



WIRE's approach to financial capability & financial wellbeing

KNOWLEDGE PAPER

Prepared by Zuleika Arashiro, March 2022



Acknowledgement of Country

WIRE acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the traditional and only custodians of country across Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to maintain their wisdom and rich culture — the oldest continuous culture on the planet — having survived genocide, dispossession and colonisation. We recognise their continued connection to land, waters and culture, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

Sovereignty has never been ceded. This land always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been enriched by the knowledge and generosity of WIRE's staff. In particular, the Financial Capability Project Team, the CEO, Julie Kun, and Dr Nilmini Fernando. Thank you to Skye Davey for their editing and design expertise.

We are also grateful to the external stakeholders who were interviewed for this work. They are in different industries (banking, community sector, government, and academia) and know WIRE's trajectory well. Their contribution was critical to understanding what makes WIRE's work unique in the financial capability space.

We acknowledge the women, non-binary and gender-diverse people who share their stories with WIRE. Theirs are stories of resilience, strength, and skill — all essential to navigating the complex systems required to financially survive. It is their experiences that have evolved our understanding of financial wellbeing and continue to inform our work.

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Introduction

This knowledge paper shares WIRE's approach to building financial capability and financial wellbeing for women, non-binary and gender-diverse people. We hope this paper will inspire utility, finance, banking and community organisations to adopt a similar approach to their services: valuing people's strengths, enabling them to navigate existing systems, and acting to change the systemic causes of their financial marginalisation.

In this paper, we will trace the evolution of WIRE's financial capability research, projects and services — from our early focus on individual financial literacy, to our current intersectional approach to financial capability and financial wellness, our work on financial abuse, and our in-depth projects. The paper ends by sharing WIRE's theory of change and recommendations for the future.

ABOUT WIRE

WIRE is a feminist organisation committed to intersectionality (see page 13-17) that provides best-practice, gender-informed services, research, and training to address the multiple barriers that marginalise women, non-binary, and gender-diverse people.

OUR VISION: A just and inclusive society where all people can thrive.

OUR VALUES: WIRE is feminist, inclusive and bold. We strive for social justice, empowerment and integrity.

OUR MISSION: At WIRE we work with women, non-binary and gender-diverse people to address the issues they identify, assist them to make informed choices in their lives, and advocate for structural change to bring about gender equity and social justice.

Our history

In 2006, at a time when women's financial inclusion was usually attributed to women's failure to understand money issues, WIRE began to talk about financial wellbeing in a way that highlighted the inadequacy of systems and dominant culture.

Now, WIRE is a thought leader in gendered financial wellbeing. We are known in the community services and financial sector for our ability to see inequities and name the shifts in systems that are required to improve the financial wellbeing of women, non-binary and gender-diverse people who experience the most exclusion in our society.

WHY FOCUS ON FINANCIAL WELLBEING?

Financial wellbeing in Australia is gendered. Women have more cultural and systemic barriers that impede financial wellbeing than men. In addition, the financial wellbeing of non-binary and gender-diverse people is mostly overlooked by Australian research and data collection.

Since WIRE commenced in 1984, we have seen the ongoing financial inequity faced by women, non-binary and gender-diverse people in Australia's industrial relations system, welfare system, and cultural assumptions and norms, which result in poverty, homelessness and violence.

In 2022 the statistics still tell a story of inequity:

- The full-time average weekly ordinary earnings for women are 13.8% less than for men.¹
- 15.7% of Australian women will experience financial abuse in their lifetime.²
- Just under 60% of recent migrants are female – making them less likely to be employed full time than their male counterparts. Meanwhile, they are also 7% less likely to be employed than women born in Australia.^{3,4}
- Employees in female-dominated industries such as health care and social assistance are paid significantly less than employees in male-dominated industries.⁵
- Women are more likely to be in casual employment than men: 25.5% of all female employees in Australia are casual compared to 19.7% of male employees.⁶
- Raising children accounts for a 17% loss in lifetime wages for women.⁷
- For migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, and LGBTI women, gender-based discrimination is intensified and inequality is compounded by racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia. For example:
 - Underemployment is much higher for migrant and refugee women⁸
 - Women with disabilities and men with disabilities have different economic opportunities, with disabled women less likely to be in the paid workforce than disabled men⁹

¹ <https://www.wgea.gov.au/terms/gender-pay-gap>

² Kutin J, Russell R & Reid M. (2017). *Economic abuse between intimate partners in Australia: prevalence, health status, disability and financial stress*. (p.16) Aust N Z J Public Health. doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.12651.

³ <https://www.vic.gov.au/gender-equality-baseline-report/intersectionality-gender-inequality>

⁴ <https://junkee.com/migrant-women-workplace/323714>

⁵ <https://www.genvic.org.au/resources/gender-equity-statistics/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ http://sydney.edu.au/business/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/44107/OECDEU_migrant_women_and_work.pdf

⁹ <http://wwda.org.au/about/snapshot/>

- According to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, LGBTI people experiencing family violence are regularly rendered invisible¹⁰

NON-BINARY AND GENDER-DIVERSE PEOPLE AT WIRE

[Non-binary and gender-diverse people](#) have identities that sit outside the man/woman gender binary.

For almost four decades, WIRE has placed the experiences and voices of women at the centre of our work and denounced systemic gendered oppression. In more recent times, WIRE has acknowledged that non-binary and gender-diverse people use our services and work with us and that they too experience the negative impacts of the system of patriarchy, which privileges males over all other genders.

WIRE has taken the step of acknowledging and centring non-binary and gender-diverse people in our work, as well as women. We also acknowledge that due to a lack of research and data collection around gender diversity, often WIRE does not have statistical data related to non-binary and gender-diverse people and financial wellbeing. As a result of the lack of such data, most of the research and statistics raised in this paper refer solely to women. It should be noted that WIRE research undertaken before 2018 does not address the specific experiences of non-binary and gender-diverse people.

DEFINING FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Based on the Centre for Social Impact's definition¹¹, **financial wellbeing** can be described as the state in which a person:

- Can meet expenses with some money left over
- Is in control of their finances
- Feels financially secure, now and in the future.

Each dimension in this definition encompasses subjective and external conditions. Underlying all of them is **the premise that people need access to a minimum level of income, regularly**, that allows them to live a decent life in which they have control over their finances, the possibility of planning, and the ability to thrive.

¹⁰ <http://www.rcfv.com.au/MediaLibraries/RCFamilyViolence/Reports/Final/RCFV-Summary.pdf>

¹¹ Muir, K., Hamilton, M., Noone, J., Marjolin, A., Salignac, F., Saunders, P. (2017). *Exploring Financial Wellbeing in the Australian Context*. Centre for Social Impact & Social Policy Research Centre, for Financial Literacy Australia. Sydney: UNSW.

OUR INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST FRAMEWORK

A critical intersectional feminist framework drives WIRE's financial wellbeing work. Applying an intersectional feminist lens means WIRE recognises that Australian financial wellbeing knowledge is often formulated through a male, white and western dominant lens, which claims this knowledge as universal. Our approach considers the human in context. We recognise how **a person's financial experiences and capabilities are influenced by their status and position in society and relationships with community, institutions and structures of power.** You can read more about our intersectional feminist approach on page 13-17.

Key definitions

This knowledge paper speaks to the Australian experience and identifies colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism, as the dominant western systems which create financial marginalisation. These systems intersect and reinforce each other structurally.

Colonialism: A system of territorial expansion in which the invading power takes political and economic control of the invaded territories. Settler colonialism starts with invasion and continues through policies, dominant assumptions and norms that ensure the dispossession of the land and resources of indigenous peoples, and privilege the invading forces. In Australia, the violence and oppression of colonialism continue through the discrimination, stigmatisation and negative stereotypes imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This violence and oppression maintain policies, laws, systems, and cultural norms that marginalise them on their own, sovereign land.

White supremacy: White supremacy is a dominant racial ideology that privileges white people above other races. It refers not only to acts of racial hate and violence of extremist groups but is expressed through 'the subtle and widespread forces that are embedded in the everyday routine actions, policies, and practices', and that build and frame the world according to the interests of white people.¹² White supremacy is not merely a belief that to be white is to be better — it is the political, cultural, and economic systems that enable white people to control the majority of power and resources and normalise such dominance and power. White supremacy is premised on the subjugation of people who are considered to be not white, and creates, reinforces and maintains white advantage.¹³

Patriarchy: A belief system that assumes the dominance of straight, cis-gender men as natural and privileges and normalises straight, cis-gender men by assuming they are the most valuable members of society. This leads to the creation and maintenance of hierarchical structures and cultural beliefs that discriminate against women, trans women and trans men, non-binary people and others in the LGBTQI+ community. Patriarchy normalises and perpetuates gender inequity,

¹² Bargallie, D. (2020). *Unmasking the racial contract: Indigenous voices on racism in the Australian Public Service*. Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, pp. 86-87.

¹³ Ibid.

through all forms of sexism based in transphobia, misogyny, heteronormativity and homophobia.

Capitalism: An economic system in which a significant proportion of the means of production and distribution of goods and services are privately owned, and profit and economic productivity are the priority. Through its emphasis on individual competition and free market allocation of resources, capitalism normalises inequalities and ranks people's worth according to their ability to create wealth within a capitalist marketplace. Capitalism perpetuates discrimination such as sexism, classism, racism and transphobia when discriminated against people are excluded from systems of wealth creation, such as labour markets and ownership. The inability to financially thrive is then individualised as a personal failure or a failure of a particular group of people, which legitimises the discrimination, as well as legitimising those who are already privileged.

From financial literacy to financial wellbeing

From the beginning, WIRE has taken a structural perspective on financial capability. In 2007, at a time when other financial literacy programs focussed on individual behaviour, WIRE combined evidence from existing literature with what women themselves shared during the research, to show why gender and economic structural inequity mattered in understanding women's financial literacy.

As the literature review conducted for WIRE's *Women's Financial Literacy* research report (2007) pointed out:

'Women face financial vulnerability through structural discrimination in the economy and labour market,' and financial literacy is a 'gender issue, with women bearing the brunt of financial pressures in families' (WIRE 2007, p.5.)

The literature review also identified themes that informed WIRE's ongoing financial capability work, including:

- How women's participation in the labour market affects their capacity to achieve financial independence, including their employment in underpaid sectors, and the expectations placed on women to undertake unpaid care responsibilities which create career interruptions throughout their work life
- Women's difficulties accessing appropriate financial information that helps them understand how to build their financial security
- The gender pay gap, which measures the difference between the average earnings of women and men in the workforce
- The diversity of experiences among women due to various socio-economic factors, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disabilities, and women in rural areas having specific financial literacy needs.

The **2007** study also touched on the **emotional and relational aspects** that shape how finances are addressed in women's lives.¹⁴ Money was found to be at the centre of

¹⁴ For a key reference on sociological studies of money, including its emotional and relational dimensions, see the work of Argentinean sociologist Viviana Zelizer, including *The Social Meaning of Money* (Princeton University Press, 2017, first published in 1994), and *The Purchase of Intimacy* (Princeton University Press, 2005). In the Australian Context, see Russell et al. (2016) *Women and Money in Australia: Across the Generations*, Melbourne: RMIT.

women's relationships with family and society. The study stressed the importance of looking at financial information relevant to different life stages or life change events, such as new jobs, divorce, or death, and tailoring financial literacy to be timely and relevant for women in these different life stages.

The attention to **gender, life stage and diversity of experiences** was equally present in the **2010** *Young Women and Money* research. That study focussed on financial literacy for young women and also recognised structural barriers, the need to understand diversity among women, and included a group of young Aboriginal women among the research participants.

From **2014**, WIRE expanded our research work on **money and relationships** and the difficulties women usually face having **money conversations**. This work was done through an approach to projects that would become a **unique characteristic of WIRE's strategy: our use of research as a connector for the development of practical tools, and as an evidence base for advocacy**.

Another critical contribution of WIRE's work was to raise awareness of the connections between financial marginalisation and family violence, **bringing financial abuse to the front** of our positioning and external engagement. With *Money problems with your partner* (Cameron 2014), the Purse Project (2015-2020), and the *Teachable Moments* research (Fernando 2018), WIRE built a strong evidence base that pointed out the need for policy and services to place more attention to the connections between financial abuse and family violence.

A definition of financial capability that gained popularity in Australia and influenced research and government frameworks was put forward by Guy Stuart from Microfinance Opportunities in the United States. Stuart describes financial capability as 'a combination of attitude, knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy needed to make and exercise money management decisions that best fit the circumstances of one's life, within an enabling environment that includes, but is not limited to, access to appropriate financial services' (Stuart 2013).

This aligns with the WIRE framework which, **from the beginning, has emphasised the context and the social, economic and political conditions that impact a person's financial capability**.

Following Margaret Sherraden's work, WIRE addresses **financial capability as a combination of a person's ability to act, with their opportunities to act.**

'Women's financial capability and financial exclusion is less about an individual woman's competence or incompetence, but is always secondary to income inadequacy, varying capacities and the context within a patriarchal capitalist society' (Sherraden 2013, p.6.)

It was around **2017** that WIRE became more attuned to the growing social and political movement for recognition and de-stigmatisation of non-binary and gender-diverse people. Following internal work by Libby Jamieson and WIRE staff, WIRE critically reviewed our language and consciously named women, non-binary and gender-diverse people as the focus of our services. To date, WIRE's financial capability and financial wellbeing research is still focused on women but is increasingly drawing on the lived experiences of non-binary and gender-diverse people. There is limited research on the diverse and complex experiences with financial marginalisation beyond binary categories — there is a great need for a better understanding.

It was also around 2017 that, through Dr Nilmini Fernando's work, **WIRE began to use intersectionality as a critical feminist approach** to analysing the impact of intersecting power systems that compound the marginalisation and oppression of certain groups of women in society. Dr Fernando's work at WIRE includes the *When is the right time to talk about money?* research, published in 2018¹⁵ — the first instance of WIRE's research utilising an intersectional lens. In addition, Dr Fernando led WIRE's Purse Project and produced our first training for professionals on intersectional practice. Dr Fernando and Manal Shehab now lead [WIRE's Intersectionality Action Plan](#), which serves to embed intersectionality across WIRE's work and infrastructure.

Around **2017-18**, research and conversations among stakeholders in the field shifted from financial literacy towards **financial capability** and **financial wellbeing**. By then, it was clear among those researching and working in the field of financial education, that the problems of financial marginalisation, hardship and vulnerability could not be resolved through financial literacy programs alone.

A gendered, critical approach to financial capability (or 'capabilities') situates the root causes of the problem in the unequal economic structures and power systems that operate as barriers to women's financial capability. WIRE's financial capability research and practice has been characterised by an ongoing emphasis on **agency within structural constraints**.¹⁶

¹⁵ Fernando, N. (2018). 'When's the right time to talk about money? Financial teachable moments for women affected by family violence.' Melbourne: WIRE.

¹⁶ For qualitative research on how low and fluctuating income, combined with high fixed expenses, restricted women's capacity to save in the Saver Plus program regardless of intention or capabilities, see Bodsworth,

Through an intersectional and gendered lens, **financial capability is a means and one of the enablers of financial wellbeing but by itself is not enough to promote financial wellbeing.**

WIRE'S EVOLVING RESEARCH FOCUS



An intersectional feminist approach to financial capability and financial wellbeing

From our early years, WIRE's research has been attentive to the diversity of experiences among women. In later years, adopting an intersectional framework has provided a strong critical feminist lens to unpack the 'production' of privilege and marginalisation in our society, with particular attention to racism and colonialism.

ON INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality — a framework that exposed how racism and sexism operate simultaneously within dominant western cultures — developed through the activism and academic work of Black women and Women of Colour in the United States. It exposed how multiple and simultaneous forms of power have operated for centuries to create human hierarchies in which Black women have been placed at the bottom. Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw — an American legal scholar and Black feminist activist — first coined the term in 1989 to explain how sexism and racism merged as a source of discrimination in a lawsuit involving the employment opportunity of a Black woman.¹⁷

Professor Patricia Hill Collins' scholarship gained more relevance at WIRE through Dr Nilmini Fernando's research (2016; 2018) and education on intersectional feminism. Hill Collins' scholarship clearly emphasises interlocking oppressive power domains that are not only structural, but also ideological and interpersonal, and whose impact cannot be understood in isolation:

'Black feminist thought fosters **a fundamental paradigmatic shift that rejects additive approaches to oppression**. Instead of starting with gender and then adding in other variables such as age, sexual orientation, race, social class, and religion, **Black feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination**. Viewing relations of domination for Black women for any given socio-historical context as being structured via a system of interlocking race, class, and gender oppression expands the focus of analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences distinguishing these systems of oppression and focuses greater attention on how they interconnect. **Assuming that each system needs the**

¹⁷ Crenshaw, K. (1989). '[Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics](#),' *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (8), pp. 139-167.

others in order to function creates a distinct theoretical stance that stimulates the rethinking of basic social science concepts' (Hill Collins 2000, p. 273).¹⁸

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMENS' INTERSECTIONALITY

While the formalisation of the term 'intersectionality' happened in the United States, it is important to bring the discussion to the Australian context. For decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars and activists have provided us with a similar basis for critical feminism, historically grounded in the colonisation and dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A fundamental reading to understand the Australian context continues to be Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *Talkin' Up to the White Woman. Indigenous Women and Feminism*, first published in 2000.¹⁹

In Australia, intersectional feminism requires placing the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, girls, non-binary and gender-diverse people at the centre of conversations. The *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's voices) report (2020), is yet another example of how Aboriginal women not only resist but are leading and making their voices heard.²⁰ For non-Indigenous organisations, being an ally and doing the work of unlearning, re-learning, and acting for change in non-Indigenous spaces is fundamental.²¹

By adopting intersectional feminism to frame our work — including in financial capability and financial wellbeing — **WIRE has aligned to principles and calls for social justice that radically challenge the colonial, white-dominated, patriarchal, capitalist system.**

¹⁸ Hill Collins, P. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge [first ed. 1990]

¹⁹ Other core readings include Professor Moreton-Robinson's 'Talkin' up to the White woman: Indigenous women and feminism (2000/2021), 'The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty' (2015), and Jackie Huggins' 'Sister Girls: Reflections on Tiddaism, Identity and Reconciliation' (1998/2021).

²⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission (2020). [Wiyi Yani U Thangani \(Women's Voices\)](#). Securing our Rights. Securing our Future [online]

²¹ A recent source for critical reflection and action is the [Listen. Think. Trust. Act. Differently. A Reflections and Resources Outro Booklet](#). It presents the results of the 'Listen. Think. Trust. Act. Differently' event, held online on 7 July 2021, and organised by the intersectional national movement The Shift to Gender Equality.

An example of an exploration of intersectional inequalities²²

In 2016, on International Women's Day, The Point²³ released data that showed the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians:

- The median income/week of Indigenous Australian women was approximately \$279, compared to \$367 for non-Indigenous Australian women and \$627 for non-Indigenous Australian men
- The median wage per week of Indigenous Australian women was \$680, compared to \$791 for non-Indigenous Australian women and \$941 for non-Indigenous Australian men
- Employment participation of Indigenous Australian women was at 43%, compared to 67% for non-Indigenous Australian women and 77% for non-Indigenous Australian men.

Since then, other studies have shown the persistent socio-economic gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The 2019 *Money Stories* research,²⁴ which explored the financial resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, shared that:

- Only one in ten Indigenous Australians were financially secure
- Fewer than two in five Indigenous Australians could access \$2,000 for an emergency, compared with four in five in the broader Australian population
- Severe financial stress was present for half the Indigenous Australian population, compared with one in ten in the broader Australian population.

The First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) Australia²⁵ has explicitly applied intersectionality to reveal how the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disabilities have been disrespected, contributing to cumulative injustice across their lifetime. Highlighting the impact of interlocking points of oppression enables a shift in thinking and action.

²² This paper does not cover the well-documented gap in economic and financial conditions between men and women as general categories in Australia. For a recent analysis, see WIRE (2021). *Submission to the Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women* [unpublished]

²³ The Point (2016). [Infographics: Snapshot of Indigenous Australian Women](#). The Point, NITV, 8 March.

²⁴ Weier, M., Dolan, K., Powell, A., Muir, K. and Young, A. (2019). [Money Stories: Financial Resilience among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians 2019](#). Centre for Social Impact, First Nations Foundation and National Australia Bank. Sydney: UNSW

²⁵ First Peoples Disability Network (2019). [Policy Platform. Federal Election 2019](#) [online]

Table: Intersectionality across the life trajectory of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person with disabilities (Source: FPDN 2019, p. 3)

Life stage aspect	Peri-natal	Early childhood	Schooling years
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low awareness of disability • Environmental factors, increased likelihood of low birth rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low awareness of disability • Exposure to trauma • Increased likelihood of being in out of home care – off country, unstable home setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low awareness of disability • ‘Bad black kid syndrome’ – punitive schooling over supported disability
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low birth weight and environmental factors in development disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability assessments aren’t carried out to the extent that they need to be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undiagnosed and unsupported disability

Life stage aspect	Young people	Justice	Health	Ageing
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less likely to secure employment • Increased likelihood of police contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial of rights – over-incarceration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subconscious bias – institutional racism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced life expectancy • Disability happens earlier in life and with more co-morbidities
Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less likely to secure employment • Communication impairments, reduced capacity to negotiate conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Denial of rights – indefinite detention and fitness to plea for people with cognitive and psychiatric disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subconscious bias – diagnostic overshadowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate public infrastructure, especially in remote communities

Intersectionality can also help us ‘see’ economic marginalisation through the experiences of women from a migrant or refugee background in Australia. Although the invisibility of their situation is reinforced by the lack of nuanced data²⁶, qualitative and

²⁶ For instance, in Australia the way the gender pay gap is calculated does not enable disaggregation to examine the pay gap outside of a gender binary; nor does it take into account the specific experience of part-time, under-employed women, women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, or women from migrant or refugee background. See Gilmore, J. (2016). [‘The gender pay gap isn’t just ‘real’ - it’s even worse than statistics suggest,’](#) *Daily Life*, 9 May.

In contrast, in the United States disaggregated data shows that in 2019, the median weekly earnings of white women were 78.4 percent of white men’s earnings. Black women and Hispanic women earned 61.4 percent and 56 percent, respectively, of what white men earned. Institute for Women’s Policy Research (2020). [‘The Gender Wage Gap 2019: Earnings Differences by Race and Ethnicity.’](#) *Fact sheet*, March.

small-scale research and surveys are useful sources to explore what financial capability and financial wellbeing interventions should look like for those women.²⁷

APPLYING AN INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST APPROACH TO OUR PRACTICE

WIRE is building our intersectional knowledge and practice. Intersectional practice means our programs come from an understanding that people's social markers — such as race, class and gender — impact how they are viewed by others and how accessible societal systems and opportunities are to them. In addition, intersectional practice means our programs come from an understanding that people are identified through a multiplicity of social markers — some that are attached to privilege and opportunity, and others that are attached to barriers and oppression. The way people interact with financial and social support systems will be impacted by their level of access and how they are viewed by others. **Those who have social markers that attract stigma and discrimination will encounter barriers to financial wellbeing.**

Instead of accepting and normalising the male, white and western dominant framing of knowledge as universal, **we look at the impact of the dominant systems on the individual and seek to learn from the experiences and knowledge of those on the financial margins.**

²⁷ For a recent analysis, see Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria and Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (2021). [Submission to the Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women](#), Melbourne. See also Women's Health in the West (2016). [Promoting economic participation and equity for women from refugee and migrant backgrounds](#), Melbourne.

WIRE's theory of change

Why a theory of change?

A theory of change encourages deep observation of the system — how power is distributed, how decisions are made, the coalitions for and against any given change, and how change is likely to happen in the system. It enables an exploration of assumptions, to deeply observe data and see where power is being exerted. It enables the inclusion of lived experience that, if left unexamined, may obscure nuanced, subtle responses and solutions. It enables deep enquiry and the possibility of finding new partners and champions that can create positive change. A theory of change prevents an automated response and provides a set of ideas and assumptions that can be tested and evaluated in cycles, leading to an ongoing process of refinement and improved practice.²⁸

PREMISE

WIRE's work on financial capability and financial wellbeing is based on the premise that the main cause for the financial insecurity experienced by the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people is **lack of access to basic and regular income and exclusion from government social infrastructure and support**. For this reason, WIRE understands that we can only achieve the impact we aspire to if, in addition to skills and knowledge to control their financial life, the most marginalised gain access to income in a fairer and more equitable way.

WIRE acknowledges that many men also experience financial hardship and face structural barriers to achieving financial wellbeing. We support action that reduces the discrimination and prejudice that people of all genders experience.

ROOT CAUSES OF FINANCIAL INEQUITY

Our long-established practice and research have provided consistent evidence that women, non-binary, gender-diverse people's financial difficulties are rarely the result of individual fault or poor skills with money management. Instead, **the causes for their money problems are often found in the gendered power systems** to which they relate to, and which affect their economic opportunities, relationships, and decisions at

²⁸ <https://oxfamapps.org/fp2p/what-use-is-a-theory-of-change-6-benefits-and-some-things-to-avoid/>

every stage of their life course. We believe the same to be true for non-binary and gender-diverse people. We see financial inequity as a social justice issue in which inequity needs to be reduced and eliminated.

WIRE's theory of change on financial wellbeing locates the root causes for the financial and economic inequalities of women, non-binary and gender-diverse people in the power hierarchies and intersecting forms of oppression that are **sustained by the colonial, white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist system** we live in. These systems **prevent women, non-binary and gender-diverse people from accessing a minimum level of income, regularly, in a fair and equitable way.**

WIRE's intersectional feminist approach recognises that these systems define degrees of privilege and exclusion between people, based on social markers that include but are not limited to gender. They privilege the cis-gender, white, able-bodied male at the top of the social hierarchy. Through institutions and social norms, these systems attempt to normalise oppression and inequalities. Characteristics such as race, ethnicity, class, disabilities, sexual orientation, age, or migrancy, become the basis through which these systems produce complex forms of marginalisation that cannot be understood in isolation from each other.

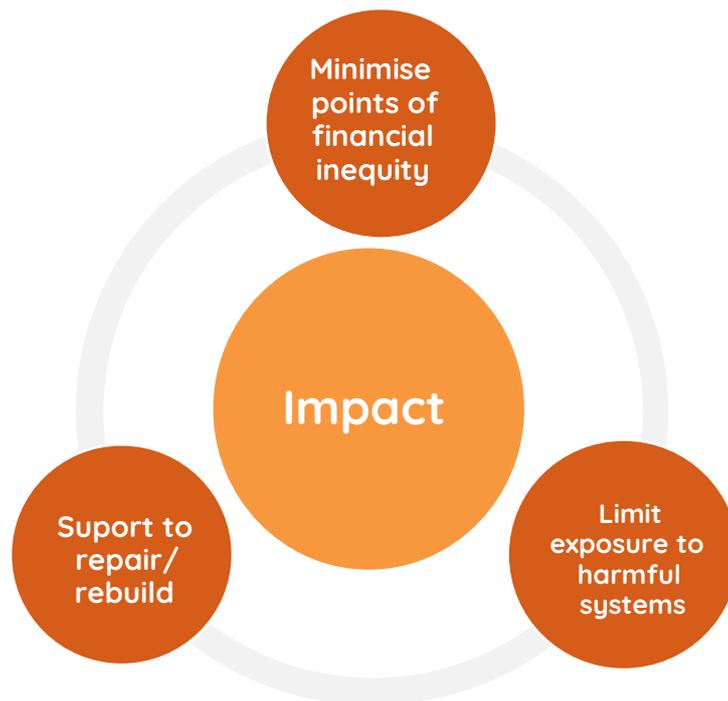
(WIRE's theory of change continues over the page).

IMPACT

WIRE uses the evidence accumulated from research and practice through our financial wellbeing projects and service delivery to contribute to **a future in which the most marginalised women, non-binary, and gender-diverse people have fairer and more equitable access to income**, and are empowered to control their financial lives.

The impact can be seen and assessed as actively working to:

- Reduce and eliminate financial inequity by minimising points of harm throughout Australia's financial systems and western dominant cultural understandings
- Equip people to manage harmful systems and western dominant cultural practices that create financial inequity
- Support people to repair and rebuild once damage has occurred, so they can recover from financial harm.

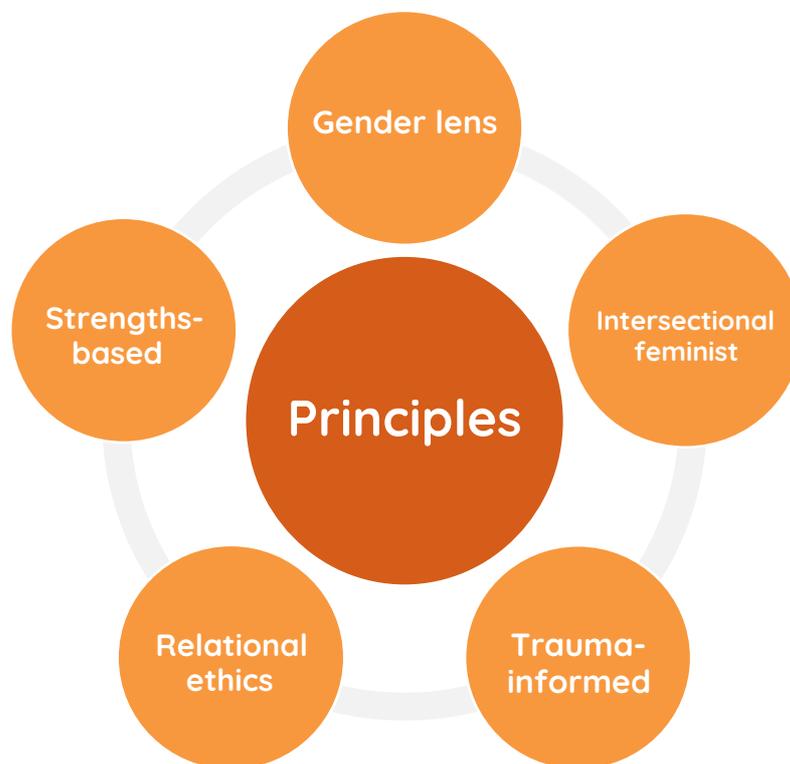


INTERVENTIONS

WIRE's activities target three levels of action for systemic change²⁹:

- **Micro level:** Increase individual financial capabilities
- **Meso level:** Increase the capability of organisations to better support the most marginalised people with their financial issues
- **Macro level:** Conduct research and evidence-based advocacy to influence policies and promote a fairer and more equitable economy for women, non-binary, and gender-diverse people.

PRINCIPLES



²⁹ For recent work addressing three levels of system change, see Brown, J. & Noone, J. (2021). [Amplify Insights: Financial Wellbeing](#). Centre for Social Impact, in partnership with NAB. Sydney: UNSW.

Premise: Inadequate access to basic and regular income and exclusion from government social infrastructure and support is the main cause of financial insecurity among the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people. Government policies and laws that distribute opportunities unequally across society deeply shape the financial behaviour of individuals, creating layers of privilege and disadvantage at a micro, meso, and macro level.

Goals

Outcomes

Transversal goal: To shift the narrative from the dominant focus on individual behaviour and deficits towards strength-based narratives that place the voices and experiences of the most marginalised people at the centre, and identify and seek to eliminate the structural barriers that contribute to their financial insecurity

M
I
C
R
O

To build the financial capabilities of the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people

To enable the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people to better navigate financial systems and services that have not been designed for them

To raise awareness of the power dynamics involved in relationships and control over money

M
E
S
O

To build the capacity of utility, finance, banking and community services to adopt an intersectional feminist lens in their service provision

To partner with other organisations to advocate for systemic change

M
A
C
R
O

To influence changes in policies, laws, and regulations to build a fairer and more equitable economy

To enable the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people to have money conversations, make money decisions that best suit their needs and aspirations, and access services and support on money matters

To increase knowledge and awareness of how Australia's economic, social and cultural systems create barriers and inequalities

That women, non-binary and gender-diverse people do not see themselves as at fault for systemic issues they don't have control over

Services that we collaborate with reduce barriers to access and adapt their services to be inclusive of the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people, acknowledging the systemic barriers they face

Community organisations we collaborate with adopt an intersectional lens in their practice

Access points for financial abuse perpetrators to commit harm are removed or reduced from services that WIRE deals with

Access points for financial abuse perpetrators to commit harm are removed or reduced from government systems

The job market offers fairer paid work opportunities for the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people

Our government and institutions have equitable systems and support the financial wellbeing of the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people

Impact: The most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people have fairer and more equitable access to income, social services and infrastructure support, and are empowered to control their financial lives.

Next steps

This knowledge paper highlights WIRE's long trajectory in financial capability and financial wellbeing. It shows the maturing of our approach towards an understanding of how colonial, white supremacist, patriarchal, and capitalist systems not only create gender inequity but produce other intersectional forms of marginalisation that rank people from the same gender against different scales of worthiness and privilege.

WIRE's theory of change is informed by the knowledge that change is possible but not easy, and that solutions must centre the people, experience, and knowledge of those experiencing the harm.

We see our role as creating a shift in thinking and being a provider of information and well-considered, evidence-informed solutions. We understand the complexity of financial wellbeing and know that access to financial wellbeing is interwoven with people's relationship to the dominant western culture and systems, as well as their access to knowledge and skills.

WIRE believes that **financial wellbeing must be tackled from every angle — from working with the individual to build their financial knowledge and confidence, to changing culture and systems to remove barriers** to financial wellbeing. WIRE knows we cannot do it alone. We need to work with others — including those experiencing the harm — and ensure their voices and experiences are elevated. We must also work with allies that are seeking to create change, from funders and organisations working in the financial wellbeing space, to influencers and decision-makers who can effect lasting change.

APPENDIX 1. List of WIRE’s financial capability projects (2007-2021)

YEAR	PROJECT	OUTPUTS	FUNDING
2007	Women’s Financial Literacy	Research report using a gender lens on financial literacy, including a literature review, qualitative data and survey. It reached over 300 women.	Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
2008-2010	Women and money month	Financial capability course and presentations for women.	Victorian Government
2010	Young Women and Money (financial literacy)	Research report using a gender lens to detail the experiences of young women in Victoria with money and financial knowledge.	Consumer Affairs Victoria
2014	Relationship Problems and Money: Women talk about financial abuse	Research report exploring the issue of money in relationships , with a focus on financial abuse . This was one of the first reports to capture the experience of a wide range of victim-survivors of financial abuse in Australia and its impact. The report highlighted the inadequate response from the community services sector, justice system and government agencies, and the impact of cultural norms.	Department of Social Services
2015	Strong Beginnings, Financial Equals	Research report and pilot booklet tested by women who trialled having respectful financial conversations. The outcome of this pilot work was included in the report, which addressed the conversations women want around money in their relationships, the barriers to having respectful financial relationships, and ways to address barriers.	Financial Literacy Australia (now known as Ecstra)

	Women Talk Money (financial literacy)	A website (digital toolkit) with simple education tools on financial literacy around relationships and money, gender and money, financial abuse, moving in together, getting married, taking a break from work, retiring, and splitting up. The website also included resources to help put learning into practice, including talking about money, 'what's your money story?', and dealing with negative responses. For each topic, there was reading and a quiz. Learning was supported by eight videos .	Financial Literacy Australia (now known as Ecstra)
2016 (updated 2019)	Money Problems with your Partner booklet	Information booklet to support women, non-binary and gender-diverse people experiencing money problems and financial abuse , and the network of people supporting them.	Originally published with funding from Victoria Law Foundation. Updated with funding from Australian Unity.
2015-2016, 2017-2020	The Purse Project	<p>Provided training for victim-survivors of family violence, workers in the family violence sector and non-family violence community services.</p> <p>Purse Project 1: 2015-16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial capability education for 79 Victorian women affected by family violence. • Professional financial capability education to community sector workers in family violence services. <p>Purse Project 2: 2017</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free financial abuse and financial capability training for workers in the family violence sector. <p>Purse Project: 2018-2020</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suite of workshops targeted to workers in the community sector that are non-family violence specialists and may work with victim-survivors of family 	McNamee Foundation

		<p>violence. The focus was on enhancing their skills and knowledge to respond to financial abuse and build the financial wellbeing of victim-survivors of family violence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included videos to support training. <p>At this point, WIRE explicitly adopted intersectionality to frame our work.</p>	
2018	When is the Right Time to Talk About Money? Financial 'teachable moments' for women affected by family violence	<p>Research that relied on an extensive literature review and qualitative data to examine the timing ('teachable moments') and relevance of financial information provided to women victim-survivors of family violence.</p> <p>Pivotal research for WIRE as it consolidated a lot of the evidence guiding WIRE's work around financial capability and introduced Dr Nilmini Fernando's framework for intersectional analysis.</p>	Financial Literacy Australia (now known as Ecstra)
2018-2021	Skilled Aware Resourceful Active: Financial wellbeing training for women (SARA)	Comprehensive financial capability training for victim-survivors of family violence, developed by WIRE and delivered through the Learn Local Network, including a participant workbook and trainers manual, and a course for trainers on delivering financial capability training for victim-survivors of family violence.	Department of Education (Victorian Government)
2018 (ongoing)	Profit-for-purpose training on financial abuse, and gender and money	Training for community sector workers, government and private sector staff to understand financial abuse , and gender and money .	

2018	Women + Money: Building Financial Futures	A website (digital toolkit) for financial sector professionals with several topics, including gender and money, women's experiences with the financial sector, experiences of marginalised groups, separation and divorce, engaging effectively with women, engaging with marginalised groups, support for women in the workplace, and understanding the relationship between finance and abuse.	NAB Foundation
2019	My Money Conversation Kit	A money conversation kit for women, non-binary and gender-diverse people including how to use the kit, My Money organiser brochure, and My Money guide.	Victorian Government
2019	Gender Equity & You Kit	A conversation kit developed to support conversations about gender equity , as part of the Lead for Change primary prevention program. The kit includes a conversation booklet, pocket guide and self-care worksheet.	Victorian Government
2019-2021	Women's Financial Capabilities Project	<p>A project led by WIRE, in partnership with Good Shepherd Australia and New Zealand (GSANZ), First Nations Foundation, Brotherhood of St Laurence and Women with Disabilities Victoria. To this date, the project has generated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A knowledge paper addressing key evidence around financial capability responses, as a background for the project (unpublished). • A centralised web resource of free money management programs (with ASIC and GSANZ). • An intersectional guide to financial capability programs for service providers (<i>Lens on, Hands on</i>), led by GSANZ, in collaboration with WIRE and Women with Disabilities Victoria. • Support to First Nations Foundation's website (Tomorrow Money), with resources to promote the financial wellbeing of Indigenous women in Australia. 	Victorian Government

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intersectional Economics training for workers from other organisations on the application of intersectionality to understand the structural causes of economic marginalisation in Australia. 	
2019-2022	Sustainable and Transformative Employment Pathways (STEP) program	Employment program for victim-survivors of family violence and guidance to employers on recruiting and supporting victim-survivors, including a standards guide for employers (in development).	Commonwealth Bank
2020-2021	Too visible, yet not fully seen: Insights from the COVID-19, Financial Capability, and Intersectionality Project	<p>Finance-related information and referral booklets, co-designed with women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family violence: Where can you get support? • My finances. An e-guide for single parents • Managing your money online (for people with disability) • Choice and control of your NDIS plan • An e-navigator to services for international students <p>A video on choice and control in the NDIS, for women with disability from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.</p> <p>A final report, <i>Too visible, yet not fully seen</i>, which documented the co-design process and inputs from consultations.</p>	Ecstra Foundation
2020-2021	The Respectful Conversations About Money Project	A Respectful Relationships & Money Conversation Kit, including a conversation booklet , and six short videos with examples of money talks in situations that people may find embarrassing or stressful, including splitting bills, sharing household bills, buying property with family, splitting income between parents, recognising financial abuse, and rent and loans in partnerships.	Great Southern Bank

WIRE'S INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST APPROACH TO FINANCIAL CAPABILITY & FINANCIAL WELLBEING

2021	Gender, Disaster and Financial Wellbeing Project	Training and resources for financial counsellors and financial capability workers to support the financial wellbeing of women in Victorian bushfire and disaster zones.	Victorian Government
2021	WIRE's financial capability theory of change	Theory of Change and supporting knowledge paper , for internal use. A communication tool to translate WIRE's Theory of Change to staff and external stakeholders.	Funded through ANZ donation

APPENDIX 2. List of WIRE's research by focus area

RESEARCH

2007 [Women's Financial Literacy \(WIRE\)](#)

2010 [Young Women and Money \(WIRE\)](#)

2014 [Relationship Problems and Money: Women talk about financial abuse \(Prue Cameron\)](#)

2015 [Strong Beginnings, Financial Equals \(Sarah Sanders\)](#)

2018 [When is the Right Time to Talk About Money?: Financial 'teachable moments' for women affected by family violence \(Dr Nilmini Fernando\)](#)

2020 (unpublished)
Background knowledge paper for the financial capability project (WIRE with GSA NZ)

2021 [Too visible yet not fully seen – Insights from the COVID-19, Financial Capability, and Intersectionality Project \(Zuleika Arashiro\)](#)

2022 WIRE financial capability/ wellbeing theory of change articulation and knowledge paper

TRAINING

FOR COMMUNITY

2008-2010 Women and Money Month – Financial capability course for women

2015-2016 [The Purse Project](#) – Financial capability workshops for women affected by family violence

2018-2021 [SARA](#) – Financial capability training course for victim-survivors of family violence

2019 & ongoing [STEP program](#) – Employment program for victim-survivors of family violence and guidance to employers on recruiting and supporting victim-survivors

FOR PROFESSIONALS

2015-2021 [The Purse Project](#) – Financial capability training for family violence services and non-family violence services on how to support the financial wellbeing of victim-survivors of family violence

The Purse Project (phase 3) – Training on critical intersectional practice around financial wellbeing

2018-2021 [SARA](#) – Financial capability training for local trainers to deliver WIRE's SARA training

RESOURCES

2014 [Money Problems with your Partner](#) – Information booklet

2015 [Women Talk Money website](#) – To support healthier money conversations

2018 [Women and Money website](#) – Digital toolkit for financial sector professionals

2019 [My Money Conversation Kit](#) – Instruction booklet, money guide and money organiser

[Gender, Equity & You Kit](#) – Booklet, pocket guide and self-care plan worksheet

2019-2021 [Women's Financial Capabilities Project \(WFCP\)](#) – Financial tools and resources for women with disabilities, multicultural communities, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

2021 [Financial resources for marginalised communities during COVID](#)

[Respectful financial conversations toolkit and videos](#)

[Centralised web resource of free money management programs](#) (with ASIC and GSA NZ)

TRAINING

2018-ongoing Profit-for-purpose training for community sector workers, government and private sector staff to understand financial abuse and gender and money

2021 [Intersectional economics](#) – Unpacks the impacts of structures and dominant cultures on the financial wellbeing of those experiencing oppression in Australia

[Gender, Disaster & Financial Wellbeing](#) – Online training for Victorian financial counsellors and financial capability workers to support women to financially prepare and recover from disasters such as bushfire, applying intersectional economics

RESOURCES

2021 (continued) [Lens on, hands on: An Intersectional Guide to Financial Capability Program Development](#) (with GSANZ and Women with Disabilities Victoria)

2021 (under development) STEP Standards for Employers – Standards to support the recruitment and employment of victim-survivors of family violence

2021 [Bushfire, disaster and women's financial wellbeing](#) – Training and resources for financial counsellors and capability workers to support the financial wellbeing of women in Victorian bushfire and disaster zones

SERVICE DELIVERY

WIRE's service delivery also contributes substantially to our work on financial capability and wellbeing. Individual supports via phone, face-to-face, and web chat, a financial guidance clinic, and the separation and family law property clinic³⁰, all support members of Victoria's community to address their financial difficulties and navigate complex systems that have not been designed for them. These services are underpinned by an intersectional feminist approach that emphasises empowerment and strengths and locates people's experiences within the broader social and economic structures that contribute to their difficulties (the WIRE model).

³⁰ The family law property clinic, for instance, was established as a response to staff's observation that many service users who experienced financial abuse lacked resources to pay for the required legal support that would help them achieve a fair property settlement. At the same time that the clinic was created, WIRE also advocated before the government for changes in the free legal aid requirements so that more victim-survivors of family violence could receive affordable legal aid around property settlement.

APPENDIX 3. List of WIRE's annotated research

Title: **Women's Financial Literacy**

Author: WIRE

Publication date: 2007

Funder: Helen Macpherson Smith Trust

The study explored what women in Victoria considered their level of financial literacy to be, and ways to improve it using a gender lens. It involved a detailed literature review and primary data collection through interviews, focus groups, and an online survey, reaching over 300 women in total. The study used Hogarth's (2002) concept of financial literacy, which emphasises information, understanding of key financial concepts and confidence in planning and making financial decisions.

The literature review found that 'women face financial vulnerability through structural discrimination in the economy and labour market', and that financial literacy was a 'gender issue, with women bearing the brunt of financial pressures in families.'

The research also found that for women, money, relationships and emotions were connected, and that their relationship with money was shaped by their life experiences. Moreover, social factors such as family, class, and financial status influenced that relationship. The research pointed out the heterogeneity of experiences among women, especially for those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Indigenous women. The following recommendations were made:

- Support group learning opportunities for women to build their individual financial knowledge and confidence
- Strengthen communities through financial awareness
- Build capacity in the financial industry to engage women
- Build better information (data, research gaps)
- Address the specific needs of Indigenous women

Keywords: financial literacy, structural discrimination, gender lens, lived experience, emotions, relationships.

Title: **Young Women and Money**

Author: WIRE

Publication date: 2010

Funder: Consumer Affairs Victoria

The study was conducted in response to a trend of increasing levels of debt among young women and to the concerns women raised in the *Women's Financial Literacy* 2007 research regarding their children's lack of financial literacy and risk of getting into debt.

Using two cohorts — teenagers (15-19 years old) and young women (20-25 years old) — the research aimed to understand teenagers' and young women's relationship with money and find ways of communicating financial information (especially about credit) more effectively to these groups.

This was action research. It used gender and diversity lenses and involved focus groups with 92 young women from metropolitan and regional Victoria, mainly from family income backgrounds of \$80K-180K. One group was formed by Indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds participated as well.

While teenagers were more focused on immediate lifestyle needs and wants, young women were starting to consider longer terms goals and viewed themselves as more careful spenders than their male counterparts. They were impacted by social pressures to consume, mistrusted banks, and tended to rely on their parents or the internet as credible sources of financial information.

The research was clear about how financial messages should be communicated to young women: they should be distributed through credible channels and spaces where they normally congregate, use plain English with 'catchy graphics,' and be appropriate to their life stage. The report made a total of 21 recommendations, targeting the Federal and Victorian state government as well as education and financial sectors.

Keywords: financial literacy, young women, debt, credit information, credibility, life stages.

Title: Relationship Problems and Money: Women talk about financial abuse

Author: Prue Cameron

Publication date: 2014

Funder: Department of Social Services

This project was driven by the need to better understand and address the serious and ongoing consequences of financial abuse in the lives of women and their children. It examined the barriers women face to building their financial independence and security post-separation.

The literature indicated that 80-90 percent of women who seek support from domestic violence services have experienced financial abuse. Unlike most projects, WIRE's project contributed by including women who had not accessed those services and who did not identify as experiencing family violence. WIRE's research also included women from a high household income level prior to separation, which led to insights into the diversity of impacts of financial abuse on women's lives.

Methodologically, the study relied on focus groups, interviews and an online survey, involving a total of more than 200 women. Their stories revealed the ways in which social and personal norms, values, and beliefs around love and trust in intimate relationships combined to increase women's risk of financial abuse in intimate relationships.

The research findings also revealed the lack of awareness and understanding of what constitutes financial abuse in society and called for more public information, services education, and campaigns on the issue of financial abuse, including within the context of family violence.

The report included a series of recommendations directed to government and services, aimed at increasing understanding of financial abuse and access to support.

Keywords: financial abuse, separation, family violence, relationships.

Title: Strong Beginnings: Financial Equals

Author: Sarah Sanders

Publication date: 2015

Funder: Financial Literacy Australia (Ecstra)

This project explored the barriers women face when talking to their partners about money. It argued that financial literacy is insufficient to address these barriers, as most financial literacy products assume that women have equitable financial decision-making capacity in relation to the money they share with their partners.

Instead, the project identified complex and entrenched gendered barriers, such as:

- Gender stereotypes
- Pay gap impacting on power dynamics
- Women disengaging from financial conversations to demonstrate their love and trust
- Gendered differences in communication styles
- Fear of relationship breakdown.

WIRE developed a trial booklet with scripts for conversation around various topics, based on the difficulties women identified. The trial booklet was received positively, with women finding the following aspects particularly valuable:

- The structured conversation framework
- Overcoming the feeling of being overwhelmed
- The \$100,000 question – setting agreed on goals
- How to discuss budgets
- Tips on responding to negative responses

Keywords: financial literacy, money conversations, conversation tools

Title: When Is the Right Time to Talk About Money? Financial teachable moments for women affected by family violence.

Author: Dr Nilmini Fernando

Publication date: 2018

Funder: Financial Literacy Australia (now known as Ecstra)

Through our work and advocacy around the Royal Commission into Family Violence (2015), WIRE noticed a gap in knowledge on how financial abuse (or economic abuse) is used as a major tactic of perpetrator violence, and the financial short and long-term consequences for victim-survivors in the aftermath of family violence.

This study explored how women victim-survivors can be best supported to gain or regain financial wellbeing. Using the concept of 'teachable moments,' it delineated the various phases in the recovery journey of women victim-survivors of family violence, and examined how, when and where they wanted to receive financial information and support.

Its findings and targeted recommendations made clear the importance of timely, targeted and integrated support across all phases of the family violence journey, to improve the financial wellbeing of women victim-survivors of family violence.

The research used an action-based feminist methodology. It relied on a thorough literature review, interviews with experts, and primary data collected through 15 focus groups, including 67 victim-survivors of family violence and a national survey completed by 281 women.

This study was particularly important in providing an evidence-based conceptual framework that has guided WIRE's work on financial capability since then. It outlines the key elements for success in targeted and timely financial support and education for women victim-survivors of family violence at specific phases of the family violence journey, including:

- The WIRE model
- Gender approach
- Five stages of family violence journey
- Trauma and violence-informed approach
- Intersectionality

The shift from the narrower focus on financial literacy towards financial capability and financial wellbeing is noticeable here, in line with how the research field around money knowledge and wellbeing has evolved. It is also in this study that Dr Nilmini Fernando named policy violence and fiscal violence and presented her Intersectional Power Analysis framework.

Keywords: financial abuse, family violence, financial capability, financial information, intersectionality.

Title: Improving the financial capability and financial confidence of women in Victoria

Author: Dr Jozica Kutin

Publication date: Unpublished (2019)

Funder: Victorian Government

This was an extensive literature review of the effectiveness of financial capability programs for women from a culturally diverse background, women living with disabilities and Indigenous women, prepared as a background paper to the Women's Financial Capabilities project. It covered definitions, building blocks and barriers to financial capability, and emerging good practices.

Keywords: Financial capability, literature review, marginalised groups.

Title: Sustainable and Transformative Employment Pathways (STEP) Project

Author: Elyse McInerney

Publication date: Unpublished (2020)

Funder: Commonwealth Bank

This learning paper captured the key findings and ideas generated during the Sustainable and Transformative Employment Pathways (STEP) Project co-design process. The co-design involved two phases, with the first dedicated to workshops with employers and human resource specialists, and with 12 victim-survivors of family violence, separately, and the second phase including joint sessions with both groups. The paper was key to inform the design of the STEP program in alignment with the feedback from lived experience participants, and in dialogue with employers.

Keywords: family violence, barriers to employment, job readiness, financial wellbeing, economic security.

Title: Women's Financial Capabilities Project (WFCP)

Authors: WIRE and Good Shepherd Australia and New Zealand (GSANZ)

Publication date: Unpublished (2020)

Funder: Victorian Government

This knowledge paper captured the evidence-base of financial capability building for women, with a specific focus on marginalised groups of women including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with a disability and migrant, refugee and asylum seeker women. It traced the thinking and research behind and through the design process for WIRE and GSANZ's Women's Financial Capabilities Project. Importantly, the knowledge paper highlighted the need for intersectional, strength-based and trauma-informed approaches to financial capability, along with the importance of co-design with both professional and lived experience experts.

Keywords: Financial capability, intersectionality, research, co-design, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Title: Too visible yet not fully seen. Insights from the COVID-19, Financial Capability and Intersectionality Project

Author: Dr Zuleika Arashiro

Publication date: 2021

Funder: Ecstra Foundation

As the unequal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic started to unfold in Australia, WIRE conducted a project that aimed to:

- Give visibility to the discrimination some groups of women, non-binary and gender-diverse people were facing
- Use co-design to develop resources that support the financial capability of those groups on their own terms.

Using intersectional practice, WIRE worked with women, non-binary and gender-diverse people including migrants, international students, and women who identify as having a disability. The collaboration resulted in the co-development of a video on choice and control over the NDIS funding and five booklets, all tailored by and for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds:

- My finances: An e-guide for single parents
- Family violence: What is it? Where can you get support?
- E-navigator to services for international students booklet
- Managing your money online: A resource for people of all abilities

The publication — designed as a final report for the funding body — documented the learning from the co-design process and provided recommendations to other institutions on how to do this work in ways that are genuinely conducive to respectful and empowering relationships for people with lived experience. It also presented the findings from the consultations with the international students and migrant women. Conducted during Victoria's 2020 lockdown, the consultations identified unemployment without government assistance, mental health, social isolation, risks related to family violence, and unclear and inconsistent information as participants' major areas of concern.

Keywords: financial information, intersectionality, migrant women, women with disability.

Glossary

Capitalism: An economic system in which a significant proportion of the means of production and distribution of goods and services are privately owned, and profit and economic productivity are the priority. Through its emphasis on individual competition and free market allocation of resources, capitalism normalises inequalities and ranks people's worth according to their ability to create wealth within a capitalist marketplace. Capitalism perpetuates discrimination such as sexism, classism, racism and transphobia when discriminated against people are excluded from systems of wealth creation such as labour markets and ownership. The inability to financially thrive is then individualised as a personal failure or a failure of a particular group of people, which legitimises the discrimination, as well as legitimising those who are already privileged.

Colonialism: A system of territorial expansion in which the invading power takes political and economic control of the invaded territories. Settler colonialism starts with invasion and continues through policies, dominant assumptions and norms that ensure the dispossession of the land and resources of indigenous peoples, and privilege the invading forces. In Australia, the violence and oppression of colonialism continue through the discrimination, stigmatisation and negative stereotypes imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This violence and oppression maintain policies, laws, systems, and cultural norms that marginalise them on their own, sovereign land.

Critical approaches: Critical approaches to social issues aim to free us from oppression and to promote justice. They identify power as the root structures that create conditions of vulnerability and marginalisation for groups placed at the bottom of social hierarchies of value and worth, due to characteristics such as gender, race, and class. Critical approaches move beyond describing and explaining unjust conditions to propose actions that transform them.

Feminist framework: A feminist framework recognises that patriarchal structures, beliefs, and values perpetuate gender-based oppression and are the root causes of the inequities, exclusion, and discrimination that women, non-binary and gender-diverse people experience. It aims to dismantle hierarchies that grant power and worth to some individuals and groups over others so that all members of society can have control over their lives, have equitable opportunity and access to resources, live free from harm, exercise choice, and participate fully in society.

Feminist practice: Feminist practice is guided by the values of humility, reflectivity, ethics of care, accountability, transparency, trust, a reckoning of privileges and sharing of power, and solidarity in the collective efforts to transform oppressive systems, including but not limited to patriarchy and the inequities these systems produce. Practitioners of feminist frameworks strive to share power, centre, listen to, and validate

the real-life experiences of people harmed through oppressive systems. They acknowledge people's strengths and continuous resistance, inform and equip them to take empowering actions, and work to amplify their voices.

Financial abuse: Financial abuse is a pattern of controlling and humiliating behaviours and actions perpetrated by one individual on another that constrain another's ability to 'acquire, use and maintain [financial] resources, thus threatening their economic security and potential for self-sufficiency' (Adams et al 2008).³¹ Financial abuse is generally used to refer specifically to money, rather than to all types of economic resources (e.g. food, telephones, transport). Social and cultural gendered norms make it hard for victim-survivors and professionals to identify financial abuse. At WIRE, the term financial abuse is used interchangeably with economic abuse, as victim-survivors and members of the public tend to understand this term better.

Financial capability: Financial capability is both an individual and a structural idea. It combines a person's ability to act with their willingness, confidence and opportunity to act.³² WIRE's intersectional approach to financial capability considers a person's financial capability as being less about competency, and more about their access to income and location in various power structures.

Financial inclusion: Financial inclusion is when people have access to appropriate and affordable financial services and products, including a transaction account, general insurance and a moderate amount of credit.³³ WIRE expands this usual definition to include access to appropriate government supports, such as income support, health and education assistance.

Financial wellbeing: In Australia, financial wellbeing is usually described as the state in which a person (i) can meet expenses and have some money left over, (ii) is in control of their finances, and (iii) feels financially secure, now and in the future. Financial capability, financial inclusion, social capital, and economic resources (especially income) are among the strongest factors which influence financial wellbeing.

Gender: Gender is the socially constructed and expected 'performances' of roles, norms, values and behaviours of men and women. In Australia, babies are assigned a sex (male/female) at birth, based on their genitals, and this sex is assumed to correspond to their gender throughout their life. However, gender identity is separate from sex, can

³¹ Adams, A. E., Sullivan, C. M., Bybee, D., & Greeson, M. R. (2008). Development of the Scale of Economic Abuse. *Violence Against Women*, 14(5), 563.

³² Sherraden, M (2013). 'Building Blocks of Financial Capability'. In J. Birkenmaier, J. Curley, and M. Sherraden (eds) *Financial Capability and Asset Development* (chapter 3). Oxford Online Scholarship.

³³ Adapted from the Centre for Social Impact's definition of financial exclusion. See Centre for Social Impact (2012). *Measuring Financial Exclusion in Australia*.

either match or differ from the sex we are assigned at birth, and can only be determined by the individual themselves.

Gender identity is how a person feels about their gender, how they show their gender to others, and how they want others to treat them.³⁴ People use many different terms to describe their gender, including man, woman, non-binary or gender-diverse. Western feminism traditionally centred women in its politics and advocacy, but contemporary gender-based politics and advocacy is inclusive of all genders and sexualities marginalised through cis-heteronormative patriarchal systems.

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a concept, tool, analytical lens and framework originating through the activism and academic works of US Critical Race, Black, Chicana and Third World feminists and also intrinsic in Indigenous feminisms and diasporic postcolonial feminisms. Intersectionality advances anti-sexist, anti-racist feminism and theories of social transformation advanced by critical feminists of colour, and it addresses complex forms of power in their relationships with identity.

In practice, intersectional feminism interrogates, exposes and seeks to dismantle gender hierarchies and binaries. It makes visible and resists the interlocking systems of power at the root of multiple oppressions that have cumulative and simultaneous impacts on specific groups of women, non-binary and gender-diverse people. In the Australian context, the interlocking power structures of colonial, white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist systems operate together to marginalise and exclude individuals and groups through their ascribed identities including Indigeneity, race, gender, class, disability, faith, age and migration status.

Patriarchy: A belief system that assumes the dominance of straight, cis-gender men as natural and privileges and normalises straight, cis-gender men by assuming they are the most valuable members of society. This leads to the creation and maintenance of hierarchical structures and cultural beliefs that discriminate against women, trans women and trans men, non-binary people and others in the LGBTQI+ community. Patriarchy normalises and perpetuates gender inequity, through all forms of sexism based in transphobia, misogyny, heteronormativity and homophobia.

Strength-based approach: This approach recognises, values, and shines a light on the agency, survival skills and resilience that a person has employed to manage the limitations they face, rather than focusing on a perceived lack or weakness in a person. It means working together to restore confidence, decision-making power and to provide

³⁴ Headspace.org.au. 2021. *What Is Gender Identity / headspace*. [online] Available at: <<https://headspace.org.au/young-people/gender-identity-and-mental-health/>> [Accessed 4 November 2021].

knowledge, information and support for the person to take action and make the best choices possible for the future.

Trans and gender-diverse: The overarching term ‘trans and gender-diverse refers to people whose gender identity or experience is different from the gender that was presumed and recorded for them at birth. Within this grouping, people use a range of different terms such as trans woman, trans man, non-binary, Brotherboys and Sistergirls. The word cisgender is used to mean people whose gender identity or experience aligns with the gender that was presumed and recorded for them at birth.³⁵

Trauma (and violence) informed practice: Trauma (and violence) informed practice holds the experiences of those we serve at the centre and is attentive to the impacts of both historic and ongoing violence experienced by them. The ‘problem’ is not seen as residing only in the person’s psychological state, but also in social circumstances and the intersecting systemic and structural inequities that impact an individual’s life and capacity to heal. In practice, it requires reflective practice, emotionally and culturally safe spaces, being heard and believed, understanding how structural and individual violence are linked, and making connections to ‘services that are connected with each other’. Trauma-informed services don’t ask, ‘what’s wrong with you?’, instead, they ask, ‘what happened to you?’

Victim-survivor: The term victim-survivor recognises that the trauma or harm (such as family violence) that a person has experienced is something that they should not be exposed to, while also recognising they have exercised their agency, strength and resilience in surviving that harm or trauma.

The WIRE model: WIRE’s unique model of service delivery is underpinned by an intersectional, trauma (and violence) informed feminist framework. The model applies a strength-based, empowering approach that centres the service user as the expert in their own life, and relates their experiences to the broader social and economic structures that produce inequalities and marginalisation. In practice, the WIRE model means:

- i. creating a safe space for the person who engages with WIRE
- ii. holding conversations that use empathic language, resist assumptions, and allow the person to express what they want

³⁵ Fairchild, J., Carman, M., Bersten, R., & O'Connor, B. (2021). *Pride in Prevention Messaging Guide: A guide for communications and engagement to support primary prevention of family violence experienced by LGBTIQ communities*. La Trobe [online]

- iii. having a non-judgmental attitude, listening to and believing a person's story, and working with them to share information and identify options of support that are suitable to what they want to prioritise
- iv. locating the person's experience in the broader social and economic contexts that are impacting on their situation.

The WIRE model has evolved and will continue to evolve through WIRE's self-reflective practices — these practices that are essential to our feminist commitment. The core elements of the WIRE model are now incorporated into how research and training are developed at WIRE.

White supremacy: White supremacy is a dominant racial ideology that privileges white people above other races. It refers not only to acts of racial hate and violence of extremist groups but is expressed through 'the subtle and widespread forces that are embedded in the everyday routine actions, policies, and practices', and that build and frame the world according to the interests of white people.³⁶ White supremacy is not merely a belief that to be white is to be better — it is the political, cultural, and economic systems that enable white people to control the majority of power and resources and normalise such dominance and power. White supremacy is premised on the subjugation of people who are considered to be not white, and creates, reinforces and maintains white advantage.³⁷

³⁶ Bargallie, D. (2020). *Unmasking the racial contract: Indigenous voices on racism in the Australian Public Service*. Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, pp. 86-87.

³⁷ Ibid.

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