

WSJ.com/Harris Interactive Survey: Majority of Adults are Involved in Relationships with Income Disparities

Only 10 percent of U.S. adults say they earn the same as their partners

A new Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Personal Finance Poll found that more than 8 out of 10 U.S. adults are involved in serious relationships with income disparities, with only 10 percent saying they earn the same as their spouses/partners. It seems that women have yet to break the glass ceiling completely, as men (57%) are more likely to earn more than their spouse/partner. Conversely, 66 percent of women say their spouses/partners earn more.

These are just some of the results of an online survey of 2,585 U.S. adults conducted by Harris Interactive® between February 5 to 7, 2007 for The Wall Street Journal Online.

The discussion of financial issues with spouses/partners carries on

Even with these income disparities, nearly 9 out of 10 respondents say they have discussed financial issues with their spouses or partners and more than half have discussed their spending habits and their current savings goals. Respondents over the age of 55 are significantly less likely to have discussed spending habits, debt and household budgets. However, respondents over 55 are more likely to discuss investments and net assets- this is probably due to retirement planning needs. Respondents ages 18-34 are more likely to discuss spending habits, savings, debt, budgets and financial responsibilities.

Respondents who work part-time and those who are retired are less likely to discuss spending habits with their spouses or partners, while students, who may also be on a limited income, are more likely to discuss spending habits, savings, debt and household budgets. Retired respondents are much more likely to discuss their net assets with their partner than other respondents (60% vs. 42% total). However, even among the retired, only 32% of respondents have discussed their retirement goals and only 54 percent have discussed current investments or investment goals. This may be a by product of generational differences in how finances are addressed.

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So, do adults hide financial information from their partners?

Nearly 8 out of 10 respondents have never hidden financial information from their spouses or partners. The most common hidden financial information includes debt and savings/checking accounts. Students and full time/self-employed respondents are more likely to have hidden savings/checking accounts. Women are more likely to hide financial information from their spouses/partners (20% of females vs. 14% of men). Men are less likely to hide debt when compared to the total population (7% vs. 10% of total respondents).

Despite discussions and lack of disagreements, there are still arguments

A quarter of respondents with income disparities claim to have no disagreements over personal/household finances. Nearly four in ten respondents over the age of 55 with income disparities report they have no disagreements over finances with their partner. Respondents in the youngest age bracket with income disparities—18-34—are most inclined to report that at least half of their disagreements are about money (40% vs. 28% total)

Respondents are almost equally split between those who say they argue about money/finances and those who do not. Among those who argue about finances, respondents argue most about irresponsible spending and not saving enough. Nearly 50 percent of married/partnered respondents claim to not argue about money (compared to 25% of married/partnered respondents with known income disparities).

More male respondents claim to argue about money than female respondents (56% vs. 47%). Additionally, nearly a quarter of male respondents claim to argue about irresponsible spending (compared to 16% of females). Over fifty percent of female respondents claim they do not argue about money (53% of females vs. 44% of males).

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Table 1a

Financial Discussions – By Age

“Which of the following financial issues, if any, have you discussed with your spouse/partner?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner

	Total	Age			
		18-34	35-44	45-54	55 and over
	N=1516	N=303	N=341	N=320	N=552
	%	%	%	%	%
Any (NET)	88	94	86	89	85
Spending habits	63	78	65	67	53
Current savings or savings goals	57	75	55	57	49
The debt we each carry	44	62	49	50	29
Setting and keeping a household budget	44	61	51	45	31
Financial responsibilities (who handles what)	43	56	49	40	36
Retirement goals	43	38	46	48	41
Current investments or investment goals	43	40	37	34	53
Our net assets	42	36	33	36	53
None of these	12	6	14	11	15

Note: Multiple Response Question

Table 1b

Financial Discussions – By Income

“Which of the following financial issues, if any, have you discussed with your spouse/partner?”

	Total	Income			
		Less Than \$35K	\$35K - \$49.9K	\$50K - \$74.9K	\$75K and over
	N=1516	N=233	N=163	N=352	N=547
	%	%	%	%	%
Any (NET)	88	76	90	93	92
Spending habits	63	55	70	73	66
Current savings or savings goals	57	53	65	61	61
The debt we each carry	44	36	50	48	48
Setting and keeping a household budget	44	45	54	51	43
Financial responsibilities (who handles what)	43	32	51	42	52
Retirement goals	43	16	39	48	59
Current investments or investment goals	43	21	45	42	53
Our net assets	42	22	42	49	48
None of these	12	24	10	7	8

Note: Multiple Response Question

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Table 1c

Financial Discussions – By Employment Status

“Which of the following financial issues, if any, have you discussed with your spouse/partner?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner

	Total	Employment Status				
		Full time/ Self Empl	Part time	Student	Retired	Un- employed
	N=1516	N=889	N=145	N=76	N=338	N=59
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Any (NET)	88	91	84	94	85	84
Spending habits	63	70	51	83	54	41
Current savings or savings goals	57	62	56	78	49	36
The debt we each carry	44	55	48	74	25	36
Setting and keeping a household budget	44	49	40	70	34	45
Financial responsibilities (who handles what)	43	50	49	64	35	34
Retirement goals	43	49	42	51	32	35
Current investments or investment goals	43	41	41	48	54	17
Our net assets	42	38	39	38	60	34
None of these	12	9	16	6	15	16

Note: Multiple Response Question

Note: Due to small base size for students and those unemployed, data should be used directionally.

Table 1d

Financial Discussions – By Gender

“Which of the following financial issues, if any, have you discussed with your spouse/partner?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner

	Total	Male	Female
	N=1516	N=779	N=737
	%	%	%
Any (NET)	88	89	87
Spending habits	63	67	60
Current savings or savings goals	57	55	59
The debt we each carry	44	44	44
Setting and keeping a household budget	44	44	44
Financial responsibilities (who handles what)	43	45	43
Retirement goals	43	43	44
Current investments or investment goals	43	43	42
Our net assets	42	46	38
None of these	12	11	13

Note: Multiple Response Question

Table 2a
Income Disparities – By Education
 “Who earns more, you or your spouse/partner?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner

	Total	Education		
		H.S. or Less	Some Col.	Col. Grad+
	N=1516	N=253	N=551	N=712
	%	%	%	%
Have Known Income Disparities (NET)	83	81	86	82
I earn more than my spouse/partner.	36	27	37	47
My spouse/partner earns more than I do.	47	54	48	35
We earn equal amounts	10	11	9	11
I don't know	1	1	1	*
Decline to answer	6	7	4	6

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

*Less Than 0.5%

Table 2b
Income Disparities – By Employment Status
 “Who earns more, you or your spouse/partner?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner

	Total	Employment Status				
		Full time/ Self Empl	Part time	Student	Retired	Un- employed
	N=1516	N=889	N=145	N=76	N=338	N=59
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Have Known Income Disparities (NET)	83	86	89	92	69	79
I earn more than my spouse/partner.	36	50	24	34	36	10
My spouse/partner earns more than I do.	47	37	65	58	33	69
We earn equal amounts.	10	11	6	7	15	8
I don't know.	1	1	–	–	1	3
Decline to answer	6	2	6	–	15	10

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Note: Due to small base size for students and those unemployed, data should be used directionally.

“–”No Response

Table 2c
Income Disparities – By Gender

“Who earns more, you or your spouse/partner?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner

	Total	Male	Female
	N=1516	N=779	N=737
	%	%	%
Have Known Income Disparities (NET)	83	81	84
I earn more than my spouse/partner.	36	57	19
My spouse/partner earns more than I do.	47	24	66
We earn equal amounts.	10	12	9
I don't know.	1	1	1
Decline to answer	6	6	6

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Table 3a
Proportion of Finance-Inspired Disagreements – By Age

“What proportion of the disagreements with your spouse/partner involve money or personal/household finances?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner & Have Known Income Disparities

	Total	Age			
		18-34	35-44	45-54	55 and over
	N=1269	N=270	N=300	N=272	N=427
	%	%	%	%	%
At Least Some Proportion (NET)	75	79	84	79	62
All or most	9	16	6	12	4
About half	19	24	23	22	10
Very few	47	39	55	45	48
None	25	21	16	21	38

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Table 3b
Proportion of Finance-Inspired Disagreements – By Employment Status

“What proportion of the disagreements with your spouse/partner involve money or personal/household finances?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner & Have Known Income Disparities

	Total	Employment Status				
		Full time/ Self Empl	Part time	Student	Retired	Un- employed
	N=1269	N=768	N=122	N=66	N=246	N=47
	%	%	%	%	%	%
At Least Some Proportion (NET)	75	80	76	70	53	88
All or most	9	11	5	4	5	20
About half	19	22	13	20	6	25
Very few	47	48	59	46	41	43
None	25	20	24	30	47	12

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Note: Due to small base size for students and those unemployed, data should be used directionally.

Table 3c
Proportion of Finance-Inspired Disagreements – By Gender

“What proportion of the disagreements with your spouse/partner involve money or personal/household finances?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner & Have Known Income Disparities

	Total	Male	Female
	N=1269	N=656	N=613
	%	%	%
At Least Some Proportion (NET)	75	78	72
All or most	9	9	9
About half	19	19	19
Very few	47	50	44
None	25	22	28

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

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Table 4a
Money-Related Arguments – By Employment Status

“Which one of the following money-related topics do you and your spouse/partner tend to argue about most?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner

	Total	Employment Status				
		Full time/ Self Empl	Part time	Student	Retired	Un- employed
	N=1516	N=889	N=145	N=76	N=338	N=59
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Argue About Money Topics (NET)	51	60	54	60	28	67
Irresponsible spending	19	22	16	37	11	19
Not saving enough	10	11	14	8	4	14
Not paying bills on time	7	8	12	5	4	15
Not consulting with one another before making a purchase	6	6	7	3	6	3
Unequal financial responsibilities	3	5	–	3	1	9
Other	6	7	5	4	2	8
We do not argue about money	49	40	46	40	72	33

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Note: Due to small base size for students and those unemployed, data should be used directionally.

– “No Response

Table 4b
Money-Related Arguments – By Gender

“Which one of the following money-related topics do you and your spouse/partner tend to argue about most?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner

	Total	Male	Female
	N=1516	N=779	N=737
	%	%	%
Argue About Money Topics (NET)	51	56	47
Irresponsible spending	19	24	16
Not saving enough	10	9	11
Not paying bills on time	7	9	5
Not consulting with one another before making a purchase	6	7	5
Unequal financial responsibilities	3	3	4
Other	6	5	7
We do not argue about money	49	44	53

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

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Table 5a

Hidden Financial Information – By Employment Status

“Which of the following types of financial information, if any, have you ever hidden from your spouse/partner?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner

	Total	Employment Status				
		Full time/ Self Empl	Part time	Student	Retired	Un- employed
	1516	889	145	76	338	59
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Ever Hidden Financial Information From Spouse/Partner (NET)	17	22	18	23	9	10
Credit card or other debt	10	11	11	7	6	8
Savings or checking accounts	6	8	3	18	4	1
Information regarding investments	2	2	–	–	2	–
Retirement funds	1	1	–	–	2	–
A history of bankruptcy	1	1	1	2	–	2
Terms of my will	1	1	–	–	–	0
Insurance policy	1	1	–	2	–	2
Alimony or child support payments	*	*	–	1	–	–
Other financial accounts/information	3	4	–	4	1	–
I have never hidden financial information from my spouse/partner.	77	7	75	76	85	75
Decline to answer	5	5	7	0	6	15

Note: Multiple Response Question

Note: Due to small base size for students and those unemployed, data should be used directionally.

“–“No Response

*Less Than 0.5%

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Table 5b
Hidden Financial Information – By Gender

“Which of the following types of financial information, if any, have you ever hidden from your spouse/partner?”

Base: Married or Living with Partner

	Total	Male	Female
	N=1516	N=779	N=737
	%	%	%
Ever Hidden Financial Information From Spouse/Partner (NET)	17	14	20
Credit card or other debt	10	7	12
Savings or checking accounts	6	6	7
Information regarding investments	2	2	1
Retirement funds	1	1	1
A history of bankruptcy	1	1	1
Terms of my will	1	–	1
Insurance policy	1	1	*
Alimony or child support payments	*	*	*
Other financial accounts/information	3	3	3
I have never hidden financial information from my spouse/partner.	77	79	76
Decline to answer	5	7	4

Note: Multiple Response Question

–“No Response

*Less Than 0.5%

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A downloadable PDF version of The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Personal Finance Poll is posted at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsifinance.asp.

Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States between February 5 to 7, 2007 among 2,585 adults (aged 18 and over), of whom 1,516 are married or living with a partner. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite "margin of error" for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With a pure probability sample of 2,585 one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results would have a sampling error of +/-3 percentage points. Sampling error for data based on sub-samples may be higher and may vary. However, that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

About the Survey

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Personal Finance Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the Personal Journal Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at www.wsj.com/personaljournal.

About The Wall Street Journal Online

The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ), is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal continues to attract quality subscribers that are at the top of their industries, with 811,000 subscribers world-wide as of Q4, 2006.

The Online Journal offers three industry-specific verticals: the award-winning Health, Media & Marketing and now Law. Health offers authoritative analysis, breaking news and commentary from top industry journalists. Media & Marketing is designed for professionals in the advertising, marketing, entertainment and media industries. Law is designed to provide law firms and attorneys timely information on events and trends important to the legal market. Subscribers to these verticals also get access to the full content of the Online Journal.

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About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is the 12th largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world. The company provides innovative research, insights and strategic advice to help its clients make more confident decisions which lead to measurable and enduring improvements in performance. Harris Interactive is widely known for *The Harris Poll*[®], one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. The company has built what it believes to be the world's largest panel of survey respondents, the Harris Poll Online. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its United States, Europe and Asia offices, its wholly-owned subsidiary Novartis in France and through a global network of independent market research firms. The service bureau, HISB, provides its market research industry clients with mixed-mode data collection, panel development services as well as syndicated and tracking research consultation. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at www.harrisinteractive.com.

To become a member of the Harris Poll Online and be invited to participate in online surveys, register at www.harrispollonline.com.

For more information, please contact us at:

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