.

01

Meet employees where they are. Consider language and learning styles when offering financial literacy programs. Cover many topics such as budgeting, saving, debt management, and investing, not just 401k options. New employees in particular often need support in understanding the implications of responses from tax withholdings.

02

Deepen Education Opportunities: Offer educational sessions on investment options, medical expense planning, and other financial topics. This empowers employees with the knowledge to make informed decisions and manage their finances better.

03

Provide Confidential Support Systems: Create a confidential and non-judgmental environment for employees seeking financial advice. Ensuring privacy can help reduce feelings of embarrassment and increase trust in utilizing employer-provided financial support.

Provide employees with access to financial planning services to help them manage their finances and plan for the future.

Offer retirement savings plans with employer-matching contributions or pension plans for long-term financial security.

On Competitive Compensation and Benefits

01

Enhanced Explanation of Benefits: Provide comprehensive explanations of available benefits and resources. Clear communication helps employees understand and maximize the support offered.

02

Student Loan Forgiveness Guidance: Assist employees in navigating options for student loan forgiveness. Providing expert guidance or resources can significantly alleviate financial burdens related to education debt.

03

Pay Equity: Pay equity was consistently raised by women. Consider wage audits and adjustments when disparities are revealed. Ensure that employees are compensated fairly to reflect their skills, experience, and the cost of living.

Many women expressed the added burdens associated with returning to the office. Offer flexible working hours to help employees manage personal and family responsibilities. Where possible, offer flexibility on remote work or provide transportation reimbursement benefits considering inflationary increases.

Consider additional incentives and benefits and make it possible for women to take advantage of these offerings. Women expressed a strong interest in upskilling. Are there degrees or certifications you can reimburse? Can schedules be adjusted so women can complete courses without additional time burdens? Many women cite multiple jobs, or home and caregiving commitments, leaving no additional time for further education.

04

Time to Utilize Resources: Allow employees dedicated time to take advantage of financial resources and benefits without impacting their work hours. Consider additional incentives and benefits and make it possible for women to take advantage of these offerings. This can reduce stress and encourage the utilization of support systems.

05

Flexibility Where Feasible: Many women expressed the added burdens associated with returning to the office. Offer flexible working hours to help employees manage personal and family responsibilities. Where possible, offer flexibility on remote work or provide transportation reimbursement benefits considering inflationary increases.

06 Emergency Financial Assistance: Offer interest-free or low-interest loans for emergencies. Unplanned expenses or surprise costs were frequently cited as significant stressors. Make these easy to access and understand.

Companies can create an emergency relief fund to provide grants to employees facing unexpected financial hardships.

07 Manager Training and Support: Train managers to recognize and address the financial stress of their team members without taking on the burden themselves. This can include strategies for managing overtime requests and offering empathetic support.

08 Wellness Programs: Implement wellness programs that include financial health as a key component. Regular financial wellness check-ins and resources can proactively address and reduce stress. In this [TIAA Institute report](#), learn more about the importance of integrated education and support by employers to address the mutually reinforcing financial and mental health relationship.

09 Connection to Community-Based Resources: Develop partnerships with local community organizations to provide employees with information and access to community-based financial resources. This can include workshops, counseling services, and other support systems available outside the work environment.

10 Supporting Caregiver Employees: Caregiving costs, including childcare, eldercare, and special needs care were mentioned as financial stressors. Subsidies and on-site care facilities can offer some support, but other alternatives, such as workplace flexibility, were seen as helpful as long as women were not penalized for taking advantage of them. In this [TIAA Institute report](#), learn more about how to plan and support caregiving needs.



Acknowledgments

This survey and report were made possible through the collaboration of the following organizations that share Paradigm for Parity's commitment to understanding and mitigating the systemic issues hindering the advancement of all communities of women in the workplace.

About Tiffany Aliche, CEO, The Budgetnista

Tiffany "The Budgetnista" Aliche is America's favorite personal financial educator and author of the New York Times Best Seller, *Get Good with Money*. Through her Live Richer Movement, she's helped over two million women save, manage, and pay off hundreds of millions of dollars.

A former teacher for ten years with a Master's degree in Education, Tiffany was instrumental in getting The Budgetnista Law (A1414) passed in January 2019, making financial education mandatory for middle school students in New Jersey.

The Budgetnista is an NAACP nominee and the first Black woman to grace the cover of *Money Magazine* (solo). She's also the cohost of Webby Award winning podcast, *Brown Ambition*, and has been featured on *Good Morning America*, the *TODAY* show, PBS, *TIME*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Reuters, *ESSENCE Magazine*, *FORBES*, *Fox Business*, *MSNBC*, *CNN*. <https://thebudgetnista.com/>

About Stacey Tisdale, CEO, Mind Money Media

Award-winning on-air financial journalist and author, Stacey Tisdale was the first woman and first African-American to report from the New York Stock Exchange in her role as a reporter/anchor for Emmy award-winning *Wall Street Journal Television*. During her 20-year career, Stacey has reported for some of the greatest news organizations in the world including, CBS, CNN, PBS, the *Today Show*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. After a 6-year research project into what drives financial behavior, Stacey authored the critically-acclaimed book, *The True Cost of Happiness: The Real Story Behind Managing Your Money* (John Wiley & Sons), and the *\$afe Spaces with Stacey Tisdale Money Mindset Journal*, became one of the pioneering journalists in behavioral finance and financial psychology. Her research, which focuses on financial behavior, also inspired her *Winning Play\$* financial education program, winner of the U.S. Department of Education's Excellence in Economic Education award, and the National Association of Black Journalists Community Service Award. As founder and CEO of multi-media content provider, *Mind Money Media Inc.*,

Stacey uses her personal finance and media platforms to educate her audiences about all aspects of our complex relationship with money, as well as the ways in which socioeconomics, gender, race, age, orientation, and culture, play out in our financial experiences and careers. She has also created financial education programs for the NFL's New York Giants, the WNBA's Washington Mystics, and the female employees of Microsoft. Stacey is also co-host and executive producer of the *Wealth Wednesdays* financial education platform on iHeartmedia's Gracie Award-winning radio and digital program, *Way Up With Angela Yee*. [Profile](#)



About Equilar

Equilar is the leading provider of executive intelligence solutions. The company's expertise in relationship intelligence drives state-of-the-art business development and CRM applications, board and executive recruitment, and compensation and governance strategies. Equilar integrates its extensive database of executive profiles with natural language processing and machine learning AI to enable real-time relationship analytics and targeted outreach for its global clients. Equilar's commitment to excellence has made it the go-to solution for over 1,000 companies, including 75% of the Fortune 500, top PE/VC firms and leading professional services entities. Learn more at www.equilar.com.

About the One Million Black Women Initiative

In partnership with Black-women-led organizations, financial institutions and other partners, Goldman Sachs has committed \$10 billion in direct investment capital and \$100 million in philanthropic capital over the next decade to address the dual disproportionate gender and racial biases that Black women have faced for generations, which have only been exacerbated by the pandemic. The initiative, One Million Black Women, is named for and guided by the goal of impacting the lives of at least one million Black women by 2030. Goldman Sachs' research Black Womenomics has shown that sustained investments in Black women will catalyze economic growth, making for not only a fairer, but also a richer society.

[Goldman Sachs One Million Black Women](#) initiative.

About Paradigm for Parity

Paradigm for Parity is a nonprofit organization committed to developing and promoting actionable solutions to barriers for women in the workplace, Paradigm for Parity is hosting a free, virtual masterclass to share the findings of the study, tips to get started managing financial stress, and strategies that companies can implement to better support the management of financial stress for Black women.

<https://paradigm4parity.org/>

Thank you TIAA for their contributions to recommendations and for sponsoring the virtual masterclass - The Invisible Weight: Addressing the Impact of Personal Financial Stress on Black Women in the Workplace.

About TIAA

TIAA is a leading provider of secure retirements and outcome-focused investment solutions to millions of people and thousands of institutions. It is the #1 not-for-profit retirement market provider¹, paid more than \$5.6 billion in lifetime income to retired clients in 2022 and has \$1.3 trillion in assets under management (as of 6/30/2024)².

¹ As of July 21, 2022. Based on data in PLANSPONSOR's 403(b) 2022 DC Recordkeeping Survey, combined 457 and 403(b) data.

² As of June 30, 2024 assets under management across Nuveen Investments affiliates and TIAA investment management teams are \$1,349 billion.