

Women can take over financial decisions when partner's brain function declines, but same not true for men

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Women can competently take over financial decision-making when they perceive a decline in their husband's cognitive ability but the same can't

be said for men, according to University of Queensland research.

Dr. Sarah Coundouris from UQ's School of Psychology led the study which tested the cognitive and financial [decision-making](#) abilities of 63 heterosexual married couples aged 60 and over. The research is published in the journal *Gerontology*.

"We aimed to understand whether the financial decision-making capabilities of older adults are impacted not only by their own, but also their partner's cognition," Dr. Coundouris said.

"The couples participated in sessions that tested their cognitive speed, reasoning, and mental flexibility.

"They were also asked about how they perceived their partner's cognitive ability and completed tests of their financial competency and ability to make good financial decisions.

"We found when [women](#) detected a decline in their husband, it positively predicted their ability to adequately carry out financial tasks, but it didn't work the other way around.

"This suggests that a woman's capacity and willingness to take over [financial responsibility](#) may be critical to the couple's continued financial well-being."

Age-related cognitive decline impacts a person's ability to think quickly, remain focused, multi-task and remember information, which can affect their capacity to make sound financial judgements.

While financial decision-making is relevant across the entire adult lifespan, the complexity, frequency, and uncertainty of these decisions is said to increase with age.

Coundouris said particularly in [older generations](#) there is a "divide and conquer" approach to managing household finances, which can have [negative impacts](#) in the future.

"Typically, husbands assume responsibility for major financial decisions like investments and retirement planning, whereas wives are generally in charge of day-to-day tasks like grocery shopping and paying bills," Coundouris said.

"While it may be efficient for spouses to specialize this way, there can be serious consequences when one partners' capacity is compromised due to [cognitive decline](#).

"We hope these findings will encourage additional research into why women have improved competency and men don't, to help ensure the financial security of older adults.

"We also need to know if the gender-specific findings of this study are unique to the age cohort involved, or if they extend to [younger generations](#)."

More information: Sarah P. Coundouris et al, Cognition and Financial Decision-Making in Older Adult Spouses, *Gerontology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1159/000531193](#)

Provided by University of Queensland

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