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Leaning Against the Wind: The Ongoing Impacts of Trauma on Financial Well-Being and Decision Making

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About the Canadian Financial Diaries Project

The Canadian Financial Diaries is a multi-year project that seeks to capture the finances and financial experiences of low- and modest-income earners in Canada. Using the financial diaries methodology, this research looks at both the barriers and opportunities which can impact financial well-being. Participants in this project meet regularly with researchers to share about their financial inflows and outflows and the values which inform their financial decision-making. This report reflects on some of the learnings from Phase One. The Canadian Financial Diaries project is currently in Phase Two, and meeting with a new set of diarists.

About the Authors

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Jodi Dueck-Read is Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution Studies and the Director of Practicum at Menno Simons College of Canadian Mennonite University. Conducting mixed methods interviews with the Canadian Financial Diaries, she learned new money tracking habits and enjoyed building relationships with participants.

Wendy Nur is the Research Coordinator for the second phase of the diaries project and has worked as an independent consultant for mixed methods research projects investigating themes such as citizen participation and consumer engagement in public decision-making, and consumer protection within the digital services marketplace.

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Abbreviations

- CCB Canada Child Benefit
- CPP Canada Pension Plan
- EFT electronic funds transfer
- EI Employment Insurance
- EIA Employment and Income Assistance
- GST Goods and Services Tax
- HELOC Home Equity Line of Credit
- MPI Manitoba Public Insurance
- OAS Old Age Security
- RESP Registered Education Savings Plan
- RIF Retirement Income Fund
- RRSP Registered Retirement Savings Plan
- TFSA Tax-Free Savings Account

Introduction

THIS PAPER EXAMINES the finances and financial experiences of twelve low-income participants from the Canadian Financial Diaries research project, all of whom have been significantly affected by trauma. The Financial Diaries project worked with twenty-eight low- and modest-income Canadians for up to one year to enhance our understanding of participants' finances and financial lives and being better placed to advocate for practices and policies of financial empowerment. The twelve participants chosen for this summary were those who shared with the research team about traumatic life events or situations. The traumas that they talked about were both personal — including abuse, neglect, relational breakdown, job loss — and systemic — racism, ableism, and colonization.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the interaction between trauma and finances and to identify how finances affect trauma and how trauma affects finances. Through a more complete understanding of this relationship, we can better envision financial empowerment practices and policies that will support people with low and modest incomes. The research question is, how does trauma affect financial behaviour? For instance, does it lead people to make more or less beneficial decisions?

Trauma has been defined as the "challenging emotional consequences" of living through a distressing event such as abuse, neglect, relational breakdown, or job loss, and can have short-term and long-term consequences (CAMH, 2022). While participants did not regularly use the term "trauma," they did share about relational losses, financial losses, violence, racism, injury, and illness. Some talked about many such events. We noted that trauma has interpersonal and systemic sources. The ongoing impact of these events on participants' lives was a prominent theme that emerged from the data analysis. Unpacking the personal trauma of these participants is an attempt to provide a more contextualized understanding of their finances and financial decisions. Their stories point to the ongoing impacts of trauma on their physical and mental health and the effects of trauma on their financial health. For some, these impacts — which were mainly negative — continue to unfold long after the traumatic events have occurred.

The paper begins with an interdisciplinary review of literature related to this topic, coming mainly from orthodox economics, behavioural economics, and psychology. We find that there is limited literature on the relationship between trauma and personal finances. There is economics literature on macro-level trauma that finds important consequences for personal finances; there is also behavioural economics literature on how scarcities of various types affect finances. We also identify relevant psychological literature that finds a connection between childhood trauma and adult experiences of finances. Finally, we point to important literature on the concept of financial therapy that casts light on this topic.

This study was motivated by our observation, in analyzing data from the diaries, that the diarists displayed remarkable resilience in the wake of sometimes numerous personal traumas and systemic barriers. Although researchers did not specifically ask participants about trauma, each of the twelve featured in this report voluntarily disclosed some of their traumatic experiences. Some participants gave evidence of financial well-being despite their circumstances and were able to improve their financial well-being and plans. Others mentioned difficulties in navigating daily financial decision-making. For many participants, past trauma seemed to cast a shadow over not only their mental and physical health but their financial health as well. The role of social support networks in alleviating financial stress, a theme that emerged in our earlier reports on this research, was seen as even more critical for participants affected by traumatic experiences. What has become clear in looking at the stories of these diarists is that it is difficult to isolate their financial lives from the other aspects of their lives. If physical health, mental health, and social health/supportive social networks all inform financial well-being, then drawing on all those systems might be a more holistic approach to restoring financial well-being. Those participants who face ongoing challenges connected to trauma, poverty, and other systemic barriers live out their financial lives under added resistance: they are leaning against the wind.

Literature Review

IN THIS REVIEW of the literature on trauma and financial well-being, we draw from several fields — psychology, economics, and behavioural economics. At the nexus of these disciplines is also the practice of financial therapy, which encompasses an understanding of counselling and financial education and literacy. We begin with a robust description of trauma and its long-term impacts, consider the shame and poor mental health outcomes, and other financial stressors, and end with the hope of resilience built through social cohesion.

Trauma is a deeply alarming and threatening experience causing physical and/or emotional injury which occurs outside of a person's control. When trauma occurs, a person's emotional response to the event is characterized by intense feelings on a spectrum ranging from fear to helplessness (Levenson, 2017). Trauma disrupts a person's sense of self, as someone with the power to affect outcomes and the sense of a comprehensible community. Trauma can occur as a single event or a series of events (chronic) and can be passed along over generations (intergenerational trauma). Janoff-Bulman (1992) considers that trauma destroys underlying notions of how the world functions — trauma makes the world seem unknowable, unmanageable, and without meaning.

Scholars from diverse fields have researched the connections between childhood trauma and development and health outcomes. Magruder, McLaughlin, and Borbon (2017) indicate that trauma in childhood has adverse effects on children's memory and social and intellectual development. Downey and Crummy (2022) consider the long-term impacts of trauma into adulthood, as adults who experienced childhood trauma contend with increased levels of poor mental health, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and distorted ideas of identity. Harter and Harter (2021) link childhood trauma and poor financial well-being. The traumatic events that a child experiences lead to personal stress, decreased financial well-being, and increased levels of financial stress. They describe factors necessary for financial well-being and conclude that financial literacy and knowledge must be accompanied by what can be termed a psychological ability -- an attitude, or a life skill that makes financial well-being a reality. When a child experiences what Harter and Harter name as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as the trauma of poverty, violence, and/or the loss of a caregiver, the child does not develop strong abilities and attitudes for coping, resulting in adulthood characterized by more financial stress and less ability to feel in control of one's finances (Harter & Harter, 2021).

Parise and Peijnenburg (2017) also consider children's experiences with trauma and discuss the importance of emotional stability as a factor for financial well-being in adulthood. They discuss how low levels of emotional stability or consciousness are more likely to lead people to experience financial distress and practice harmful financial behaviours (e.g., they are less likely to save, more likely to use unsecured credit and buy on impulse). They argue that "people with lower non-cognitive abilities tend to make poorer financial decisions, thereby increasing the likelihood of financial distress" (Parise & Peijnenburg, 2017, p. 36).

While the field of psychology has extensive literature on childhood trauma, there is also ample literature about how the traumatic effects of adult experiences lead to poor health outcomes. Hassan, et al. (2021) conclude that scholars have consistently found that financial duress leads to poor mental health. Freshman (2012) documents a form of financial trauma — a sudden loss of accumulated savings through a fraudulent investment scheme — as leading to poor mental health. While this paper focuses on personal and familial trauma and the trauma of living with poverty or a low income, it is essential to realize that people of all socio-economic levels have the potential to experience financial trauma.

As trauma affects emotional functioning, affected persons can turn to therapists to heal their distorted relationships with money. Financial therapists are trained financial counsellors who help people to understand their traumas, become cognizant of the way that these traumas have affected their relationships with money, and work through these traumas to achieve financial well-being. Financial therapists document a significant relationship between trauma and shame (Ross & Coambs, 2018). Ross and Coambs (2018) explain that trauma-affected individuals feel as if they do not deserve to have personal financial needs or emotions. Their sense of shame makes it difficult for trauma-affected persons to express their needs or feel like they have the power to satiate their needs.

Scholars Starrin et al. (2009) argue that a person strained by finances is susceptible to fear and shame. Ross and Coambs (2018) also correlate financial stressors with stress in other areas of people's lives and note that some people find themselves in a cycle of using credit to solve financial stress. Since trauma leads to long-term consequences in part by how it affects the brain to create "places of semantic rigidity and semantic chaos" (Ross & Coambs, 2018, p. 39), various types of trauma can lead people to different types of behaviours with money, including spending, hoarding, controlling, or limiting it (Ross & Coambs, 2018, p. 39).

There is also a structural element to people's sense of shame resulting from trauma. Ross and Coambs (2018) discuss how classism and disregard for the social status of certain occupations negatively affect the financial well-being of people with low incomes. Jorgensen (2020), in her groundbreaking study of inclusive financial well-being, concludes that "[s]ystematic classism and racism result in compounding effects of lower lifetime earnings, limited access to optimal financial services, and additional barriers to achieving financial independence and wealth building" (Jorgensen, 2020, p. 4). Thus, shame is not an individual event with limited outcomes. Shame can be manifested in systems to keep groups of people from accessing financial well-being.

Other traumas that affect people's financial decision-making include major crises like economic recessions or civil wars (Malmendier & Shen, 2020; Imas et al., 2015; Ghilarducci et al., 2018). Imas et al. (2015) note that the experience of major economic upheavals or natural disasters can affect peoples' financial decisions in the future. Those "burned" in the stock market may stay away from it for a very long time, and someone who has survived an earthquake may be more risk-averse about earthquakes in the future.

Several studies have examined how economic upheavals affect financial behaviour (Malmendier & Shen, 2020; Ghilarducci et al., 2018). Malmendier and Shen (2020), for instance, argue that recessions "scar" consumers and this leads to lower spending and higher savings behaviour. Ghilarducci et al. (2018), drawing on a U.S. national data survey, explore the connection between trauma and finances through feelings of fear and anxiety. They examine how fear and anxiety affect people's savings behaviour and contend that these emotions, not inertia, lead to a lower retirement savings rate.

They argue that fear is one of the most powerful human motivators and that along with anxiety, it can lead to harmful psychological, physiological, and behavioural states. They find that workers experiencing a rise in their income do not save more, but those that experience a drop in their earnings reduce their savings rate (Ghilarducci et al., 2018, p. 572). They hypothesize that a negative economic shock, such as a recession, can generate fear and anxiety that may lead people to save less for retirement. A rising income does not lead to rising savings because of status quo bias.

Behavioural studies have shown that bounded rationality can often guide credit choice (Bertrand et al., 2009; Bertrand & Morse, 2011; Benartzi & Thaler, 2004). For instance, Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) found that when faced with scarce income or assets, people "tunnel," or focus on immediate needs and make decisions that might work against their longer-term needs and interests. Imas et al. (2015) undertook a field experiment in the Democratic Republic of the Congo which found evidence of present bias or heavily discounting the future. This bias can harm a person's long-term finances by keeping them too focused on their immediate needs.

It is broadly recognized that recovery from trauma requires the re-establishment of human agency, or the ability to harness interpersonal power (Herman, 2015). Ross and Coambs (2018, p. 49) state: "When the proper ecology for the recognition of trauma occurs, then multiple restorative systems can interact to create a supportive environment that fosters self-agency and personal growth." Scholars also promote the idea that strong community bonds facilitate capacities for resilience. For example, social cohesion has been found to diminish collective trauma (Jewett et al., 2021). In Indigenous traditions, the healing path for trauma is inclusive of families, communities, and nations encompassed in a variety of cultural ceremonies (Menzies, 2008). Ultimately, for some, the path toward healing is individual and entails understanding the far-reaching effects of trauma and learning to develop a different relationship with money, while for others building community helps to lessen the load.

Intergenerational trauma, passed down not only from parents experiencing the loss of personhood but from structures that continue to dehumanize, has had enduring impacts on Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Canadian scholar Peter Menzies (2008, 2010) has written extensively about the ongoing injurious effects of intergenerational trauma on the health and well-being of Indigenous people. Bombay et al. (2009) note that Indigenous people have experienced many adverse childhood experiences, poverty, violence, and discrimination. They explain that survivors of residential schools demonstrate high levels of trauma and clinical diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While the effects of intergenerational trauma on Indigenous family cohesion, education, homelessness, and addictions are often studied, there are also a few studies that examine the relationship between trauma and the finances of Indigenous people. One study of Indigenous women in the United States illustrates that Indigenous women exhibit a connection between trauma and economic well-being: trauma negatively affects economic well-being (Johnston, 2019). An Australian report that evaluates a financial well-being program shows the importance of validating Indigenous knowledges while also understanding that trauma is passed on from generation to generation as the violence of colonialism continues to impact Indigenous Peoples (Louth & Goodwin-Smith, 2018).

Methods

THE CANADIAN FINANCIAL Diaries research project is a multi-year investigation that looks at the financial lives of low- and modest-income households in Canada. The project uses the financial diaries methodology in a distinctly mixed-methods format that includes both quantitative and qualitative components. The financial diaries methodology was initiated by David Hulme, Development Studies at the University of Manchester, and first implemented on a large scale by Darryl Collins and colleagues in a project studying people in Bangladesh, India, and South Africa (Collins et al., 2009). The next large-scale diaries project was undertaken in the United States by Jonathan Morduch and Rachel Schneider (Morduch & Schneider, 2017; Morduch & Siwicki, 2017). Subsequently, the methodology has been used in several countries, including Scotland/United Kingdom (Biosca et al., 2020); India (Dattasharma et al., 2016; Kamath & Dattasharma, 2017); and the combination of Mozambique, Tanzania, and Pakistan (del Puerto Soria et al., 2019). The financial diaries method involves having participants track their finances on a regular — ideally daily — basis and then meeting with them, also regularly — perhaps weekly, biweekly, or monthly — to collect those data. The purpose of the diaries method is to gain detailed data on the participants' finances over time. This enables an in-depth and dynamic analysis that is not possible with survey data.

The Canadian Financial Diaries project intentionally wove into the quantitative financial diaries a substantial qualitative component, resulting in a mixed methodology. A mixed methodology approach has a strong tradition that is rooted in several social science disciplines (Bryman and Bell, 2019; Creswell, 2018) and is sometimes used in economics (Starr, 2014; Morduch, 2019). There are several advantages to a mixed methodology. One is that it allows one to compare results across methods, thereby improving the overall validity of conclusions. Another benefit of mixed methodology is that it enables the generation of data to describe a situation and personal stories to narrate these data. The combination of data and stories is a powerful combination for understanding social and economic problems. Morduch (2019) argues that while randomized control trials (RCTs) have strengths in measuring program outcomes, for example with microcredit programs, they also lack contextualization: "Perhaps unintentionally, the RCTs demonstrate why a diversity of methods — from RCTs that explore other margins to financial diaries and ethnography that provide context — is required to understand the experience of microcredit" (Morduch, 2019, p. 2).

The foundation of the diaries method is the financial diary that each participant maintains. Participants were required to track their income, spending, saving, and borrowing (ideally daily) and then, through weekly or biweekly meetings with project interviewers (including two of the authors of this study), contribute this information to the project. These meetings provided the basis for building relationships and trust with the interviewers and allowed for informal opportunities to talk with participants about their thoughts and feelings about their finances. Trust in the research relationship enabled participants to share some of the life challenges they had experienced. Interviewers kept detailed notes on these meetings, and these logs act as one tool for qualitative analysis. More formal interviews were conducted regularly; the topics of these interviews included experience with the income tax return process, thoughts about financial literacy and well-being, and an exit interview that asked participants about their experiences with the diary process.

The information included in this report is based on quantitative and qualitative data from participants' financial diaries and interview logs. Researchers did not specifically ask about or probe for accounts of trauma, but after the interviews had been completed, we noted that these twelve participants had all shared accounts of traumatic experiences. In writing this report, we have made an intentional effort to distinguish between the voices of the participants and the researchers and to present accurate stories while attempting to remain aware of any personal bias. Pseudonyms have been assigned to each participant to maintain anonymity.

Participants

THE FIRST PHASE of the Financial Diaries project started in 2018 and finished in October 2019, accommodating the gradual recruitment of participants for their one-year involvement. A total of twenty-eight people participated in phase one; twenty-two of them completed the twelve-month term while the remaining participants were engaged for fewer than twelve months.

By meeting with project participants on a weekly or biweekly basis, a level of relational trust was established between the research team and participants. Participants shared information about their finances, their lives, and the details of some of their personal experiences. Trauma was a common thread running through their stories.

The twelve participants selected for this summary came from a diversity of cultural backgrounds, ages, and income levels (Table 1). Two participants were retired. Two were considered precariously employed.[1] Seven of the participants received help from Manitoba's social assistance program, Employment and Income Assistance (EIA), and two of these received disability EIA. None of the twelve was employed full-time. Six participants identified their cultural backgrounds as Indigenous. Two of the participants described themselves as newcomers to Canada. Nine were female and two were male. They ranged in age from their early twenties up to their early sixties. All disclosed — either in detail or in passing — events or situations that can be considered traumatic.

1 One participant is considered both retired and precariously employed as she is a foster parent, so she is counted twice in these categories.

TABLE 1 Socio-demographic Data of Participants in Trauma Group

Pseudonym	Indigenous person identity	Refugee to Canada	Age	Smart phone, tablet, or computer	Internet connection	Diary duration (weeks)	Hhld annual income*	Per capita hhld annual income
Donna	No	No	63	Yes	Yes	52	$21,857	$21,857
Jacquelyn	Yes	No	36	Yes	No	52	$19,360	$19,360
Kateryna	No	No	53	Yes	No	52	$13,763	$13,763
Linda	Yes	No	63	Yes	Yes	52	$7,724	$7,724
Melissa	No	No	47	Yes	Yes	52	$19,636	$13,885
Mia	Yes	No	40	Yes	Yes	22	$13,375	$13,375
Namid	Yes	No	30	Yes	No	21	$7,051	$4,986
Nita	Yes	No	59	Yes	No	52	$40,764	$40,764
Ochieng	No	Yes	59	Yes	Yes	29	$5,228	$5,228
Rupi	No	No	44	Yes	Yes	52	$17,630	$12,466
Sarah	No	No	55	Yes	Yes	52	$20,547	$20,547
Sylvie	Yes	No	34	Yes	Yes	16	$16,511	$16,511
Average							**$20,851**	**$18,234**

* Incomes of less than one year were annualized.

A few participants were not able to complete the full fifty-two-week diary period. Namid was unable to continue because of illness and the need to enter addiction treatment. Both Mia and Sylvie, in addition to transitioning from addiction treatment, gave birth during their time with the project. They were also in the process of regaining custody of their older children, who lived in care. Both shared at some point that participation in the project was too overwhelming during this period of their lives and continuing was not feasible.

Results: Common and Uncommon Experiences with Trauma and Finances

IN THIS SECTION, we identify results from our study that highlight the connections between trauma and finances: how finances affect trauma and how trauma affects finances. Trauma is, as discussed above, a deeply alarming and threatening experience causing physical and/or emotional injury that occurs outside of a person's control. Traumatic experiences can be diverse and can include events such as accidents, violence, bereavement or sudden loss. Other adverse experiences such as long-term relational abuse, abandonment, neglect, family separation, and poverty can also have long-term negative consequences. Multiple traumatic experiences can result in complex trauma. Social structural inequalities can also not only cause traumatic injury but also compound its impacts. Systemic trauma such as racism often exacerbates or perpetuates the social, emotional, and financial stressors experienced by those in the margins. All participants displayed remarkable resilience in the wake of in some cases many personal traumas and systemic barriers.

While each participant's lived experiences are unique, some commonalities emerged across their stories (Table 2). Several participants shared accounts of early childhood stressors and adversity in their families. Others spoke

TABLE 2 Some Sources of Trauma, by Diarist

Pseudonym	Identified hardships
Donna	Marriage that ended; nearly homeless for a time; low income
Jacquelyn	Impact of colonialism; fragile social support; foster child; complex one-sided lending; precarious employment; predatory debt; low income
Kateryna	Informal and exploitative employment; harassment in previous jobs; very low income
Linda	Foster care; hunger as a child; suicide of an adult child; depression; sexual assault; robbery; extremely low income
Melissa	Family breakdown; loss of connection to and then death of father; major car injury; neglectful mother; death of husband; subjected to ableism; low income
Mia	Involved in recovery program for healing from addiction and abuse; custody issues; very low income
Namid	Extreme poverty; substance addiction; illness; unstable housing; murder of wife and son; suicide attempt; extremely low income
Nita	Parents with alcoholism; adult son with alcoholism; residential school; foster care
Ochieng	Landmine injury; imprisonment and torture; financial trauma (debt); family breakdown; racism; extremely low income
Rupi	Physical health challenges; displacement trauma; status loss; credentialing barrier as newcomer; abusive ex-husband; low income; lack of social capital and support
Sarah	Financial loss from divorce; child's illness; bankruptcy; low income
Sylvie	Involved in recovery program for healing from addiction and abuse; child custody issues; low income

about past relationship abuses, mostly interpersonal but also within work relationships. A few experienced sudden traumatic experiences, such as sexual violence, the death of loved ones, or accidents. Some lived with chronic health issues, pain, and disabilities. Many of the participants experienced more than one type of trauma. Some participants not only continued to be impacted by past trauma but were also living in contexts of ongoing adversity, which compounded the effects of trauma and negatively impacted their financial well-being. Below, we discuss trauma experienced by the diarists in four areas: early childhood, relationships, sudden events, and socio-structural inequalities.

As six of twelve participants in our study were Indigenous people, we are invited to consider the context of systemic and intergenerational trauma affecting First Nations Peoples. Weakened family bonds and disconnection from culture as a result of residential schools and the Sixties Scoop[2] negatively affected the Indigenous participants. Actions supposedly undertaken for the welfare of the participants who were victims of the Sixties Scoop seem to have had lasting and far-reaching traumatic impacts culturally, relationally, and financially.

2 The Sixties Scoop refers to child welfare practices from 1960–1990, when Indigenous children were removed from the care of their birth families and placed into the care of white, middle-class families across North America, a practice now recognized as extremely deleterious to the cultural identities of these children.

Early Childhood Adversity

One commonality among participants was various adverse experiences in childhood in which their physical and/or emotional health was threatened. Three participants — Jacquelyn, Linda, and Nita — were removed from their Indigenous families of origin and placed into foster care as children. The fragile social support system Jacquelyn described to researchers demonstrates that she continues to be adversely impacted by the trauma of family separation. While Jacquelyn has maintained a connection to a former foster parent, she does not have custody of her children. Linda shared with researchers that she regularly experienced food scarcity and hunger as a child and was removed from her home (and culture) as part of the Sixties Scoop. Although her family of origin is Indigenous, Linda identifies more closely with the cultural background of her foster family and prefers to identify as Canadian.

Nita told researchers that she came from a family of ten children. Nita's parents struggled with alcohol abuse when she was a child, and she was removed from her family and placed in foster care. She attended residential school as a part of the Sixties Scoop. Nita's adult son, Namid, was also a participant in the Financial Diaries project. His struggle with addiction highlights the generational implications of such trauma. These participants have experienced the harms of residential schools and other colonization processes, which have traumatized subsequent generations of Indigenous people in Canada.

Melissa also described traumatic experiences from her childhood. Her parents were divorced when she was fifteen and her father, with whom she was close, subsequently moved to another province. When Melissa was seventeen, she was in a car accident that left her with a broken collar bone. She was separated from her family for an extended period while she recuperated from her injuries. Melissa shared that this separation was made more painful for her because she felt that the reason it occurred was that her mom did not want to take care of her at home. This has resulted in a permanent strain on their relationship.

Relational Trauma

Another commonality noted in the stories of some participants was that of relational trauma, which led to financial trauma and vulnerability. In part, because most participants were female and heterosexual, most of these stories came from women who had experienced abuse by male partners.

Donna, Kateryna, and Rupi described financial neglect or abuse suffered at the hands of former partners. Two of these participants also recounted financial exploitation in the workplace. Rupi shared that she had experienced intimate partner violence. Another participant, Sarah, did not talk about physical or emotional abuse but had suffered financial trauma in the form of bankruptcy and loss of her business after her divorce when she was left to raise two young children, one of whom had a serious medical condition that was costly to treat. The one male participant in this subset, Ochieng, had suffered financial loss and betrayal by his partner.

Donna shared with the Financial Diaries team that finances in her marriage were challenging and that her divorce had been tumultuous. While married, Donna had owned a home with her now ex-husband. After she left her marriage, her husband defaulted on mortgage payments for the home, leaving Donna, now a single parent to their four young children, in financial distress. The bank took all her savings ($5,000), and Donna's phone line and Canada Child Benefits (CCB) were cut for several weeks. At one point, she faced the prospect of homelessness and was forced to choose between transportation or shelter for her family.

Rupi, a newcomer from South Asia, disclosed that her marriage to her ex-husband had been abusive. Their marriage had been arranged and she first met him only briefly on their wedding day. They were married for only three years before she left. Rupi told the research team that her ex-husband had not seen or supported his daughter since she was one year old. She shared that she is not even certain that the divorce is final, and although her daughter was born in the United States and is a U.S. citizen, she is uncertain about her entitlements.

Another participant, Kateryna, talked about an ongoing pattern of abuse within the workplace. At the time of her participation in the project, Kateryna worked casually "under the table" at a local business in the service sector. She told researchers that her relationship with the business owner for whom she works informally is complicated; the lines between business and friendship are blurred. While Kateryna described the relationship as one of "bartering," she was not receiving fair wages, a practice which is both exploitative and illegal.

Kateryna also recounted past work-related experiences of being treated unfairly. At one time, Kateryna had been employed in an administrative capacity at a local manufacturing company. However, when she ended an unhealthy relationship with a co-worker, it was she (and not her partner) who was terminated at the workplace. Kateryna later also experienced "harassment" from her next manager while working a retail position and again when she was in the employ of a communal living facility for seniors. Kateryna told us that these experiences caused her to turn to Employment Insurance (EI). The traumas that she experienced seemed to have led her to devalue herself and her work. This is one of the aspects of trauma.

Ochieng shared with researchers that his wife had had an affair with his adult son, and together they accumulated a high debt on Ochieng's credit cards, which led to the dissolution of Ochieng's marriage and the loss of his home and assets. The betrayal of a spouse and a child are forms of relational trauma. This betrayal also resulted in a devastating financial loss, which is a form of financial trauma. Ochieng's story is an example of how repeated traumatic experiences can compound their impacts. Ochieng expressed a level of resignation regarding his limited finances that could be viewed as "powerlessness," which Levenson (2017) describes as one manifestation of a trauma response.

Sarah told researchers that she had managed a variety of businesses in the past but experienced sudden financial loss after her marriage to her children's father ended and her son fell ill. Suddenly a single parent of two young children (ages six and eight), Sarah became overburdened with medical bills for her son and had to declare bankruptcy. In Sarah's view, this was a pivotal point in her financial well-being: "So that kind of got me behind the eight ball and I ended up having to declare bankruptcy so that I could pay the medical bills. From there, I've just never had extra. I've always been in the low-income spectrum, I guess you'd say."

Both Mia and Sylvie began participating in the Financial Diaries project while transitioning out of a recovery program for women healing from abuse and addictions. They were in the process of regaining custody of their children. Beyond these details, these two participants did not share much about their struggles with researchers other than the details of their financial diaries. Additionally, neither of these two stayed with the project beyond three months. As noted earlier, besides being in the process of regaining custody of their other children, they each gave birth during this period. This may be why we did not learn more about their additional struggles.

Sudden Traumatic Events

Some of the participants shared that in addition to experiencing childhood and relational stressors, they had also experienced sudden traumatic events such as accidents, sexual assault, loss of loved ones, or workplace-related injuries. Several participants' stories revealed that they had faced adversity on multiple levels. Some spoke of having long-term health issues or having to face systemic racism or ableism — factors that hindered their overall health and impacted their financial well-being.

Melissa lives with a permanent disability. She lost her husband to a terminal illness when their child was still an infant. Melissa was thrust into the role of a single parent and left to navigate the care of her baby while also grieving her loss. These are multiple and overlapping traumas. The sudden illness of a loved one, particularly a life partner, is traumatic, especially when this illness ends in the passing of the partner. Experiencing such circumstances while also being pregnant, giving birth, and caring for a newborn would certainly compound the stressors.

Ochieng shared his experience of numerous traumatic events. In addition to his recent family betrayal and bankruptcy, he had suffered trauma and violence in his country of origin East Africa. He lost a limb in an accident and then suffered violence at the hands of local authorities who were investigating the incident. After arriving in Canada as a refugee, Ochieng said, he also faced systemic racism. More recently, he sustained an injury to his eyes when he changed a wheelchair battery (this occurred during one of his volunteer jobs) and some battery acid splashed into his eyes. He told the research team that he still suffers from damage to his eyes.

Linda told researchers about multiple traumatic events in her life. Besides growing up in foster care, she lost her only child, a daughter, who committed suicide shortly after giving birth to Linda's grandchild. This grandchild is being raised by Linda's sister and therefore, according to Linda, the relationship between herself and her grandchild is not as close as she likes it to be. More recently, Linda was sexually assaulted, and fears for her safety continue to preoccupy her mind and make demands on her financially, as she subscribes to a cellphone plan that she cannot afford but feels is essential for her security. She also suffered a workplace injury a few years before her participation in the Financial Diaries project. She has not been able to return to regular employment and continues to suffer from several health issues (diabetes and high blood pressure). Her income is extremely limited, creating a circumstance of food scarcity in her senior years that mirrors her childhood experiences. Linda sometimes volunteers in exchange for food, but this is insufficient for her needs. "There are days I … can't afford to eat. You just don't eat."

Nita shared that one of her sons was murdered a few years before she participated in the Financial Diaries project. Her other son (Namid, also a participant) struggles with alcoholism. Although her resources are limited, she often takes him in when his addiction leaves him without resources. Namid also told researchers about the murder of his brother. He also disclosed that his wife and child were murdered during the time he was serving a jail sentence. Namid revealed that upon hearing about their deaths, he had been placed on suicide watch. Namid was open with the research team about his ongoing struggle with addiction. His financial diaries indicated impulsive spending patterns, which research has linked to trauma (Ross & Coambs, 2018, p. 48).

The Impact of Trauma

While Donna, Kateryna, Rupi, and Sarah all shared with researchers about various forms of relational trauma, their stories and the impacts on their financial and overall well-being were unique and diverse. In her early fifties at the time of her participation in the Financial Diaries project, Donna's financial well-being had improved. She had the support of a family member who had both financial knowledge and resources to assist her in recovering her financial well-being. The bank eventually forgave her debt, and with the help of her parents (the $25,000 needed for a payment), Donna was able to purchase a home once again. The social network Donna enjoyed seemed to facilitate the resiliency that enabled Donna to recover from the trauma of the breakup of her marriage and ensuing financial losses. These types of strong interpersonal connections and supports have been linked to resilience in the wake of trauma (Jewett et al., 2021; Ross & Coambs, 2018). Donna was able to access training and a professional position as an educational assistant and now receives a modest private pension from her former employer. Donna (similar to other participants such as Sarah, Nita, and Jacquelyn) made credit choices with a present focus, such as borrowing on her HELOC (Home Equity Line of Credit) beyond her immediate ability to repay, a spending behaviour that research has shown is typical of those with limited resources, who tend to focus on immediate needs to the detriment of long-term interests (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013). However, the support Donna had received to purchase her own home now placed her in a position to draw on her assets, whereas other participants without assets (such as Jacquelyn, who owed money for outstanding payday loans) were more vulnerable to one-sided lending options.

Sarah, for example, was not able to recover her financial well-being after her divorce and financial loss. She came into the project carrying significant personal and student loans, as well as credit card debt. Sarah also struggled with a chronic health issue; pain limited the amount of time that she could spend working. Although she considered herself to be a good financial manager, Sarah's debt load and health issues prevented her from moving into a higher income bracket.

Like Donna, Rupi reported positive support and influences in childhood and had learned about good financial management practices. At the time of her participation in the project, however, Rupi was a single parent and recent newcomer to Canada and was still actively searching for support. Although she had earned a master's degree in business administration outside of Canada, she was not able to find stable employment in Canada. At one point, Rupi was working casually "under the table," cooking for a local restaurant. She mentioned several employment barriers she faced: ongoing health issues; receiving EIA benefits and therefore not considered employable, and subsequently not eligible for training programs that could assist her in finding stable employment. Despite these disadvantages, Rupi contributes regularly to a Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA) and a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) for her daughter. Rupi's long-term financial goal was homeownership, but she was not sure how she would accomplish this.

Like Rupi, Kateryna also worked in the informal economy. Although she was regularly employed in the past, she told researchers that she turned to EI after repeated experiences of workplace harassment. According to Levenson (2017), exposure to traumatic experiences can result in feelings of helplessness. Kateryna's decision to stop looking for work in the formal economy may have been a trauma response. This choice left Kateryna with a limited income, and food scarcity, and unfortunately exposed to further exploitation through informal employment. Kateryna told researchers that she was satisfied with her financial situation; however, she seemed to make do with what for many might seem inadequate resources. According to Ross and Coambs (2018), expressions of contentment in circumstances such as Kateryna's might equally be a form of financial denial indicative of underlying personal trauma.

Socio-Structural Inequalities

As we have seen from the literature, those who have suffered trauma have a heightened response to normal stressors (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Downey & Crummy, 2022). Poverty creates additional stress that compounds those stressors. Therefore, the conventional conclusion that people are poor because of their lack of effort is incorrect. From listening to the stories of the participants in this study, it is evident that many were working hard at managing their resources and living within their means — which is how many participants defined financial well-being. Some, like Rupi and Melissa, were doing so despite facing multiple traumas and systemic barriers.

Melissa and Ochieng were both living with a disability, which limited their options for work. Both were receiving EIA, and both were contributing significantly to their communities through volunteer work.[3] Both also had supportive networks. Ochieng's volunteer associations and his connections to a local church buffered the absence of his lost family and community support. Melissa had access to in-home disability care and the autonomy to hire her assistants. Both talked about their frugal financial practices. Melissa was even able to save for her son's future.

Many of the project participants had no discretionary income. For example, some participants, such as Linda and Namid, had income levels that placed them at risk of going without food regularly. In addition, some participants' financial decision-making was predetermined for them. Namid's rent for his rooming house, for example, was paid directly by EIA, Mia's housing was completely (and directly) subsidized, and Sylvie received in-kind groceries and purchase vouchers for the periods when her children (still in care) would come to visit her. Because Mia and Sylvie were transitioning out of a rehabilitation program, they were living on-site and receiving minimal income. These circumstances may have impacted some of their financial decision-making processes during the project. Recent research has pointed to the impacts of assistance (in particular, the constraints on the way recipients can use benefits) on financial decision-making, suggesting that people in such circumstances may not have adequate opportunities to develop financial management skills (Parise & Peijnenburg, 2017).

Ochieng was another participant with such a low income that after meeting his basic needs, there was nothing left for savings or discretionary spending. Ochieng's situation cemented his opinion that any training was futile for individuals in his circumstances. Other participants, however, such as Rupi and Melissa, although on limited incomes, were able to earmark some of their income for savings and use savings products such as RRSPs and TFSAs to plan for their financial futures.

3 We note a correlation for some participants between volunteer work and stronger social supports/ increased agency. We posit that helping may serve to mitigate feelings of helplessness after traumatic experiences.

A commonality in the stories of Melissa, Linda, Jacquelyn, and Nita was that they had all experienced adverse childhood experiences, although Melissa's experiences were confined to her later teen years while those of the others spanned their entire childhoods. All participants were also single parents at one point in their lives. Melissa, despite her experiences and her disability, had relatively stable finances (though at an extremely limited income level since she could not work and received EIA) and was able to save for her son's future. She talked about being able to stock up on groceries for the future when there were sales.

Linda's circumstances were vastly different. Linda came into the project with almost no assets. Because of her previous workplace injury and poor health, Linda was only able to work casually while receiving EIA. With her limited income, Linda often went without meals. She shared with researchers that she did not feel in control of her finances and often delayed paying bills. Linda was not able to save enough to be able to respond to financial emergencies. "I try so hard but I never [can], even if I put every dime on it." She told researchers that she would love to know what it was like to be able to have a full refrigerator.

Jacquelyn also had few assets coming into the project. Like Linda, Jacquelyn lived paycheque to paycheque. Precariously employed by a temporary agency, she was earning more than she had in the past, but this increase caused a reduction in the amount of Rent Assist she received, which left her no better off (Rent Assist is a provincial benefit to help those on EIA or those with lower incomes with housing costs). Jacquelyn shared that she carried a large debt load and a poor credit rating. Payday loans and communications bills from past years had gone to collections and now amounted to nearly $20,000. She also shared with researchers that she was involved in several one-sided lending relationships. Her former foster parent, who used to be a source of support, was now borrowing from Jacquelyn. Jacquelyn's roommate (who had been inconsistent with rent) moved out during Jacquelyn's time with the project, leaving Jacquelyn solely responsible for the rent for their two-bedroom apartment. Jacquelyn was still paying a cellphone contract she took out for a former partner. She also frequently paid for her daughter's phone bill and often lent money to family members, leaving her without enough to buy groceries for herself. The literature draws correlations between accumulated or childhood trauma and harmful financial behaviours such as one-sided lending, which can create added stress (Parise & Peijenburg, 2017).

Nita received most of her income from her role as a foster parent to three children. She told researchers that she felt knowledgeable about finances.

She had learned about financial management from her father and had a certificate in business administration from a local community college. Despite this, Nita shared that she did not feel in control of her finances. She told researchers that she frequently lent money to her children and that these loans were seldom repaid. She described paying for her adult children's phone bills and spending her time driving them to appointments or caring for her grandchildren, often to the point of neglecting herself. This help also extended to Nita's son, Namid, also a participant in the project. In his struggles with addiction, Namid often turned to his mother for food, finances, and shelter when he ran out of money. At one point, Namid used his mother's credit card without her permission. The sense of responsibility Nita expressed toward supporting her family in the context of a precarious income and insufficient support for herself is itself a significant stressor. Having to deal with an alcoholic family member can also contribute to both emotional and financial stress.

Linda, Jacquelyn, Nita, and Namid (as well as Sylvie and Mia) — six of the twelve participants included in this paper — were born into Indigenous families. Linda, Jacquelyn, and Nita recounted their experiences of being removed from their families of origin and their cultures as young children during the Sixties Scoop. Separation from one's family is traumatic, as is separation from one's culture. At least three participants described additional trauma related to family separation. Jacquelyn, Mia, and Sylvie did not have custody of their children when they started participating in the project, though Mia and Sylvie regained custody shortly after. Nita spoke of the difficulties she faced gaining employment as a result of her past criminal record. Namid had also spent time in prison. Systemic racism often criminalizes racialized communities, and this often results in higher rates of criminal charges and incarceration.

Ochieng and Rupi also spoke of facing systemic racism. While Ochieng did not share specific details, Rupi told researchers that finding work in Canada had been difficult, since her degrees from outside the country were not recognized. She found herself working in the informal economy in the service industry. Rupi spoke of her feelings of loss arising from not having a respectable job. She had worked in Bangladesh as a deputy manager of an electrical company and was earning $3,000 to $4,000 per month. Status loss is a very real stressor for newcomers, especially those from racialized communities. Rupi also disclosed that because of her health issues, she had applied to go on disability support but was not accepted.

Discussion

We find that two important levels of trauma-impacted participants: the personal/family level and the institutional/social level. Each participant had different experiences with these sources of trauma (*Table 3*). In some cases, the more personal trauma seemed to dominate and in other cases, it was the institutional traumas. For many participants, trauma seemed to come from both sources. This means that not only were participants' difficulties during their time with the Financial Diaries project characterized by a lack of trajectory that was seemingly linked with their traumatic experiences, but the harms they suffered were also sometimes multiplied by many stressors, reinforced by bias and stereotypes, and compounded by systemic barriers.

In returning to our research question — how does trauma affect financial behaviour? — we find that the consequences of these personal and social pressures are a series of behaviours that reinforce everyday survival but may harm people further, in the medium to long term. Even more critically, these survival mechanisms, sometimes rooted in traumatic situations, can lead to distinct types of harmful biases, such as present bias and status quo bias. Additionally, these individuals may simultaneously face institutions that are exclusionary and manifest racism, reinforce poverty, and force people to rely on the informal sector.

We can see that those impacted on many levels face compounding barriers to maintaining or recovering their financial well-being. The fact that these participants were working through both trauma and financial

TABLE 3 Personal and Institutional Trauma

Level	Personal, family, community	Institutional, social, structural
Description	Decision making and behaviour for everyday survival	Institutional structures that foster social exclusion by banks, government institutions
Examples	• Early childhood adversity • Relational trauma • Sudden traumatic event	• Racism: social and institutional manifestations • Welfare benefits well below the official poverty line • Low-paying jobs • Exploitative informal sector jobs • Inaccessible basic banking
Some consequences	• Reliance on family and informal sector with possibility of one-way relationship • Distrust toward modern institutions, e.g., state, bank • Not using effective tools to look for work • Not building new search and work skills, e.g., computer, internet • Over-spending, not saving, relying on predatory credit	

hardship within a socio-economic system still deeply informed by systemic bias created additional obstacles to their emotional and financial well-being.

But we note that trauma affects finances and financial decision-making in different ways. In some cases, trauma led people to develop strong resiliencies, but in other cases, trauma led people to have trouble with their finances. Some diarists shared that they had trouble navigating financial decision-making. Namid, for example, had impulsive spending patterns. Researchers noted that during one of their meetings, Namid indicated that he had spent nearly his entire EIA cheques in a twenty-four-hour period (on alcohol and transportation). Compulsive spending is a financial behaviour that has traditionally been viewed as financial irresponsibility. It is often met, as in Namid's situation, with an effort to reduce the amount of discretionary spending available to the individual (such as when EIA pays rent directly). A trauma-informed perspective, which sees impulsive spending by those with traumatic injuries as an effort to fill deeply unmet needs (Ross & Coambs, 2018, p. 48), might not only help remove this judgment but also prescribe additional supports to deal with the root causes of such financial behaviours (which work to undermine financial well-being and cause added distress for those already navigating loss and trauma.)

The most salient commonality amongst the stories of these participants was the presence of one or more supportive networks in their lives, which speaks to the vital role played by social support in trauma-impacted individuals, not only for emotional but also for financial well-being and resilience. Donna, for example, who lost her home and assets after a contentious divorce, told researchers that she believed her experiences had made her stronger. With the help of her family, she was eventually able to purchase another home.

Linda was actively working to improve her physical health through daily exercise. Because of her experiences with food scarcity as a child, Linda was very involved in her church community and volunteering. Melissa was actively saving for her son's future and her own. She also undertook the responsibility of hiring her care workers. Melissa expressed confidence in her financial management skills and was co-facilitating an upcoming class on money management at a local non-profit organization. Ochieng emphasized to the research team that he valued social connections more highly than finances, and he worked to deliberately cultivate these relationships. He told us about the strong social network he enjoyed through his volunteer work and from his local church community. Ochieng spoke about being able to depend on these connections for the type of support that would normally come from family, such as his pastor is willing to be his emergency contact.

Conclusion and Recommendations

THROUGH A BETTER understanding of the relationship between trauma and finances, we can imagine financial empowerment practices and policies that will better support people with low and modest incomes. This final section of this study identifies five features of the finance-trauma relationship that have implications for practice and policy.

Recognition That Trauma-Affected Poverty Is Multi-Faceted

Trauma-affected poverty is complex and involves financial, psycho-social, and political dimensions. This might be because financial problems have spilt into mental well-being and social connections. Or a relationship breakup may have eroded a person's confidence and hurt their employment or employability. However, it starts, trauma-affected poverty is a kind of poverty that cannot be solved by finances alone. There are personal, psychological, and social aspects to be addressed as well as political system changes needed for recovery. This means that an effective response to trauma-affected poverty must recognize the multi-faceted nature of the problem. To resolve the challenge of trauma-affected poverty, improved finances, mental and social support, and socio-political changes are necessary. This is not to say that all elements of the problem must be addressed simultaneously. What is important to recognize is that recovering from trauma-affected poverty is a process that involves many steps and will take time.

Our study found that trauma can be rooted in personal issues (e.g., mental health, addictions, ability challenges), family-level issues (relationship breakdown, negative childhood experiences with parents, addictions of family members), community-level issues (workplace harassment, experiences with violence) and systemic issues (racism, colonialism). These issues are rooted at one level but often have connections with other levels. A person with a physical disability may be able to do a particular job, but it is the prejudice of ableism that stigmatizes that person and prevents them from doing it. A person's addiction may have a connection to their experience as the child of a parent with an addiction. An Indigenous person or newcomer Canadian may experience mental health challenges because of systemic racism and colonization.

A debate on addressing homelessness can be seen as comparable: Is it more effective to treat people experiencing homelessness who suffer from addictions first for addictions, and then work on finding them housing? Or is it better to offer to the house first, providing them with the security that will better enable them to overcome their addictions? Treatment first or housing first? We might think of the response to trauma-affected poverty in a similar way to homelessness. The equivalent question for responding to trauma-affected poverty would be whether to first address the non-financial sources of trauma or on the other hand, first, treat the financial sources of trauma.

Trying to address all the trauma-affected poverty issues at once, and quickly, is not practical and probably not effective. But the recognition that recovery is a process (on many different levels) and that improved finances are just one part of the process roots the solution in a more realistic assessment of trauma-affected poverty. Financial problems such as debt and insufficient income add to the stress experienced by those who have experienced trauma. Efforts to mitigate this strain contribute to a holistic approach to financial, emotional, and physical well-being. A key step to addressing trauma-affected poverty is improved finances, including help with budgets (financial literacy), banking (financial inclusion), debt relief, income supports (minimum income), and employment situation (fully employed at a living wage).

Trauma-affected poverty affects both individuals and groups. It is well known that poverty affects individuals but sometimes how poverty affects larger collectives is not seen or well understood. Inner-city neighbourhoods, low-income inner suburbs, and remote rural locations are geographic communities in which trauma-affected poverty may be more common. Larger collectives such as newcomer Canadians, Indigenous Peoples, and single-parent households are more likely to face trauma-affected poverty. Policies and practices seeking to address trauma-affected poverty need to be cognizant of its collective and systemic nature. Financial literacy, financial inclusion, income support, and employment promotion, discussed below, all need to be contextualized by collective interest, needs, and principles.

One-half of the participants in this study of trauma were Indigenous people, and the various types of trauma they experienced included, for most, trauma affected by systemic racism. In addition to the recommendations below, efforts to promote reconciliation are critical to addressing this type of trauma. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action include a call for public servants to be educated about the experience of Indigenous Peoples:

> We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada).

Directing these programs to public servants and private sector staff who implement programs that connect with people with low income would be particularly helpful. This includes social assistance providers, employment trainers, bankers, and insurance providers.

Financial Literacy that is Trauma-Informed

As we have seen in this study, diarists were affected by different types of trauma, and these traumas affected their finances. For instance, some diarists found themselves in debt and with bad credit because of a relationship breakup, loss of a spouse through death, or financial abuse where they were left with the debts incurred by a former abusive partner. We believe that financial literacy programs that work with people with low and modest incomes who may have experienced trauma like this will be more successful if their practices are informed by an understanding of the trauma effect.

One way to better “trauma inform” financial literacy programs is to use an empowerment model (Jorgenson, 2020). The empowerment model, appropriate for adult education, places the student in the centre using means such as listening, facilitating, and encouraging to assist the student, within a group of peers, to better understand their strengths and challenges. An empowering financial literacy education seeks to learn from participants what they believe will empower them. Empowering financial literacy also requires that the facilitator clearly understand the financial challenges, opportunities, and realities faced by people in that peer group. A trained facilitator combines knowledge of appropriate financial literacy with knowledge of the student group to guide and direct that group to greater knowledge and enhanced skills to fulfil their self-identified financial goals. And above all else, a financial literacy educator needs to listen (or be available to listen).

Interestingly, while the Financial Diaries project did not engage in nor aspire to offer financial literacy education, we noted that many participants found the diary process therapeutic (Box 1). Sharing financial information, goals, and challenges with a sympathetic person in a setting where trust was built was critically important. These participants felt listened to and taken seriously, and this in turn inspired them to pursue their own financial goals. In our meetings with participants, we affirmed their agency, assets, and knowledge. For financial literacy to be effective it must be premised on this asset-based approach. Recent research finds that the financial diary can be an effective means of boosting financial literacy (Islam et al., 2021) (Box 1).

Trauma-affected individuals frequently struggle with shame and the inability to express or meet their own needs (Ross & Coambs, 2018). In addition, those in poverty experience the shame and stigma associated with being poor. A trauma-informed approach to financial literacy and financial empowerment acknowledges this dynamic and seeks to offer a non-judgmental approach when working with those who have experienced trauma. For example, the literature makes connections between impulsive spending and trauma and sees this behaviour as one through which an individual is attempting to meet an unfilled need rather than as an act of irresponsibility (Ross & Coambs, 2018). A focus on understanding the context in which people live their financial lives, including a trauma-informed perspective that actively works to remove judgment and shame, will be more effective at meeting the emotional, psychological, and financial needs of those whom we want to see empowered than an approach that focuses solely on financial knowledge.

Diarists’ Experiences With the Financial Diary Process

We note that some participants found the diary process stressful, while others found it helpful. In fact, we were surprised to find that at the end of the process, several participants described the process as being therapeutic.

Some participants shared that they found their meetings with the research team to be helpful but that the actual tracking and reconciling process itself was extremely stressful. This meant that quantitative data for financial flows were sometimes incomplete. One participant (Mia) commented about feeling very stressed and overwhelmed by tasks such as financial tracking. Another participant (Linda) spoke about avoiding paying bills because of the stress. These are examples of what is sometimes referred to as “mental tax”—the additional stress faced by those constantly required to make difficult financial choices with insufficient resources (Robson & Shaban, 2020).

While several participants found the more detailed tracking process difficult, many experienced their meetings with researchers to be both beneficial and enjoyable. Some pointed to the conversations they had with researchers about their financial transactions as opportunities to re-examine their choices and budgeting processes. More than one participant in phase one described their conversations with the Financial Diaries research team as “therapy.” For them, the simple act of discussing their financial lives with another person was helpful in and of itself. Nita, for example, pointed to this aspect of the project as having the greatest impact. While the interviews and meetings with participants were intended simply to gather qualitative data and hear their stories (not as therapy), the participants’ response to this method is reinforced in the literature. Trauma-affected people might be more effectively moved toward financial well-being by first addressing their emotional needs, as opposed to providing financial literacy training alone (Parise & Peijnenburg, 2017, p. 38).

Financial Inclusion that is Realistic

Diary participants often pay higher bank fees than they need to and do not have access to appropriate, safe, and necessary financial products. This might be because they rely on fringe banks (e.g., payday lenders, instalment lenders, cheque cashers), or because they do not know the full range of services available at mainstream banks (e.g., a chartered bank or credit union). This might be because there is no bank in their neighbourhood or there is no bank that they feel comfortable using. This leads to what Spotton Visano (Buckland and Spotton Visano 2022) calls the poverty penalty: people with low-income face poorer quality banking services but pay more for them. Banks, credit unions, and Canada Post (with its new loan product on the market) must seek to improve the quality of basic banking services to people who are more likely to live in neighbourhoods with low average incomes and may not always have resources to access internet banking. For a bank to state goals such as “reconciliation starts here” but then not allow some people to open a bank account is an example of a lofty goal with weak implementation (CBC 2022).

There are many practical ways financial inclusion might be implemented, including opening special branches, offering special products, promoting basic banking services, training staff on basic banking, and retaining and/or expanding banking in marginalized neighbourhoods. Credit unions, as a collective relatively smaller than mainstream banks, have nevertheless played a critical role in addressing financial inclusion. Their efforts could be replicated by the handful of large oligopolistic Canadian banks, and the federal government could apply policy pressure to require them to do so.

Income Supports That Are Sufficient

Having a low income is a significant contributor to trauma-affected poverty. In some cases, diarists had low-waged full-time jobs; more commonly they were piecing together casual part-time jobs, or not earning a wage but relying on social support. These conditions led to insufficient income that aggravated trauma-affected poverty. Government welfare rates are usually below the official poverty line. Some groups, such as families with children and seniors receive additional federal government support but it is often not enough and other groups do not receive that support.

Classism tends to stigmatize people with low incomes, blame them for their poverty, and argue that social supports undermine their motivation. A further argument is that more meaningful government support for people experiencing trauma-affected poverty will place a heavy burden on the government and impoverish the nation. But this ignores the consequences of not addressing poverty. Lingering poverty can lead to a variety of outcomes that are even more expensive to address, including homelessness, addictions, and petty crime. By supporting people with low incomes, society is fostering greater equity and social harmony, which can allay future costs. Moreover, people who experience trauma-affected poverty are less able to reach their full potential. Thus, by being parsimonious, society is losing out on the valuable contributions that could have been made by people who have been marginalized.

Fairly Paid, More Stable Employment That Enhances the Person's Capability

Diary participants valued employment. In some cases, they worked full-time, in other cases part-time, and in other cases, they were largely unemployed. Regardless of the type of employment they had, and even if they were unemployed, diarists were active. Those diarists who were largely unemployed kept busy with many other activities, including caring for family and friends and connecting with the larger community. Much of this activity by unemployed diarists, contributed to their family's and neighbourhood's good. The lack of recognition of the unpaid work that many trauma-impacted people do diminishes the actual value of their very real contributions to both the social and economic well-being of their families and communities. This leaves them open to judgment, blame, and shame about their lack of effort to earn money, and therefore for their poverty. However, it was the lack of fairly paid work that prevented many diarists from engaging in a constructive and creative activity that would provide them with a steady source of income.

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Appendix

Summary of Participant Diaries

THIS APPENDIX PROVIDES a summary of each participant's financial situation for the diary year. *Table 4*, Sources of household income, and *Table 5*, Areas of household spending below, are referred to in the description of each participant.

TABLE 4 Sources of Household Income

Pseudonym	One-year income	Employment	Government sources	Other
Donna	$21,857	57.20%	34.30%	8%
Jacquelyn	$19,360	86.60%	12.60%	1%
Kateryna	$13,763	58.70%	41.30%	0%
Linda	$7,724	4.50%	71.80%	24%
Melissa	$19,636	2.50%	94.30%	3%
Mia	$13,375	11.60%	79.20%	9%
Namid	$7,051	4.20%	95.00%	1%
Nita	$40,764	98.90%	0.20%	1%
Ochieng	$5,228	11.40%	88.60%	0%
Rupi	$17,630	3.40%	96.40%	0%
Sarah	$20,547	72.60%	16.80%	11%
Sylvie	$16,511	3.00%	97.00%	0%
Average	**$16,954**	**34.60%**	**60.60%**	**4.80%**

TABLE 5 Areas of Household Spending

Pseudonym	Food	Housing & Utilities	Clothing	Transportation	Communication & Media	Other
Donna	24.90%	4.20%	1.90%	0.90%	6.70%	61.50%
Jacquelyn	31.10%	29.70%	2.80%	5.90%	11.40%	19.00%
Kateryna	28.30%	47.30%	5.00%	1.80%	2.10%	15.60%
Linda	9.00%	59.70%	0.00%	2.80%	18.40%	10.20%
Melissa	15.20%	27.50%	3.80%	7.20%	29.40%	16.90%
Mia	21.00%	0.00%	13.30%	4.40%	8.60%	52.80%
Namid	20.40%	15.00%	0.00%	13.70%	0.00%	51.00%
Nita	29.20%	9.80%	5.10%	32.40%	12.70%	10.70%
Ochieng	8.60%	41.10%	0.40%	3.30%	11.90%	34.70%
Rupi	21.90%	22.60%	2.70%	6.20%	13.50%	33.10%
Sarah	19.10%	24.00%	1.00%	11.10%	2.90%	41.80%
Sylvie	13.80%	57.30%	0.00%	0.00%	9.70%	19.20%
Average	**20.20%**	**28.20%**	**3.00%**	**7.50%**	**10.60%**	**30.50%**

Donna

Donna is a single woman in her early fifties. Now retired, Donna relies on a small pension and lives well below the poverty line. Although she owns her own home, Donna's net assets declined during her participation in the project as she drew on her HELOC to lend money to her adult children.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Donna learned about the Financial Diaries project from a local tax clinic. She joined the project in March of 2018 and continued for fifty-two weeks.

Before starting with the project, Donna monitored her expenses regularly because, as she explained, she wants to know where her money goes. She keeps a small book where she logs her financial transactions. Donna would read from this book during meetings and the research team noted that she often would justify certain purchases. This caused researchers to ponder whether there might be some shame attached to these transactions.

The Financial Diaries team observed that Donna was a unique participant in that she preferred to continue using her method of recording her transactions instead of adopting the project's system. Researchers found Donna's transaction records to be detailed, and she even included her bank account balances.

They noted that this made their task of calculating Donna's outflows against her inflows very easy and that Donna seemed to enjoy doing this, as she said that it was like getting paid to share what she has been doing already.

Donna pointed out that participating in this project did not inform her daily finances or change the way she thought or acted on her finances, but that it did make her more conscious of how much she was spending in certain categories, such as her pets.

When asked about how knowledgeable she felt about her finances, Donna responded: "Maybe 50%. There's a lot of things that I don't know, but a lot of things I've learned just from having to through experience." She explained that she learned how to budget out of necessity when she became a single parent to four children in the late 1990s. Donna disclosed that her definition of financial well-being was to "not owe anything and maybe not to have a lot in the bank, but at least to break even and not owe."

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Donna is divorced and lives alone. She describes her cultural background as Canadian. Donna has four adult children: two live in Winnipeg; one lives in another country; and the fourth lives in another province. Donna also has several pets.

Donna shared with the Financial Diaries team that finances in her marriage were challenging and that her divorce had been tumultuous. She told the research team that when she became a single parent to four children twenty years earlier, she had to choose "to either live in her car or live in a house." She chose to sell her vehicle. These challenges suggested that Donna has experienced significant trauma, which may affect her finances.

While married, Donna had owned a home with her now ex-husband. She revealed that when they separated, she left the home, with the understanding that her ex-husband would continue the mortgage payments. He failed to do so, however, which left Donna in a financial crisis. The bank subsequently took all her savings ($5,000), and Donna's phone line and CCB were cut for several weeks. Donna disclosed that the bank eventually forgave her this debt, and with the help of her parents (toward a $25,000 down payment), Donna was able to purchase a home once again.

The researcher team asked Donna how these events affected her financial well-being and management of her finances. She replied,

> It made me a lot stronger. Because before I left, he was saying that I could never afford a house and the kids without him. And I believed that, but when I had to, I did. And so it made me very strong to know that I, I couldn't imagine myself and the kids being homeless or on the street, so I knew that wasn't going to happen. Yeah. And I knew it was up to me to make sure it didn't happen. So I gained a lot of … strength to know that it can be done and I can do it.

Donna has faced very hard choices and difficulties: choosing between a house or a car, being a single mother with young children, and having little income. Today she often spends beyond her income, mainly on her pets and her children. Researchers noted that Donna seems to experience possible shame or guilt over her expenses. When asked by researchers about how the diary process impacted her financial decision-making, Donna responded, "Apart from having to confess how much I spend, [my spending] hasn't changed. I kind of bite the bullet and say, I spent this, but it hasn't changed the way that I do spend." The embarrassment over her spending might be due simply to spending over her ideal budget; however, researchers did not ask further questions at the time. The literature does point to a connection between "unprocessed emotions of shame/guilt and/or anxiety around finances" (Ross & Coambs, 2018, p. 48).

Financial Practices

A retired educational assistant, Donna now depends on her private pension income and Canada Pension Plan (CPP). Her annual income is approximately $18,000: she receives regular a monthly income of approximately $1,260 ($813 from pension, $330 from CPP, and $123 from a Retirement Income Fund [RIF]). Donna's income level puts her around $4,000 per year below the poverty line.[4]

Donna shared with a researcher that she pays the utilities first and then buys pet food for her three dogs and her cat. The research team observed in their filed notes that Donna's pets present a significant, ongoing expense in her life, as there are also vet bills. Donna's third priority is her groceries, and her fourth is her savings. She told the research team that she tries to set aside $250 per month which she will later use to pay for her annual home

4 The market basket measure (MBM), used as Canada's official poverty line for Winnipeg using the 2018, base for a family of four is $44,030. Adjusting for family size (the square root rule the OECD uses), the figure for a single individual would be half that or $22,015, which is close to the old low-income cut-off (LICO) figure.

taxes and house insurance, though she is not always consistent. Donna also regularly gives $41 per month to a children's charity.

Donna uses her two credit cards like debit cards; she purchases items on her credit cards and then pays off the balance daily. During the diaries period, she drew on her HELOC. One reason Donna gave for doing this was that she wanted to contribute to down payments for her children's houses. She also dips into her HELOC when her spending outpaces her income.

Donna said that she could borrow up to 80% of the total value of her home through her HELOC. She told the research team that she does not pay her debt religiously and that she is aware that she pays more interest because of that. She also expressed some concern to the research team about drawing on her HELOC to cover expenses. While Donna shared with researchers that she engaged in this borrowing behaviour to provide her children with down payments for new homes, she was subsequently left with an ongoing debt on her HELOC. This might be viewed as a sacrificial act of a mother trying to assist her children. However, the literature points to instances where those with limited resources tend to focus on their immediate needs (in Donna's case, the desire to help her children) and make credit choices that can have negative impacts in the long term (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013).

Assets and Liabilities: Start and Finish the Diaries Project

Donna has one checking account and two savings accounts (Table D1). She also has a TFSA and a RRIF. Donna owns her house, valued at $220,000, and has a HELOC. She used her HELOC to borrow against her equity during the period she participated in the Financial Diaries. Her net assets declined over this period.

TABLE D1 Donna Start and Finish Financial Assets and Liabilities

	Start ($)	Finish ($)
Home	220,000	220,000
Chequing	134	413
Savings	2,613	2,193
TFSA	192	194
RRIF	43,831	38,378
Credit cards	5,000	0
HELOC	−11,500	−13,675

Income and Spending Patterns

Donna's income and spending patterns were smooth except for August and January (Figure D1). She mostly spends more than she earns and supplements her income by withdrawing from her HELOC. In March, April, December, and January, Donna's inflows exceeded her outflows. In the other months, it was the opposite: her outflows exceeded her inflows.

The inflow spike in March was due to an income tax refund of $1,726. The receipt of a Goods and Services Tax (GST) rebate resulted in an income spike in January. Donna also had more income in November (she received cash gifts for her birthday) and December (she received cash gifts as Christmas presents).

The large spike in expenditure (outflow) in August reflects the purchase of furniture ($2,540) and expenses, and costs associated with a trip to Japan to visit her son and his family. While she was in Japan, Donna needed to leave her three dogs at a kennel. She reported that the total cost of the kennel was about $1,000. Donna also took her dog for veterinary visits beforehand to get the appropriate immunizations required for them to stay at the kennel. This cost about $400 total for all three dogs.

Donna spends a large share of her budget on food partly due to Donna's purchase of more expensive food, as she is a vegan (Table 5). She also spent

FIGURE D1 Donna Income and Spending by Month

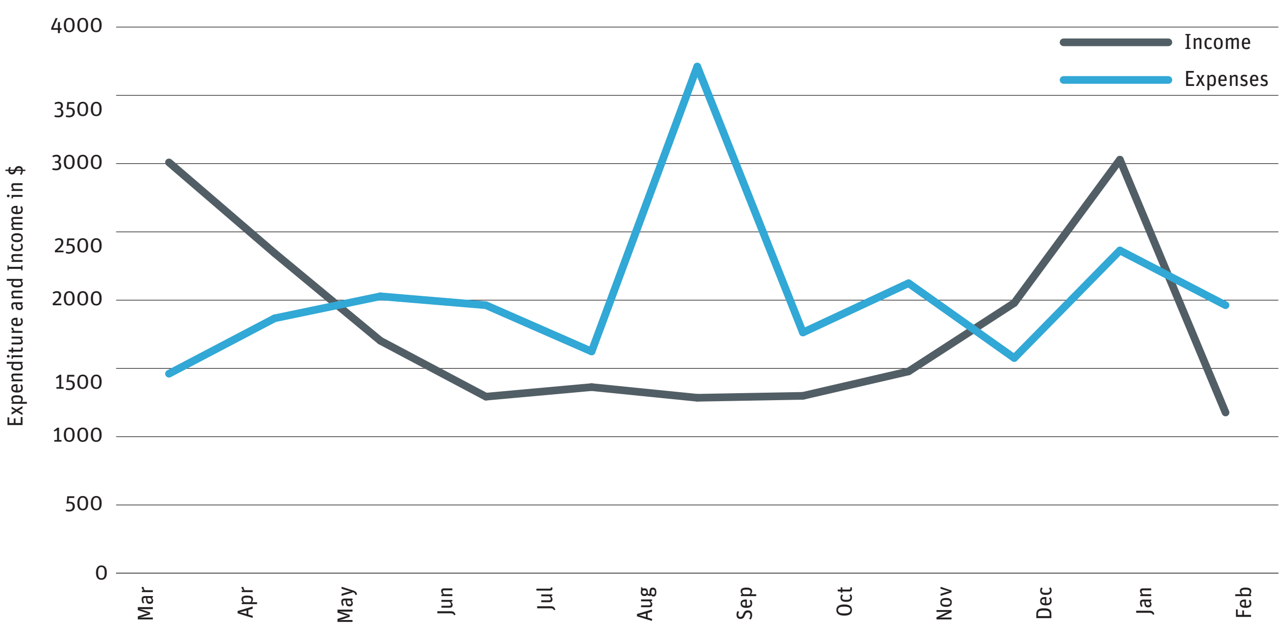
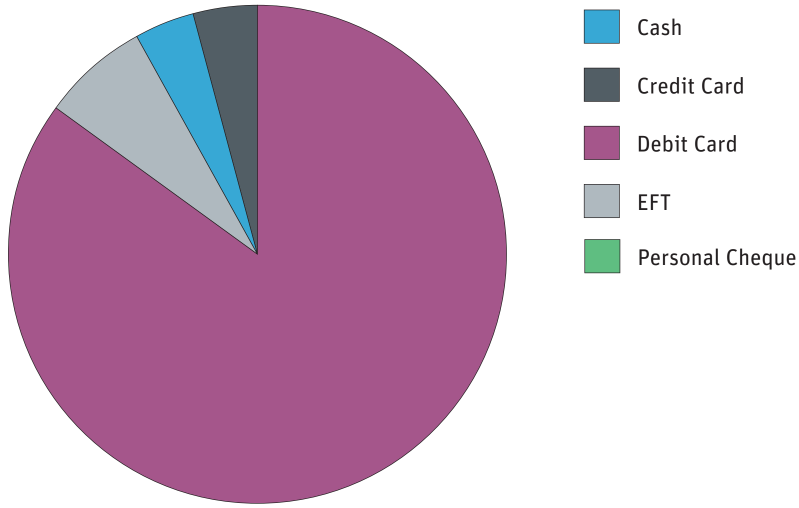


FIGURE D2 Donna Transaction Methods



quite a bit on furniture during the diaries year. Her spending on financial services is surprisingly high which included account fees, the interest charged for the HELOC (approximately $42 per month for the six months of August through January), overdraft fees, and other fees.

Donna's main source of income is pension income from work and income from CPP (Table 4). Employment income also includes the honorarium that Donna received for being a participant in the Financial Diaries project. She also earned smaller amounts in the form of cash gifts, mainly from a brother.

Transactions

Donna makes 85% of her transactions using debit (Figure D2). This is followed by EFT (7%) and then — quite closely — by spending via cash and credit card. Donna rarely uses personal cheques. Donna told the research team that she uses her credit card to make purchases because she wants to earn points, but that she pays the balance after each purchase. For this reason, Donna informed the research team that she reported her credit card transaction as debit transactions in her diary.

Jacquelyn

Jacquelyn is in her mid-thirties. Although she has some post-secondary education and now earns more than she ever has before, she confided in researchers that she feels constrained by financial debt and educational limitations. She attributes her disadvantages to her own experience in the child welfare system, having spent the latter part of her adolescence in foster care. Although she said that she does not always feel like she is in control of her finances and is challenged by the more abstract aspects of financial management (debit/credit management and online banking), Jacquelyn told the research team that she feels pride in being able to manage her day-to-day finances.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Jacquelyn began her participation in the Financial Diaries project in June 2018 and participated for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the project through a local food bank. When she first began the project, she was regularly employed and earned $23,000 per year. Early in the project, however, Jacquelyn lost that position when her contract was not renewed. This resulted in several weeks of unemployment, and she needed to apply for and receive EI.

Throughout the project, the research team noted a pattern of loans going back and forth between Jacquelyn and her partner and family members, which created an accounting challenge. Researchers also noted that Jacquelyn often came to meetings without a complete record of her transactions. During the exercise of recounting her financial transactions with the Financial Diaries team, Jacquelyn expressed surprise at both the amount she was earning and her expenditures.

It seemed to the research team that throughout the project, Jacquelyn was developing a growing awareness of her day-to-day finances. She told the Financial Diaries team that being a part of the project made her more conscious of her purchases and that it helped her identify what she wants and set small goals.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Jacquelyn describes her cultural background as Indigenous. She has been legally separated from her former partner for several years. In her interviews, she revealed to the research team details that appear to point to a fragile social support system and the legacy and ongoing impacts of colonization, linking Jacquelyn to this report's focus on trauma and personal finances. She does not have custody of her children. Jacquelyn shared that a former foster parent has been a big support, especially in the past, but that she now sometimes relies on Jacquelyn for financial support, which makes Jacquelyn feel obligated to help her to repay this kindness.

While she and various family members depend on each other for loans in times of need, there is a consistent pattern of Jacquelyn denying her own need to help others, and of others failing to contribute where they have promised to do so. At the start of the Financial Diaries project, Jacquelyn was sharing a private two-bedroom apartment with a roommate who was inconsistent with rent payments. The roommate moved out midway through the project, leaving Jacquelyn solely responsible for the rent. Another example of one-way giving is that Jacquelyn was still paying the phone bill for an ex-partner (they split up midway through the diary year). The one-sided nature of these relationships suggests some level of challenge and possibly trauma.

Although she earns more money now than she has previously, Jacquelyn has accumulated considerable personal debt and has a poor credit rating. Payday loans and communication bills (cellphone bills with data overages amounting to $3,000) from years ago have gone to collections, amounting to approximately $20,000 in total. Accumulating debt can add to traumatic experiences. Jacquelyn has been receiving Rent Assist, but a higher income in the year before the project reduced the amount she was receiving. Although Jacquelyn regularly borrows money when her income is not sufficient, she also lends money to family members. Jacquelyn describes herself as a giver, saying she helps when she can do so. She recounted an occasion when she gave her daughter grocery money and subsequently spent very little on her groceries the following week.

Jacquelyn completed her General Educational Development (GED) certificate as an adult while raising three young children. She noted that although she has had several years' experience in administration, she wants to pursue post-secondary education in the field of administration to improve her future job prospects but lacks the savings to fund this goal. Jacquelyn told the Financial Diaries team that she wants to improve her financial situation by earning more money but faces several barriers. At the beginning of the project, Jacquelyn was precariously employed, having worked at a temporary agency for the past eight years. During this time, she held numerous positions at various wages but received no sick days or benefits as a temporary worker. Jacquelyn does not have a driver's licence or vehicle. She told the research team that she thinks that she might be able to find another part-time position in her current agency if she could drive. She also finds it a challenge to commute to different parts of the city to work at the various positions assigned to her by her temporary employment agency.

Do the challenges that Jacquelyn faces — the legacy of colonization, one-sided lending relationships, accumulated debt — relate to her financial challenges? Do they diminish her ability to pursue her goals of more education, a driver's license, and a new job? We cannot say; however, the literature points to a correlation between accumulated trauma and financial behaviours that are potentially harmful (Parise & Peijnenburg, 2017). One study emphasizes the connections between childhood trauma and subsequent stress or anxiety in adulthood, which can limit a person's ability to make healthy financial decisions and lead to behaviours (like one-sided lending) that can subsequently result in financial distress (accumulated debt) (Parise & Peijnenburg, 2017).

Financial Practices

Jacquelyn has an unpredictable income as a casual worker. Because she works for a temporary agency, she can be placed in various positions at variable wage rates. Although she had a good contract at the beginning of the Financial Diaries project, when that contract ended, Jacquelyn was without work for several weeks and needed to rely on EI. According to Jacquelyn, losing her well-paid position negatively impacted her mental health. She has had various health issues in the recent past that have also contributed significantly to periods of income loss. She experiences periods of financial stability and instability; when she is laid off, she borrows money to pay bills.

Jacquelyn lives paycheque-to-paycheque (paid weekly) and saves for rent and utility bills. She also prioritizes giving, despite her limited income. Her finances have become intertwined with those of her ex-partner's finances, with a lot of lending, borrowing, and frequent e-transfers. Jacquelyn told us that she also regularly pays for her daughter's transportation and her partner's telecommunications bill, despite this resulting in her use of the food bank to make ends meet.

Although at the time of the Financial Diaries project she did not have substantial savings nor a consistent source of income, Jacquelyn shared that she would like to be able to save a few months of income to have some padding for rent and to invest in a vehicle someday. However, she did not share a plan for saving toward that goal. While Jacquelyn did not tell researchers that anxiety about inconsistent income was the reason for her lack of savings, the stress induced by unpredictable income may explain the gap between her desire to save and the absence of a plan to do so. Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) point to correlations between income scarcity and the tendency to focus on immediate needs rather than long-term issues, which could be the consequences of debt. Ghilarducci and Reznik (2018) note that anxiety can negatively impact saving behaviours.

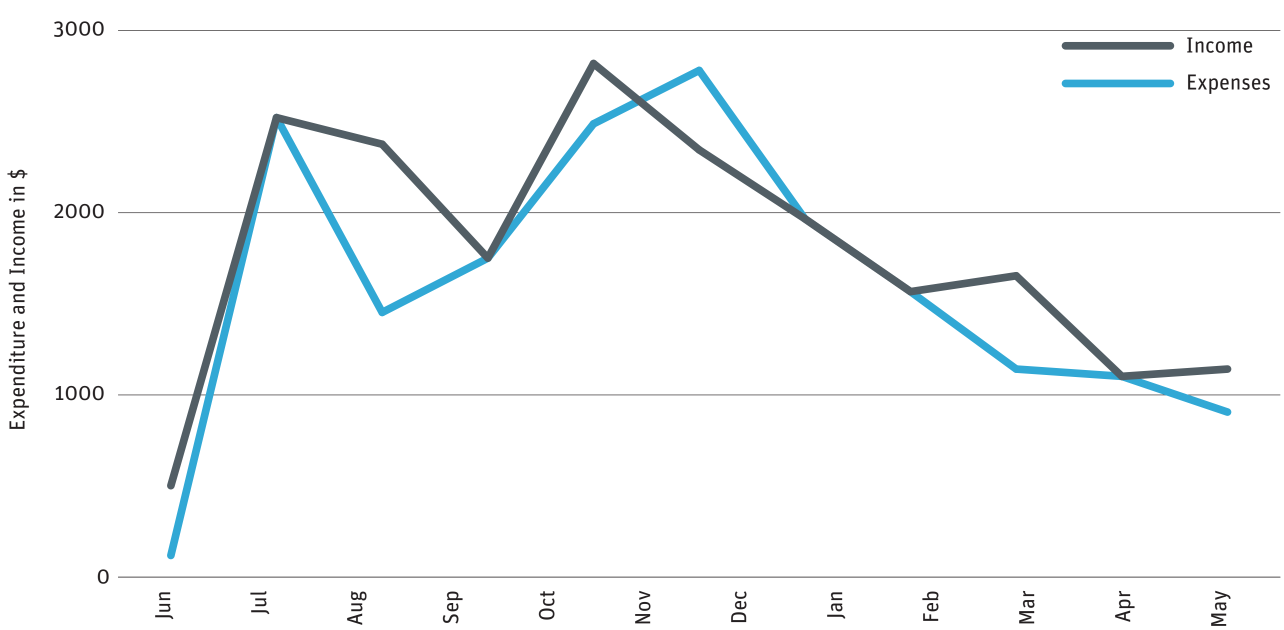
Assets and Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Jacquelyn had one checking account, along with insignificant amounts in her savings account during her participation in the Financial Diaries project. Her net financial assets deteriorated throughout the project. She was owed a small amount of money by a family member when she joined the project. Regarding liabilities, Jacquelyn reported a debt of several hundred dollars at the beginning of the project, but at the end, she had a debt with a collection agency that amounted to several thousand dollars. She also owed a portion of unpaid rent.

Income and Spending Patterns

Jacquelyn's pattern of expenditure and income on goods and services from June 2018 (partial month) to May 2019 is shown below (Figure J1).

FIGURE J1 Jacquelyn Income and Spending by Month



Income and spending followed one another closely and showed spikes in July, October, and November. As previously mentioned, income volatility is a result of her working a variety of temporary jobs. Spending volatility was due to a few reasons. The spike in July, for example, was the result of large expenditure on food (both grocery stores and restaurants). The dip in spending in August reflects lower expenditures on food. The expenses for mobile telecommunications, however, were larger compared to the previous months (because of the non-payment of her bill in June and July). November and December spending on the rent was high because Jacquelyn's roommate was unable to pay their share of the rent, which left Jacquelyn almost solely responsible for the rent payments for those months ($1,108 in November and $931.5 in December). As a rule, Jacquelyn's expenditures were less than her income, aside from July, November, and December.

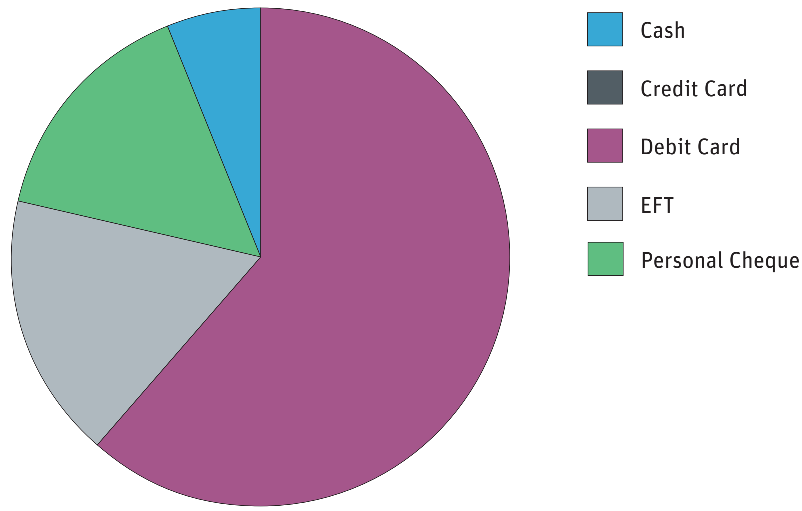
Jacquelyn's main expenses are on housing and utilities (30%) and food (31%) (Table 5). She lives in a modest two-bedroom rental unit. Jaquelyn does a minimal amount of cooking and spends a fair portion of her food budget on eating out, as well as on regular purchases, such as soda, at convenience stores. She spends about 11% of her income on communications, and, under "other," 7% on leisure purchases such as Spotify and Netflix services. Jacquelyn has two cellphone plans. One plan was used by her partner; however, they separated midway through her year with the Financial Diaries project. Her partner lost the phone, and she had to pay $200 as a result. Jacquelyn was still paying for this plan, but no one was using it.

Jacquelyn's main source of income is temporary employment, which constitutes 87% of her earnings (Table 4). During her year with the Financial Diaries project, this amounted to just over $16,000. Income received from EI and Rent Assist (government inflows) comprises about 13% of Jacquelyn's total income.

Transactions

Jacquelyn mostly uses her debit card for her financial transactions (61%) (Figure J2). This is followed by electronic transfers, which account for about 17% of her expenditures. She mentioned buying cheques to pay for her rent. As a result of her poor credit rating and accumulated debt, Jacquelyn has never had a credit card.

FIGURE J2 Jacquelyn Transaction Methods



Kateryna

Kateryna is a single adult in her fifties. At the start of her involvement with the Financial Diaries project, she was casually employed in a service position. The Financial Diaries team observed that Kateryna was very careful in managing her expenses and her day-to-day transactions; however, she did not speak about specific long-term financial plans. She lives in a neighbourhood with very limited access to in-person banking, and she explained that she does not do online banking because she does not feel secure about accessing her account that way and she does not have a computer and internet connection at home. During the time of her participation in this project, Kateryna saw a modest improvement in her net assets and employment.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Kateryna joined the Financial Diaries project in May of 2018 and participated for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the project from a local tax clinic. Both before and throughout this project, Kateryna tracked her expenses and kept what appeared to researchers to be a very careful diary.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Kateryna describes her cultural background as Mennonite and Ukrainian/English. She is single and lives alone in private rental accommodation. She has one adult child and one grandchild who sometimes comes to stay with her. Her educational background includes some secondary school. Kateryna owns a smartphone but does not have an internet connection at home.

Before starting with the Financial Diaries project, Kateryna estimated her annual income at $10,000. She had previously enjoyed full-time employment with a well-known company in the retail sector but was terminated when the company closed its doors. After losing that job, Kateryna worked intermittently at a position in the service sector. The remuneration was intermittent and informal, and not equivalent to a minimum wage. Kateryna referred to this as a bartering relationship and shared that she was paid either in cash or received goods or services in exchange for her work. She also revealed to the research team that this was not her only experience in the informal economy. By the end of the project, however, Kateryna had acquired a part-time minimum-wage municipal position, one that brought her a more regular income and greater stability.

Kateryna talked about some difficult work-related experiences with the Financial Diaries team. She recalled being hired for what she termed a "practical position" at a manufacturing plant. A few years later, she was promoted to an administrative position. Unfortunately, Kateryna found herself in an unhealthy relationship with a co-worker who was more firmly established in the company, and when she realized that she could not continue the relationship, Kateryna felt compelled to leave the company. In her next position at a large retail outlet, Kateryna experienced what she termed as "harassment" from her manager, who, according to Kateryna, would neither advance her nor assign her adequate hours. She left this job for another, serving in a communal living facility for seniors, but had to leave this position as well, as she once again experienced workplace harassment. Kateryna told the research team that at this point she turned to EI.

The experiences Kateryna related and her subsequent decision to rely on government assistance raise questions as to whether this may be, at least in part, a trauma response to Kateryna's repeated experiences of workplace harassment. Kateryna also told researchers that her relationship with the business owner for whom she works informally is complicated; the lines between business and friendship are blurred. According to Kateryna, she finds herself in a position where she must "ask" for money when needs arise, rather than being able to expect regular remuneration.

Financial Practices

During the year that Kateryna participated in the Financial Diaries project, she had an annual income of approximately $17,000. This was based on two part-time low-waged jobs and the help that she received through Rent Assist. Kateryna would often emphasize to the Financial Diaries team that she was satisfied with her financial situation; however, her lifestyle struck researchers as bordering on hardship, as she seemed to make do with what for many would be inadequate resources. This appeared to be a form of denial of difficult circumstances and might be what Ross and Coambs (2018) discuss as financial denial indicative of underlying personal trauma.

Kateryna lives in a neighbourhood without sufficient in-person banking options, but she does not use internet banking. She does not own a computer and said to the research team that she feels impatient with the intricacies of using a computer. The Financial Diaries team noted that this placed Kateryna in a difficult position regarding banking options. In addition, Kateryna said that her bank no longer offered a bank passbook to record transactions, instead offering online tracking and that they charged extra fees for paper statements, making it difficult for her to track her finances.

At the start of her participation in the Financial Diaries project, Kateryna's focus was very much present-oriented because, as she shared with researchers, the potential gap between her income and her bills once her EI ran out was troubling to think about. Kateryna stated that her current goals were to pay for her bills, including rent, groceries, and utilities. She also noted that she thought education and training could improve her current position, yet she did not share a specific strategy for achieving these goals.

The Financial Diaries team found that Kateryna's diary appeared to be done very carefully. She told the research team that she is cautious about using credit and tries to avoid debt. She reported that she uses her credit card only when she does not have cash and that she pays it down immediately afterwards.

Assets and Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Kateryna has one checking account (Table K1). She told researchers that this is a low-fee account, and she, therefore, keeps small amounts of savings in the form of cash at home to avoid paying debit transaction fees. She also has a credit card but rarely uses it.

TABLE K1 Kateryna Financial Assets and Liabilities

	Start ($)	Finish ($)
Chequing	860	2,644
Cash	0	130
Total	**860**	**2,774**

Kateryna's net assets increased over the period she was part of the Financial Diaries project, thanks to her receipt of an income tax refund. Although this was the main reason that her assets improved, her acquisition of better-paid employment enabled her to save the amount of the refund, whereas she might previously have used it toward her regular expenses.

Income and Spending Patterns

Kateryna's monthly income and spending track closely, although outflows are lumpier than inflows (Figure K1a). However, when looking at her weekly income and spending, the amounts track very closely. This is evident, for example, in August and September (Figure K1b). It is also clear that small outflow spikes come after income spikes. This can be seen when an income spike in late September is followed by a small spending spike in early October (Figure K1a).

FIGURE K1A Kateryna Income and Spending by Month

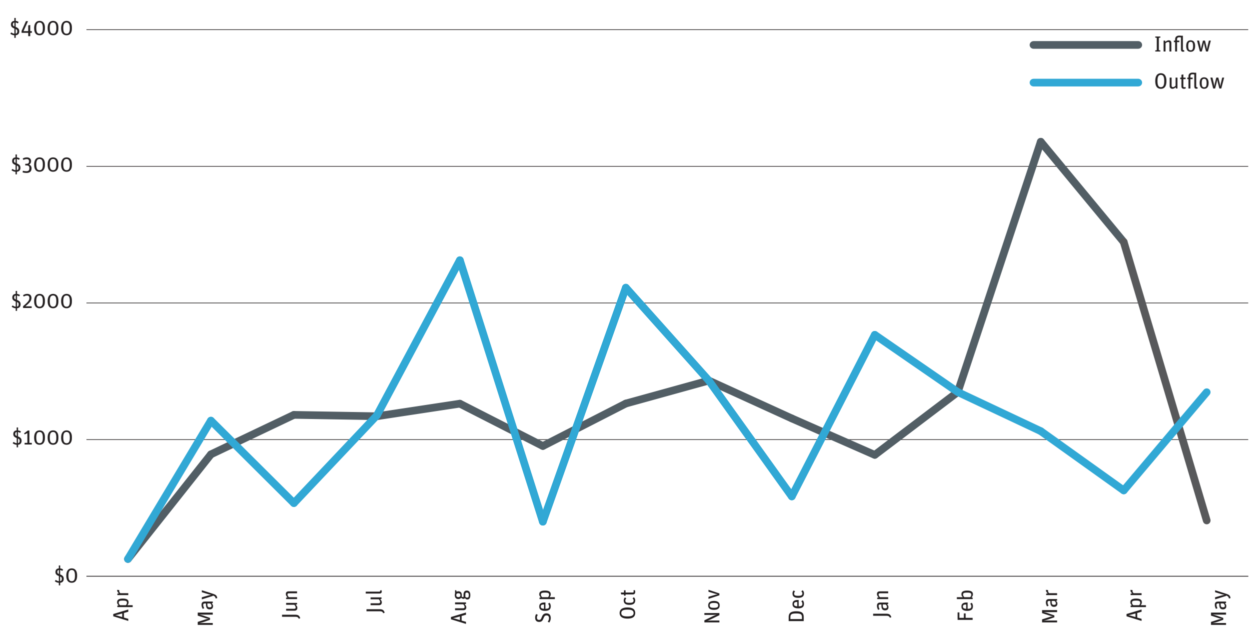
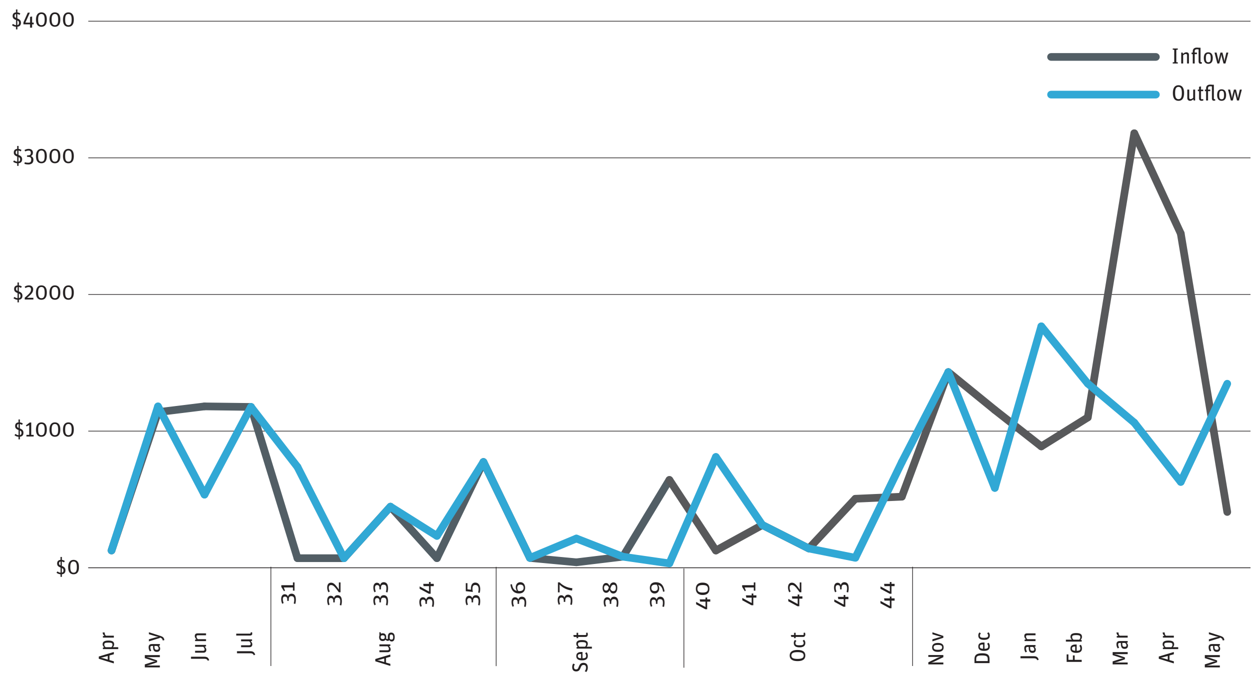


FIGURE K1B Kateryna Income and Spending by Month or Week



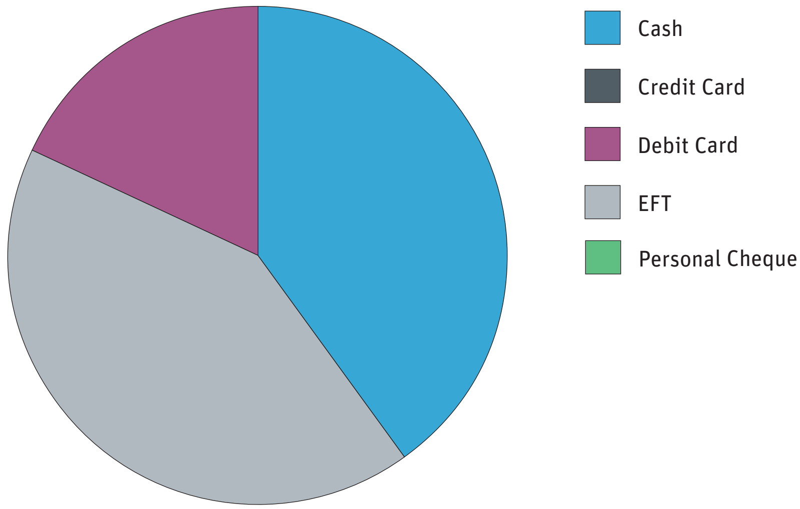
The majority of Kateryna's spending goes toward housing and food (Table 5). Food costs account for about 28% of her expenditures, while smaller amounts go toward financial fees, clothing, and gifts. Kateryna also makes frequent charitable donations and gives gifts to family members and friends.

Kateryna received 59% of her income from employment (Table 4). She also regularly receives rent assistance from the government, which, along with other government inflows, makes up 41% of her total income. Kateryna works casually for a small local business owner who has not put her on the payroll. Instead, the owner pays Kateryna in cash and often pays for her groceries in exchange for work done for the business. Kateryna has not been able to accumulate a significant amount of savings.

Transactions

Kateryna uses cash for most of her transactions (42%) (Table K2). This is followed by the use of electronic fund transfer (direct deposits from work and Rent Assist) (42%) and the use of her debit card (18%). She does not use her credit card regularly. Kateryna is an important example of a person who still relies on cash for many of her transactions.

FIGURE K2 Kateryna Transaction Methods



Linda

Linda is in her early sixties. Although she was regularly employed up until four years before she participated in the Financial Diaries project, she suffered a workplace injury and has not been able to return to regular employment. Linda is currently working on a casual basis and her main source of income is EIA.

Linda shared with researchers that she has experienced multiple traumatic events in her life, including growing up in foster care and losing her adult daughter. She had begun a journey of personal transformation shortly before joining the project that involved getting fit and quitting smoking. However, past trauma continues to affect Linda's financial well-being.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Linda learned about the Financial Diaries project from a local tax clinic. She started in April 2018 and participated for fifty-two weeks. Linda told the research team that she found the diary process therapeutic; she appreciated the "listening ear" of the interviewer, and these meetings were almost like a financial counselling session for her. Linda revealed that she does not always feel in control of her finances and told researchers that she sometimes delays paying bills because she feels "frustrated". When asked whether she was able to respond to financial emergencies, Linda replied, "No. No. I'm always trying to figure out how to, I mean, I'm always behind the eight ball. I try so hard but I never, even if I put every dime on it, I'm still behind the eight ball."

Linda spoke about wanting to win the lottery. She told researchers that she would love to know what it's like to be able to go out and to have a full fridge, to have enough coins to do her laundry without having to worry.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Linda is single. She shared with the research team that although she was born into an Indigenous family, she grew up in foster care with a Dutch family and prefers to identify culturally as Canadian. Linda had only one child, a daughter who had committed suicide a few years ago, shortly after giving birth. Linda's grandchild is being raised by her sister and, according to Linda, the relationship between herself and her grandchild is therefore not as close as she would have liked it to be.

Linda lives in a rented apartment. She has completed grade 10 and works casually. Her income is supplemented by EIA. She also receives Old Age Security (OAS) benefits. The workplace injury she suffered four years before the Financial Diaries project meant she had to go on disability benefits. She suffers from various health conditions (diabetes and high blood pressure). Linda owns a smartphone and has an internet connection at home.

Past traumatic events seemed to researchers to weigh heavily on Linda. One can almost feel her pain on the pages of the interview log. She has suffered very deep losses on many levels and lives with ongoing grief and fear that have financial, emotional, and social costs. She told the Financial Diaries team that the death of her daughter caused her to go through a period of depression and that she would never get over this loss. Linda also shared with the research team that she had been sexually assaulted. A lasting fear from this experience was one main reason she felt she needed her current cellphone/data plan, as a form of personal security.

Linda has extremely limited resources (often not enough for food) but is very creative in her budgeting and volunteers in return for food. She can share meals with others in her social network. Recounting to researchers that she remembers frequently going hungry as a child and that she now wants to help others, Linda explained that she chooses to be very involved in her church community and volunteering.

Linda suffers from several health-related problems but is also actively pursuing health goals through diet and exercise, even allocating finances toward that goal. She noted that she is committed to improving her physical health, visiting her local YMCA daily to exercise and that she has recently lost a significant amount of weight. During her year with the Financial Diaries project, Linda experienced some health challenges, including surgery to improve circulation that was complicated by an infection. She was assaulted in an attempted robbery but credited her recent workouts for her increased physical strength and ability to fend off her attacker and retain her cellphone.

It is clear from the data that Linda feels shame about not having food, and keeping empty, upside-down food cans in her pantry so family members will think she had food. This may be a result of being traumatized by food scarcity and hunger as a child of alcoholic parents, and experiencing judgment connected to poverty, hunger, substance abuse, and possibly even internalized racial stereotypes (which researchers perceived in various comments). Linda's behaviour of hiding her lack of food appears to researchers to relate to a sense of shame. The literature on the impact of trauma on personal finances articulates another layer of shame for those suffering from both trauma and poverty. Ross and Coambs (2018) discuss how trauma creates a sense of shame connected to the trauma itself and can also create financial shame. They argue that financial shame leads a person to believe that they do not have a right to have a say in their finances (Ross & Coambs, 2018, p. 42).

Experiencing extreme low income as a child and today, the effects of colonization, fear of violence, health issues, and shame are several traumatic factors that influence Linda and her finances. Institutional and social supports are remarkably weak; sufficient income supports to work through mental trauma, and supports to make her feel safe are critical for Linda.

Financial Practices

At the start of her participation in the Financial Diaries project, Linda estimated her annual income as approximately $11,000. Her main source of income is EIA, which she supplements with casual work such as babysitting or doing other odd jobs for people at her church.

Linda noted that she does not track her expenses and finds it difficult to stick to a small budget. She receives barely enough to cover her rent and utilities from her EIA payments. The $900 Linda receives from EIA covers her $600 rent payment and her phone/internet bill, leaving very little for all her other expenses.

Linda spends a lot on her cellphone. First, she is paying $100 per month to clear a previous phone bill debt. As a result of that debt, she is unable to get her phone and so has joined with a friend on her plan. Linda revealed that she does not have access to the detailed bills and feels that her friend is charging her more than the plan. But since she needs internet and phone service for her security (following a sexual assault several years ago), she has no option but to trust her friend and pay the amount requested. Linda told researchers that her YMCA fitness membership is her only extra spending, but that she regards this as essential for her well-being.

Researchers noted that Linda seemed to struggle more than the other participants in her efforts to manage her finances month to month. Linda said that she has approximately $35 left for everything else after paying her monthly bills. She relies on her local food bank and a community kitchen program through her church to supplement her meagre food budget (Linda receives meals/food in return for her volunteer time). She also regularly eats meals with family or friends. In addition, Linda looks for ways to save, including buying second-hand items, hand-washing her laundry in her bathtub, and using senior bus tickets (which are $0.45 cheaper than regular adult tickets) as often as she is able.

Linda told the research team that she does not like to borrow or ask for things that she does not have, as she is very independent. She feels that she manages well with the small amount that she is given but admits that this is often difficult: "Yeah … I do the best I can and I come through. I'm even surprised how I come through each month. There are days I just don't, you just can't afford to eat. You just don't eat."

Assets and Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Linda has a checking and savings account (Table L1). Her net assets are negative, and this did not change throughout her participation in the project.

TABLE L1 Linda Financial Assets and Liabilities

	Start ($)	Finish ($)
Household Contents	700	700
Chequing	9	3
Savings	2	0

Income and Spending Patterns

For the most part, Linda's inflows and outflows correspond very closely (Figure L1). This pattern is logical, as she receives very little income and spends the bulk of it on rent and utility bills, leaving little to no discretionary income. At the beginning of her involvement with the Financial Diaries project, there were no records of EIA and pensions received (April to July). Inflows increased once EIA and pensions were received in August, and outflows increased correspondingly (though less than the income received). From September 2018 to December and in March 2019, outflows slightly exceeded inflows. February inflows were slightly higher than outflows.

Linda prioritizes food, rent, utilities, and transportation (Table 5). Most of Linda's income goes toward rent. She also spends significantly on internet connection (nearly $1,800 during her time with the project). This spending is notably high, and it becomes very evident that her fear for her safety and priority on cellphone connection exceeds even her prioritization of food in her budget.

Linda's main sources of income are EIA and Old Age Security (OAS) (Table 4). This is supplemented by income from casual employment and the honorarium from her participation in the project.

FIGURE L1 Linda Income and Spending by Month

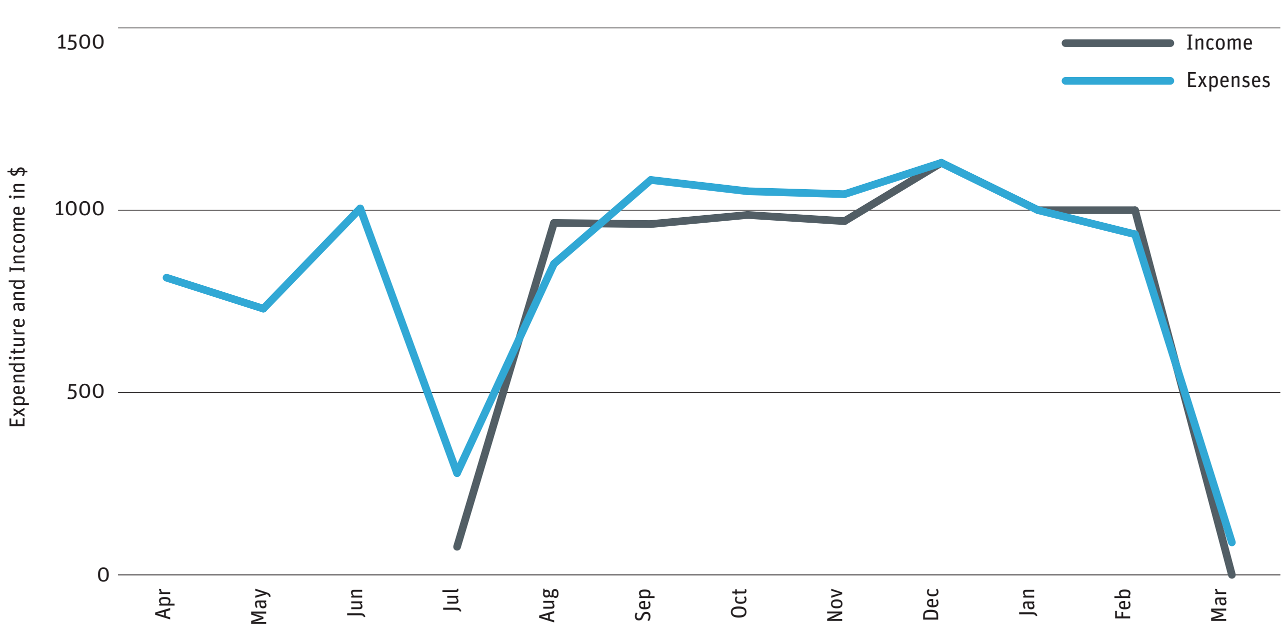
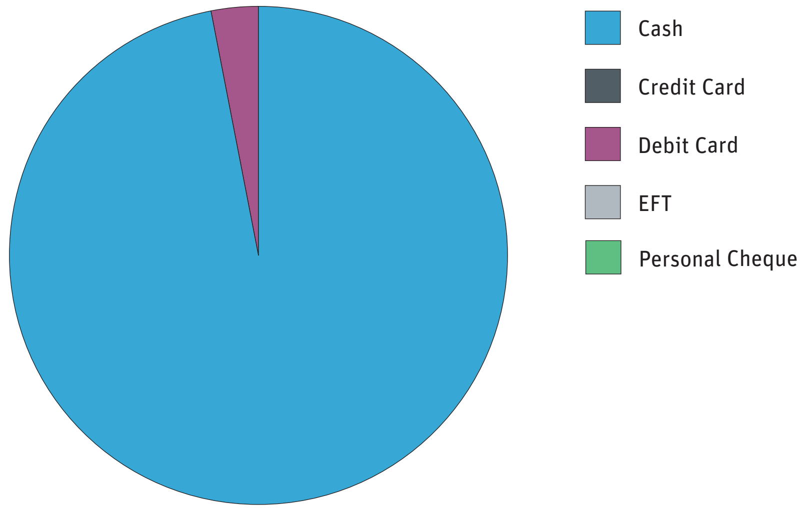


FIGURE L2 Linda Transaction Methods



Transactions

Linda is one of the few Financial Diaries participants who rely mainly on cash (97%) for her transactions (Figure L2). She uses her debit card for only 3% of her transactions and does not own a credit card.

Melissa

Melissa is in her late forties. A single mother of a teenage son, she lost her husband (her son's father) when her son was only an infant. Melissa receives EIA and disability benefits. She also regularly volunteers for various organizations and receives an honorarium amount for her volunteer commitments. Melissa's financial goals are to avoid debt and to save money for her son's future.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Melissa began participating in the Financial Diaries project in May of 2018 and continued for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the project from a local non-profit organization.

Melissa told her interviewer that she has tracked her expenses ever since she became a parent sixteen years ago. Melissa kept mental notes about her finances, but her written diary was not always complete. She sometimes mentioned spending that was not included in the diary, on one occasion saying that she had given $5 to a homeless man — an outflow that was not recorded in her diary for that week. Because most of Melissa's transactions were provided orally, and meeting logistics were challenging (it was difficult to find access to a table or workspace that would accommodate her needs), the research team found it necessary to accept that they would not be able to consistently capture exact amounts of all of Melissa's financial transactions and make them balance.

Melissa reported being very deliberate about her financial decisions. She revealed that she had learned to start saving at the age of five when her dad encouraged her to begin by saving her small change. "My dad said if you want something to save all your nickels 'cause you're five, right, so nickels are worth five cents." When asked to define financial well-being, Melinda responded, "It means that I am pretty financially stable, knowing where money is coming in and going [out] and why it's coming and going and stuff that I could, documents that I could back- it- up-wise. How much is coming in and how much is coming out." In addition to stability, Melissa told researchers that financial well-being also included being able to save for her son's future. She said that she feels confident about her financial management skills and that she considers self-control to be vital to good financial decision-making.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Melissa is a single parent with a teenage son. She describes her cultural background as Canadian. Melissa lives with a disability and told the research team that she receives seven hours of in-home support care each day, including help with housekeeping and cooking for her son. She also has supportive siblings. Melissa has a grade 12 education. She disclosed that her parents had not saved for her education in the same way that they had done for her siblings, as they had assumed she would receive funding for her education because she had a disability.

Melissa has supportive and accessible housing, which is paid for by EIA. She has relied on disability/EIA for her entire adult life. Melissa volunteers extensively and obtains occasional casual employment.

Researchers found Melissa to have a detailed sense of her finances. She shared that she would be co-facilitating an upcoming class on money management at a local non-profit. Melissa told the research team that she knows what is in each of her accounts to the penny. She explained that she has learned to advocate for herself, noting that she was the only person living with a disability to receive twenty-four-hour care for herself and her son when he was a baby. Melissa has hired and managed her employees since that time.

Like other participants, Melissa revealed several difficult or traumatic life events to the research team. Her parents were divorced when she was fifteen, and her father subsequently moved to another province. Melissa shared that she had been close to her father and spoke to him at least once a week until he died approximately fifteen years ago. When Melissa was seventeen, she was hit by a car and broke her collar bone. She spent an extended period recovering, first in a children's hospital for a long time and then in a rehabilitation centre. Melissa felt that this long period away from home occurred because her mom did not want to take care of her at home. Their relationship remains strained.

Melissa lost her husband to cancer when their son was just eight months old, leaving her a single parent. She has had to advocate for herself since then, and she disclosed that she continues to suffer a lot from ableism as an adult. One example she noted was that she has a boyfriend in another city, but she is not accepted by his mother because she cannot care for her son as an able-bodied person would be able to do. Melissa and her boyfriend also face considerable resistance from family in their romantic relationship, finding it difficult to spend time alone as a couple. An additional hurdle Melissa faces is that Handi-Transit (subsidized public transportation for those with mobility constraints) will not provide regular rides because as an unemployed person, she is low on the priority list.

Melissa is remarkably resilient. Financially, she saves consistently and plans for her son's future and her own. She budgets and uses various ways to economize. She is an example, like Donna, of someone who has been able to make gains in their financial well-being despite the winds of resistance life has blown at her. She comes across as fiercely independent.

Financial Practices

At the beginning of her participation in the Financial Diaries process, Melissa expressed to the team that she was not comfortable sharing her annual income. Her main source of income is from EIA.

Melissa noted that a major priority for her — after paying her regular bills — was to save money for her son's RESP, which she does consistently (she deposits 95% of the CCB she receives into an RESP). She also shared that she has begun to contribute regularly to a disability savings account. As travelling to a bank is difficult for Melissa, she saves up several months' worth of contributions at home and then makes a larger deposit. Melissa told researchers that she is concerned about the future because she will cease to receive disability benefits once she turns sixty-five.

Melissa described some of her savings habits to the research team. She buys food in bulk and so does not need to do grocery shopping very often. She indicated that she has three freezers full of food. Her transactions revealed that she does not tend to buy snacks for herself or go out for food. Melissa shared that a higher expense for her was transportation — in particular, her periodic trips to visit her boyfriend in Brandon. She also told researchers that she regularly played the lottery. Having experienced credit debt in her early twenties (and subsequently having had to work to pay it down), Melissa noted that she is adamant about avoiding debt.

> I lose sleep over debt and it makes me nauseous … It makes me physically ill to think that I owe people money. It bothers me … Even if somebody bought me something, for example, my boyfriend bought me a ticket or whatever. He said you don't have to pay me back. My conscience won't let me do that. I gave him the money back as soon as I saw him.

Assets and Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Melissa has one checking account and one savings account (Table ME1). She also contributes actively to an RESP for her son. Melissa's net assets increased by just under $2,000 through the diary period.

TABLE ME1 Melissa Financial Assets and Liabilities

	Start ($)	Finish ($)
House Contents	8,450	8,776
Chequing	150	1
Savings	685	440
RESP	46,800	48,900
Drawer	850	—
Total	**47,635**	**49,341**

Income and Spending Patterns

Melissa's outflows mostly mirror her inflows, and she generally spends less than her income (Figure ME1). The spike in outflows in July resulted from a trip to visit her boyfriend in Brandon. She mentioned to the research team that she had saved $800 toward this trip, which explains the lower spending levels before July. The dip in outflows in September may be attributed to the fact that Melissa's boyfriend paid for her trip to Brandon to see him that month. Melissa's income remained constant over time (mainly EIA and disability benefits).

Melissa spends the most on communication (Table 5). She prioritizes communication, rent, and saving toward her son's RESP. She also contributes regularly to her disability tax credit account (savings plan contributions are included in the Other category.) Melissa's food expenses are not high. She tends to buy her food in bulk and stores it in freezers, which also allows her to minimize her grocery shopping.

Melissa's main source of income is from her disability EIA (Table 4). She receives a small honorarium for her volunteer roles and was given a small honorarium for her participation in this project.

FIGURE ME1 Melissa Income and Spending by Month

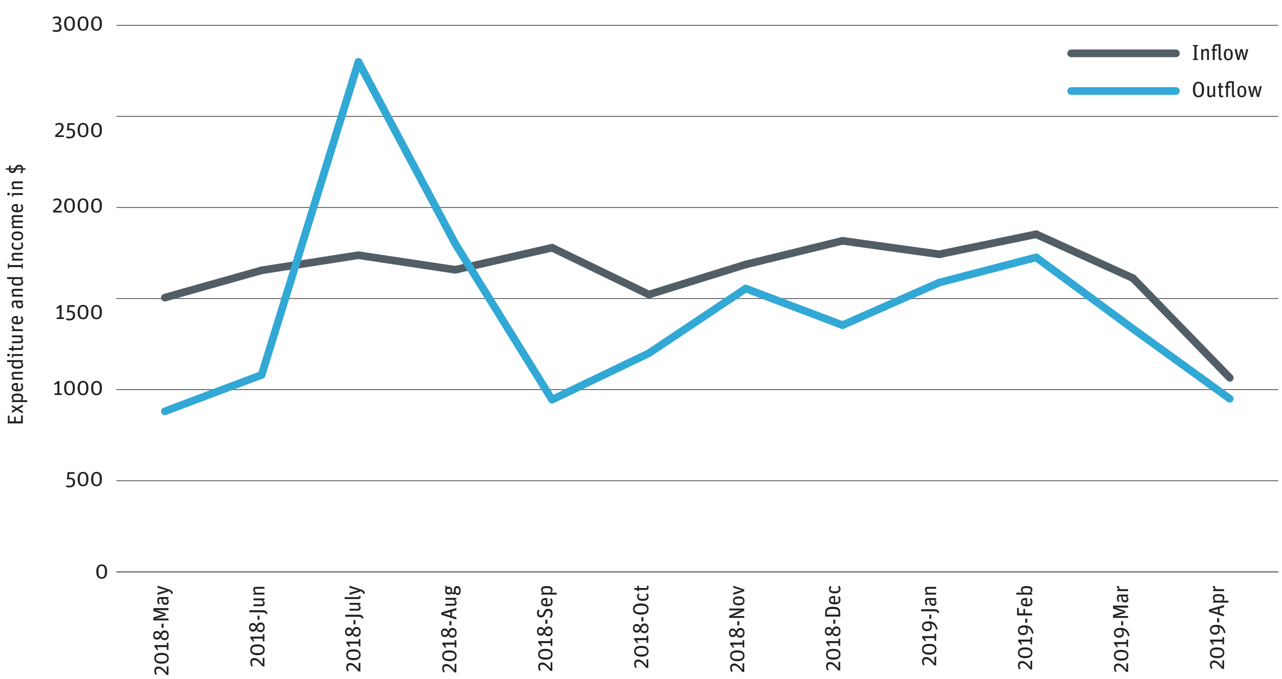
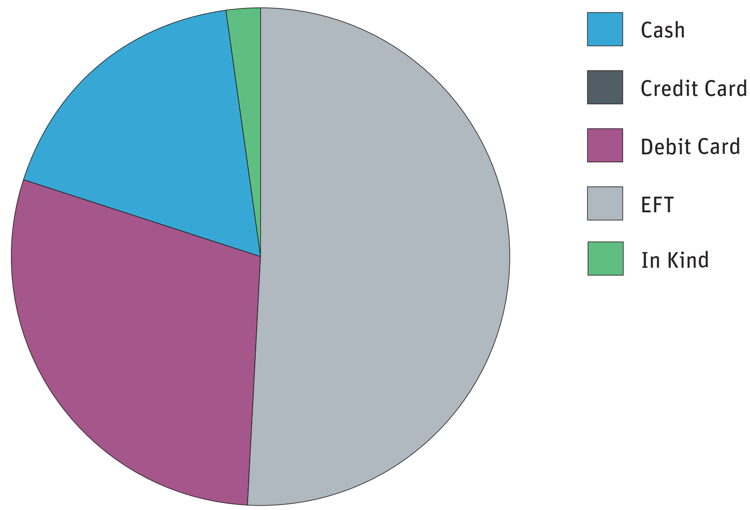


FIGURE ME2 Melissa Transaction Methods



Transactions

Melissa predominantly uses EFT (51%) for her financial transactions (Figure ME2). She uses her debit card 29% of the time and cash 18% of the time. Melissa rarely uses her credit card.

Mia

Mia is forty and has five children. Mia began participating in the Financial Diaries project while transitioning out of a recovery program for women healing from abuse and addiction. At the start of the project, Mia was pregnant with twins and still living at the healing centre; however, she transitioned to second-stage living early in the diary year. Her income while living at the women's program was meagre, but this improved after she gave birth to her son and daughter and started receiving CCB. Mia shared with researchers that tracking her finances was stressful for her.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Mia learned about the Financial Diaries project from a local Indigenous healing organization. She started with the project in April 2018 and continued for twenty-two weeks. Mia's is a personal diary; however, it appeared to the research team that Mia's finances were still somewhat intertwined with those of her ex-boyfriend (the father of her eldest three children).

Mia began participating in the project while she was still living in supportive housing. Early in the process, she was interested in knowing where her money was going but would become stressed when talking about money. She said that she found the diary process helpful and appeared to researchers to be committed to tracking expenses, but she was not always able to be consistent. Mia revealed that she would become overwhelmed with the tracking process at times.

Members of the Financial Diaries team noted that Mia's experience of becoming overwhelmed seemed to relate to being more intentional about her finances during a season of many changes, which included giving birth to her twins and moving through various stages of transitional housing. Mia dropped out after struggling to complete her diary for several meetings. She explained to researchers that this was a stressful period of life and that she was busy and needed some time "to not think about money." The literature points to a connection between emotional regulation and financial decision-making. Mia was in a season of many transitions which called for minimized attention to less needful issues and a greater focus on self-care and emotional regulation.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Mia describes her cultural background as Métis. She is currently in a relationship with the father of her twins. Mia also has three older children. They were in foster care at the start of the diary process, but two of these children later moved in with their dad; Mia has weekly visits with them.

Although Mia began the diary year while living in supportive housing for an addiction issue, this was not something she explicitly discussed with the research team. She has a grade 10 education and stated that she is technologically and digitally knowledgeable. Mia has a smartphone and access to an internet connection at home. She is not currently looking for work outside of the home. Through custody issues around her children, Mia has faced challenging and perhaps traumatic issues.

Financial Practices

Mia's main sources of income are CCB payments and EIA. At the start of her involvement with the project, Mia estimated her yearly gross income at approximately $2,600; however, she received additional funds from EIA after the birth of her twins. After an initial lag caused by the reapplication process, Mia also began once again to receive CCB payments, a major boost to her income. Mia's supportive housing in both the first stage and second stage of her recovery program was fully subsidized. Researchers noted that it did not appear to them that Mia's parents contributed financially.

An avid smoker, Mia spends about $45 per month on cigarettes which she buys at a reduced rate from her parents, who purchase them in the United States. She was also re-selling cigarettes to others; however, Mia told interviewers that she was only selling them at cost. She also purchased diet cola in large quantities.

Mia practices money-saving habits such as buying her prescription medication from a local store, which rewards her purchases with a $10 gift card toward grocery purchases. She participated in a matched savings program with a local non-profit organization and saved $250, which was matched to become $1,000, all of which Mia spent on household items for her children. Mia shared that she wanted to save for a car, furniture, and a vacation in the future, but her diary showed that she had not been able to actively save toward these goals.

Mia reported that she would spend income (such as her CCB payment) very quickly after receiving it — something she found both puzzling and disappointing. The research team noted that Mia expressed a desire to rein in her spending but was unsure of how to accomplish this and that this was an emotional process for her. We cannot conclude that Mia's tendency to spend her CCB income quickly is the result of trauma; however, the literature on financial decision-making and trauma points to correlations between the two (Ross & Coambs, 2018, p. 48).

Assets and Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Mia has one checking account and one savings account (Table MI1). She had very few assets at the beginning of the diary period. Mia purchased some furniture during her time with the project through a local asset-building program, but her net assets did not change substantially. Mia dropped out of the project early and was not willing to do a "post-diary" assets and liabilities interview.

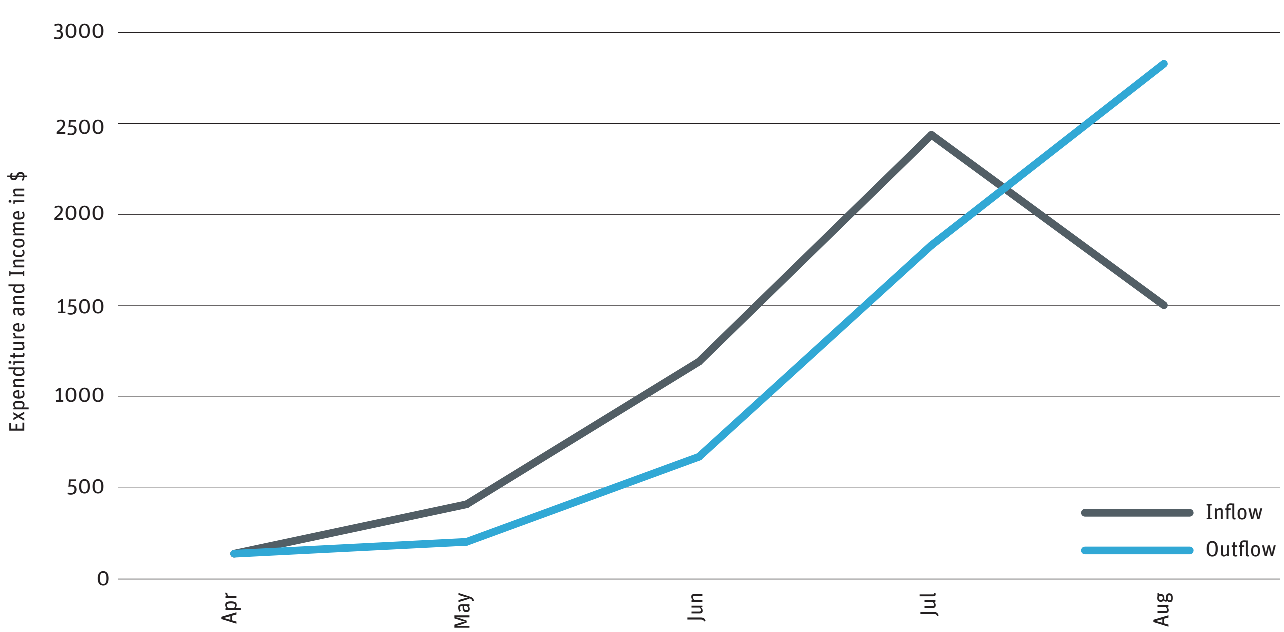
TABLE MI1 Mia Financial Assets and Liabilities

	Start ($)
Household Contents	240
Chequing	70
Savings	1,000
Loan (Mb Housing)	–1,500
Total	**–190**

Income and Spending Patterns

Mia's income and spending patterns over the time she participated in the Financial Diaries project show a steep increase in income and spending from the April–May period to the June–August period (Figure MI1). This is because Mia moved out of supportive housing to have greater independence — a major transition in terms of her children's care, her accommodation, financial independence, and inflows/outflows. Mia now needed to set up a furnished home and kitchen. In addition, she had to buy a tablet during the project after losing her old one at a bus stop. She also needed to replace her cellphone (purchased second-hand online) after it stopped working. From April to July, both inflows and outflows continued to increase, with inflows

FIGURE MI1 Mia Income and Spending by Month



remaining higher than outflows. The inflow spike in July was due to a higher CCB payment. Mia's spending in July also increased because she purchased shoes for her eldest son. In August, however, her income dipped when she received a lower CCB payment than in the previous month.

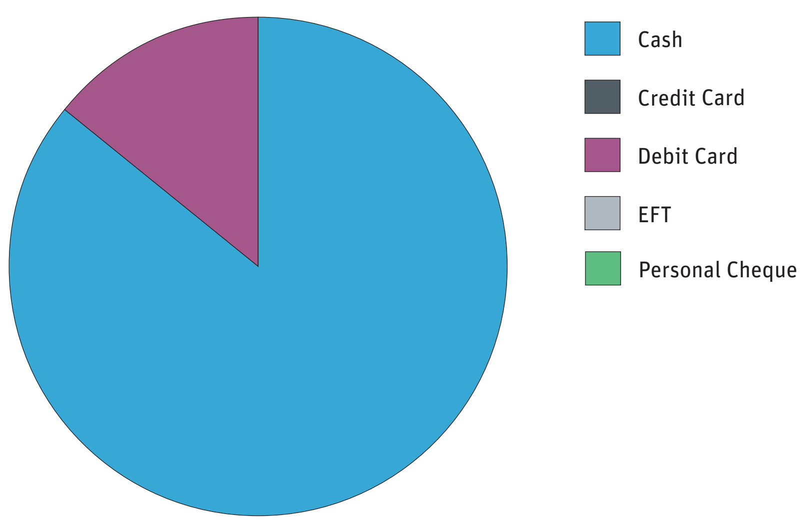
Mia spends the most on leisure, food, and clothing (Table 5). The high spending on leisure reflects Mia's expenditure on cigarettes and diet cola. Food and clothing costs are higher because this category includes spending on formula, clothing, and diapers for her newborn twins. Spending on communications costs (cellphone) also comprises a large part of Mia's budget. Mia's housing costs, on the other hand, are not reflected here, as her housing is completely subsidized.

Most of Mia's income (79%) comes from government inflows such as EIA benefits and CCB payments (Table 4). Mia also receives cash gifts from family and friends, as well as shopping loyalty rewards (9%). Mia received 2% of her income from casual employment (cleaning, baking) and occasionally receives income from the sale of cigarettes.

Transactions

Mia makes 85% of her transactions using cash (Figure MI2). She uses debit 14% of the time and rarely uses EFT. Mia does not own a credit card.

FIGURE MI2 Mia Transaction Methods



Namid

Namid is in his early thirties. When he first began participating in the Financial Diaries project, Namid's financial situation was already precarious. He was looking for work and receiving support from EIA, but this was insufficient to meet his basic needs. The instability of his circumstances was further compounded by his active struggle with addiction. Like some of the other participants in this group, Namid has suffered various traumatic experiences throughout his life. This seemed to researchers to have impacted both his financial choices as well as the overall health of his finances.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Namid learned about the Financial Diaries project from a local tax clinic. He joined the project in April 2018 and participated for twenty-one weeks. He shared with the research team that he had not been in the habit of tracking his finances before the project. On one occasion, Namid expressed his surprise at the discrepancy between what he thought he had spent and what he had spent, remarking that he had much less money left over than he had thought.

In September, Namid did not meet with researchers for a few weeks. He later informed the Financial Diaries team that he had been hospitalized for an illness. In late October, Namid enrolled in a rehabilitation program for sixty days. After an extended absence from the project, Namid's participation in the project ended.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Namid describes his cultural background as Anishinaabe-Sioux. At thirty-three, he is currently single. He told the Financial Diaries team that he had had a family in the past, but that his wife and child had passed away while he was serving a prison sentence.

Namid is unemployed and is working with a provincial agency to gain employment. He spoke about the potential for a year of training with this agency to gain employment skills. Namid had some undergraduate education and shared that he hoped to continue with his university education. He owns a smartphone but does not have an internet connection at home.

At the beginning of the project, Namid was teetering on homelessness. Living in a rooming house paid for by EIA, Namid described to the research team fights with other tenants and not being able to prepare meals in his room. At one point, Namid lost the key to his room and did not have the required $25 fee to get a new one. He ended up staying with his mother for a short period. In the fall, Namid lost his room in the rooming house and began staying alternately at his mother's and with a friend.

Namid shared with the Financial Diaries team about some traumatic losses he had experienced in the past. His wife and child were murdered during the time he was serving a jail sentence. Upon hearing about their deaths, he had been placed on suicide watch. He mentioned that his brother had been murdered as well, something that his mother, Nita, had also shared with researchers. Namid was open with the research team about his ongoing struggle with addiction. His financial diary showed patterns of impulsive spending.

Financial Practices

Before starting the Financial Diaries project, Namid estimated his annual household income to be approximately $10,000. This was mostly from government inflows from EIA.

Namid spends $365 per month on rent. He revealed to researchers that he normally does not keep track of his finances. Instead, he plans his expenditures and spends only after receiving his payment. Namid mentioned that he would likely require a new laptop for upcoming fall university courses, but because he liked to eat out when he had money this would likely not be possible.

In-kind gifts of food and groceries play a significant role in Namid's financial situation. He commented to the research team that when he runs out of money, he can borrow cash from his mother, and sometimes borrows her credit card as well. He frequently eats meals at his mother's home.

A researcher noted that Namid "seems to live in the moment and at the same time be distressed about the moment." Namid talked about how money seemed to go very quickly. He shared that he drinks heavily a couple of times a month. Namid also told the research team that he enjoys gambling and had once won the jackpot. Researchers noted that for one month, during which Namid had recorded most of his transactions, he spent nearly all his EIA within twenty-four hours, mostly on cab fare and beer. When asked about this, Namid responded, "Well cabs are faster and when I have money, I think it is easier."

Namid's financial decision-making might be understood better through a trauma-informed lens. Research points to the complex intersection of

TABLE NA1 Namid Financial Assets and Liabilities

	Start ($)
Electronics	20
Chequing	0
Savings	74
Owed gov't disability pay	Uncertain as to amount
Loan, MPI	−3000

trauma and financial decision-making, offering the theory that seemingly impulsive financial spending patterns by those who have suffered trauma might be attempting to compensate for trauma and satisfy deeper needs (Ross & Coambs, 2018, p. 48). The literature also draws a connection between having limited or scarce resources and focusing on immediate needs to the detriment of future financial well-being (Mullanaithan & Shafir, 2013).

Assets and Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Namid has one savings account and one checking account (Table NA1). He started the project with outstanding debt — a $3,000 loan from Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI) and a $50 bill for his cellphone. Namid indicated to the research team that the amount owed to MPI included regular payments for his licence as well as another debt, the details of which he did not disclose. Namid had very few household assets at the start of the project. His net assets did not change significantly during the diary period.

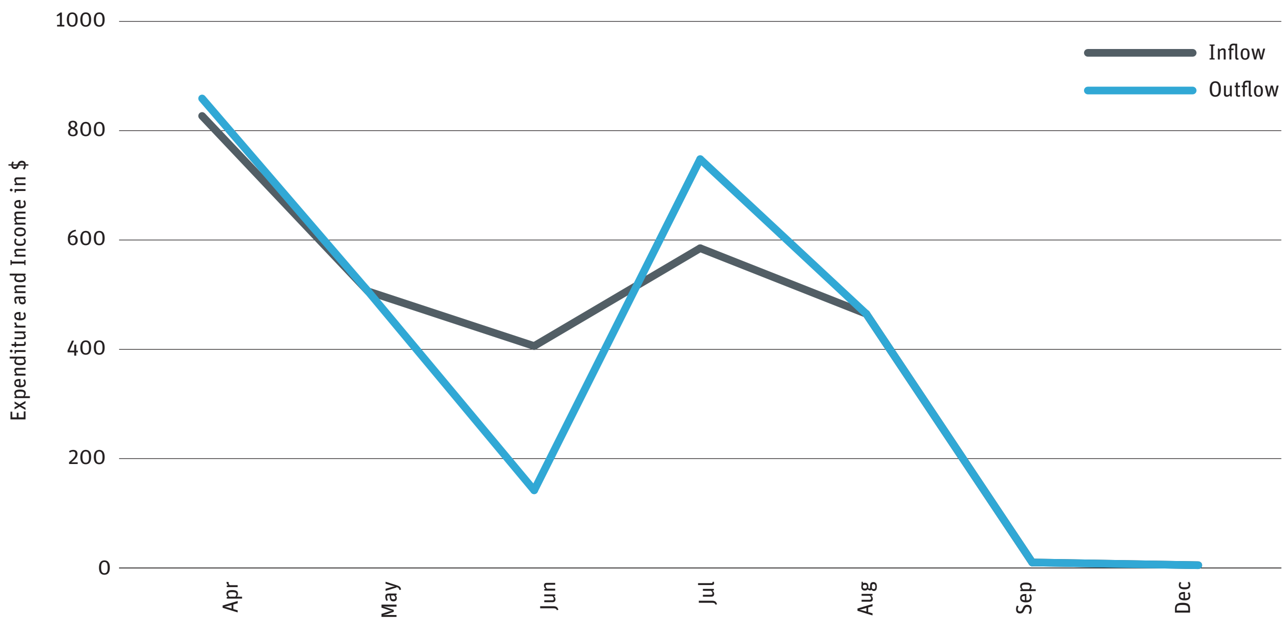
Income and Spending Patterns

Figure NA1 shows Namid's income and spending, or what he disclosed to the project, throughout his participation in the diary. Outflows normally mirror inflows for Namid, as he generally bases his spending on his income.

The dip in spending in June was due to a period of illness when Namid was not spending as he normally would. There was a sharp spike in spending in July. This was because of increased spending on leisure (alcohol and cigarettes). Namid also borrowed $40 from his mother (Nita) during this period.

Namid spends the most on items in the Other category (cigarettes and substances) (Table 5). This is followed by spending on food, housing, and transportation. Namid's food expenses are relatively high because he does

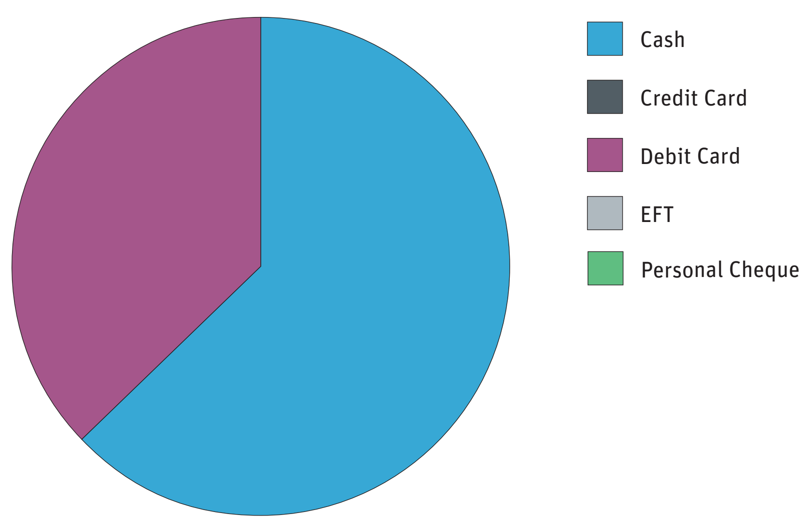
FIGURE NA1 Namid Income and Spending by Month



not have a space to cook in his rooming house accommodation. Namid also told researchers that he preferred to use taxis for transportation when he had the available finances, a factor that contributes to his transportation costs.

Ninety-five per cent of Namid's income is derived from EIA, as indicated in the Government Sources category (Table 4). A small amount of income was earned from the research project honorarium.

FIGURE NA2 Namid Transaction Methods



Transactions

Namid uses cash for 63% of his transactions and debits for 37% (Figure NA2). He does not own a credit card.

Nita

Nita is in her late fifties. She is not formally employed outside the home; however, she has been a full-time, long-term foster parent to three children. Although her income did not increase during her participation in the Financial Diaries project, Nita shared that she felt that her finances had improved.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Nita joined the Financial Diaries project in June 2018 and participated for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the diary project from her son, Namid, who was also a participant.

Near the start of her involvement in the project, Nita told the Financial Diaries team that she felt knowledgeable about her finances — she had a business administration certificate from a local community college and had observed her father's financial practices as he managed the family farm. In addition, Nita said, she had taken a course on financial tracking through a local non-profit organization. Despite this knowledge, however, Nita did not feel that she was in control of her finances. She had a small notebook where she noted down financial transactions but did not do this consistently. "I think at this point the finances are in control of me because I haven't had time to sit down and look over all the bills, et cetera."

Interviewers found that Nita's quantitative diary consisted of a general list of transactions and that there were discrepancies between the written data and her verbal accounts. Interviewers therefore frequently needed to ask additional questions regarding the details of these transactions to gain a more complete picture.

When asked about her definition of financial well-being, Nita said that it included having sufficient income for necessities, such as food, clothing and shelter, and transportation, but that financial well-being went beyond such necessities and included saving for the future and things such as family vacations.

By the end of the project, Nita had become more mindful of her spending. She shared that what she found most helpful about the project was the opportunity to discuss her finances with someone else. “I think because it gives me a chance to talk about my expenses every week or every two weeks. And I think about it after I talk and then I go home and contemplate. It’s always on my mind, expenses now.”

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Nita is divorced with three surviving adult children. She describes her cultural background as Sioux. Nita’s children do not officially live in her household; she is currently caring for three foster children. Her son Namid also frequently stays with Nita for extended periods. Nita is also very involved in caring for her grandchildren and helping with transportation to childcare.

Nita comes from a family of ten. Her parents struggled with alcohol abuse. Nita was placed in foster care as a child and attended residential school as a part of the Sixties Scoop. She is expecting a settlement payment as a result of the Sixties Scoop Class Action. One of Nita’s adult children also struggles with alcoholism and another son was tragically murdered a few years ago. The effects of residential schools and other colonization processes have traumatized many Indigenous people in Canada.

While her main source of income currently comes from her role as a foster parent, Nita shared with the research team that she had recently earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in aboriginal governance. She told researchers that one barrier she faces to employment is a past criminal record. This caused Nita to lose what she viewed as a good and stable job: she has hired as a maintenance worker at a facility a few years ago but was let go upon the discovery of her criminal record from nearly three decades ago.

Nita and her foster children live in subsidized housing. They are waiting for a three-bedroom unit to become available through Manitoba Housing (a provincial non-profit housing program), as Nita’s foster son is turning five and will need his bedroom after that point. Nita has a smartphone but does not have an internet connection at home.

Nita suffered because of the Sixties Scoop. She is a residential school survivor. Like Donna, Jaquelyn, and Sarah, she gives beyond her ability and suffers personally as a result. She gives her finances and time. For instance, she disclosed that her son used her credit card without permission. This self-sacrifice leaves her to eat takeout food or frozen dinners, which are not healthy for her.

Financial Practices

At the start of her participation in the Financial Diaries project, Nita estimated her annual income at $41,400. Her main income comes from foster parenting.

Nita frequently lends money to family members but does not keep records. These loans are more like gifts, as most are not repaid. This is particularly true for loans to her son, who has a drinking issue. Nita also helps her children financially in various ways, such as letting her adult son live with her periodically, paying for her daughter's cellphone bill, frequently giving her daughter rides, and paying for her daughter's traffic ticket (she drove through a red light), and paying for her son-in-law's parking ticket. Nita used to lend money to friends but ceased to do so during her participation in the project.

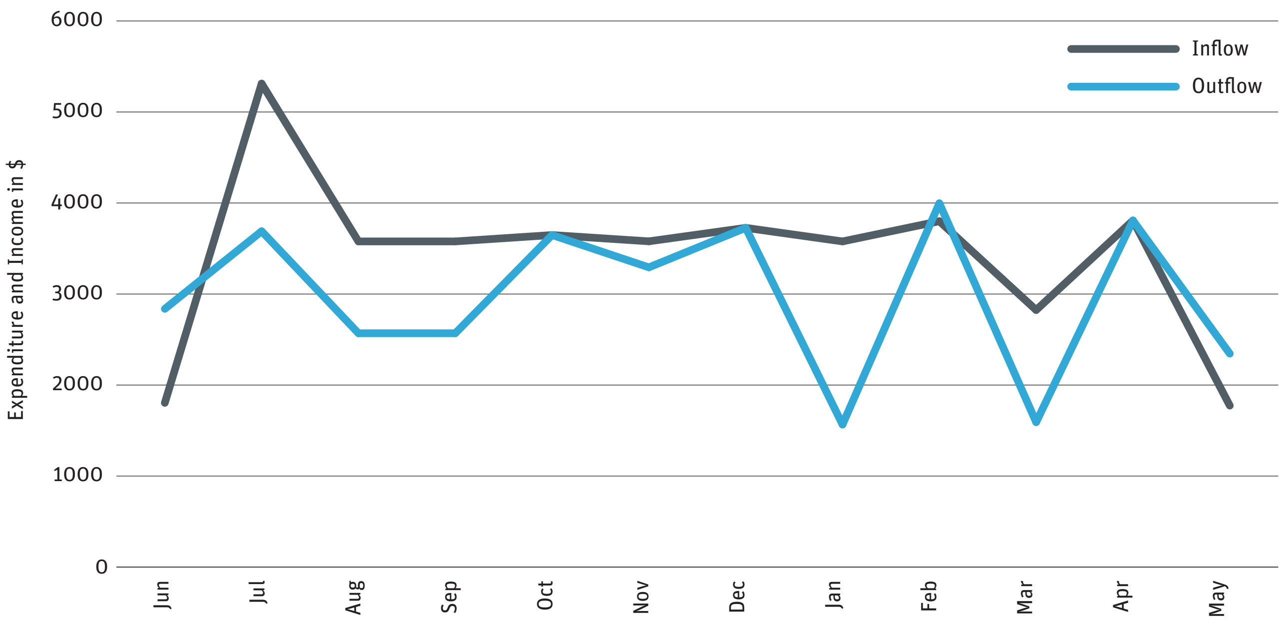
In addition to sharing financial resources with her children, Nita spends a lot of time helping her adult children by driving them to places they need to go and caring for her grandchildren, often at the expense of her self-care. She often resorts to takeout food or frozen dinners after spending time helping her children and subsequently being unable to take the time to prepare food from scratch.

Nita also stated that she is not a saver. She said that although she felt her income was modest, she could save if she became more intentional: "I know if I were to save, I could save." Nita regularly saves $50 per month toward the $900 fee required to apply for a pardon for her criminal record, but the majority of her financial transactions are very immediate — paying bills, lending money she can't afford to, eating out — demonstrating a present-oriented focus.

Throughout her participation in the diary process, Nita held just one credit card. She was leery of credit card debt, as she had accumulated a substantial balance owing on her cards in the past that took several years to clear. When she purchased a vehicle in the spring, she got a second card. Nita expressed to the research team that she was not completely comfortable having the additional credit card.

Nita commented that she would like to buy RRSPs with her portion of the Sixties Scoop Class Action Settlement. She also noted that the reason that she wanted to work outside the home was to save money for later in life, as her children already had enough to worry about in supporting themselves and she did not want to place additional expectations on them.

FIGURE NI1 Nita Income and Spending by Month

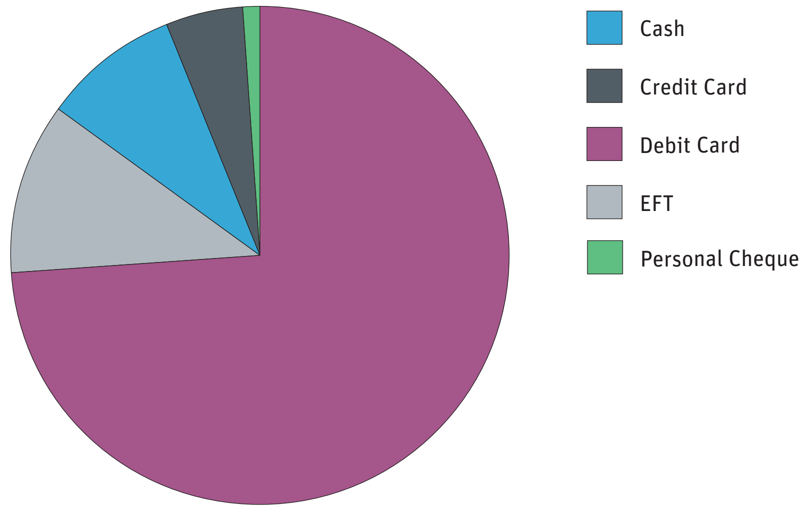


Income and Spending Patterns

The graph below shows Nita's income and spending patterns from June 2018 to May 2019 (Figure NI1). Her monthly outflows and inflows track one another quite closely. The income spikes in July and April occurred when Nita received more income as a foster parent. The spike in outflows in July was caused by increased expenditure on food and communication (cable TV, internet, and cellphone). In October, there were again increased expenditures on food and transportation, including car insurance, gasoline, and car payments. Nita also had higher court hearing fees (triple the usual amount) in October. The dips in outflows in September, January, and March were due to lower food, communication, and transport expenses. The dip in outflows in August was a result of lower expenses on communication and transport.

Nita mostly spends on food, transportation, and communication (Table 5). She spends more on food because she is often too busy to cook from scratch, and so must rely on takeout and ready-made foods for her household. She also purchases food for her adult children and grandchildren. Her high transportation costs reflect in part the purchase of a new van during the year she participated in the project. Nita's housing costs are low because she lives in subsidized housing.

FIGURE NI2 Nita Transaction Methods



Nita earns 99% of her total income as a foster parent, and the remainder is derived from gifts and government sources (Table 4).

Transactions

Nita relies primarily on debit for her transactions (74%) (Figure NI2). She uses EFT for 11% of her financial transactions and cash for 9% of her transactions. Nita rarely uses her credit card.

Ochieng

Ochieng is in his late fifties. Originally from Uganda, Ochieng came to Canada in 1991 to receive medical treatment for injuries sustained after he lost his leg in an explosion. He had been working in the Democratic Republic of Congo as a cargo truck driver when the truck he was driving triggered a land mine. After his treatment, Ochieng decided to stay in Canada and applied for citizenship. He worked for a local furniture company for sixteen years; however, at the start of his participation in the Financial Diaries project, Ochieng was on EIA and looking for work.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Ochieng began participating in the Financial Diaries project in March 2018 and continued for twenty-nine weeks. He learned about the project through a local non-profit organization. Ochieng noted that he normally does not track his expenses and does not save. He commented to researchers that there was no point in his tracking or saving, as his income was very meagre. Instead, he simply paid whatever bills he could when he received his EIA, saying, "'cause me, a person who is getting less, I care less about finishing my $200 and wait for another pay cheque."

Ochieng told the research team that he has attended financial education classes in the past but finds them discouraging. He feels that they are more helpful for those with more disposable income and who therefore must make decisions about discretionary spending. In his opinion, Ochieng explained, he has so little income that he does not have any money to save in the first place. He told researchers that he thinks the diary process is better for those with more income or young people, as he is set in his ways and has no wiggle room:

> I took almost three sessions not only here, but I came to find out, that those kinds of sessions need people who are making more money, who have no way of tracking their finances, but that people like me, who are right now not employed, are on EIA, sometimes I don't find that I have even $10 to budget … I don't have even 10 cents in my account, so I'm finding out, I'm sorry to tell you, it was kind of wastage of time to tell you the truth.

The Financial Diaries team found that Ochieng provided better qualitative data than quantitative data, noting that he would often arrive at their meetings with a hastily written list of expenditures — a few groceries and utilities — and very few income sources recorded.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Ochieng is single and one of only two male participants in this group. He describes his cultural background as Ugandan. Ochieng was married and has two sons. Ochieng also shared that he has experienced considerable conflict with his ex-wife, including legal disputes over property and finances.

Despite his family conflicts, Ochieng indicated that he has a strong social network. He spoke about the support he receives from his church and his pastor, including the fact that he has them listed as his emergency contact.

Ochieng expressed confidence in knowing that he could reach out to them for help or support if needed, relating an incident in which he was injured while he was volunteering and after which his fellow volunteers had rushed to his aid. Ochieng emphasized to the research team that he valued social connections more highly than finances:

> The friendship is more than a million dollars because you may die with this cupboard full of million here. Like, this heart attack you get here in this chair, this million dollars is not going to pick up the phone and phone for 911...

Ochieng has a grade 9 education. He lives in a rented apartment that is subsidized by Manitoba Housing. He owns a smartphone and has access to an internet connection at home. Unemployed, Ochieng occasionally looks for casual work. He volunteers extensively for his local church and local non-profits because, as he explained to researchers, this brings him joy and fulfilment.

Ochieng shared several hardships that he had experienced. He described encountering racism as a newcomer to Canada. He also suffered two separate work-related injuries. While a truck driver in the Congo, Ochieng not only lost his leg driving over a land mine but was subsequently imprisoned and tortured by authorities who wanted information about the incident. More recently, Ochieng sustained an injury to his eyes when he was changing a wheelchair battery (this occurred during one of his volunteer jobs) and some battery acid splashed into his eyes. He told the research team that he still suffers from damage to his eyes.

Ochieng also told researchers that he is rebuilding a relationship with the adult son he sponsored to come to Canada in 2004. This son, according to Ochieng, had an affair with his second wife and together they accumulated a high debt on Ochieng's credit cards, which led to the dissolution of Ochieng's marriage and the loss of his home and assets.

Ochieng has accepted relying on an extremely low income. He expresses contentment with his current situation and seems to manage well within his small means. He has a strong support network in the form of his local church and his volunteer positions — a network in which he has invested very deliberately. This seems to act as a buffer for his lack of family connection.

Although Ochieng has expressed acceptance of, and even contentment with, his financial situation, observers might ask if this acceptance is a form of denial — a display of present focus that might be a necessary coping mechanism in his case. Ochieng told researchers that he doesn't have the money required to address his debt issues, nor does he have sufficient income to save to do so. Mullainathan and Shafir (2013) note that individuals experiencing scarcity often become more focused on immediate financial needs, sometimes to the detriment of their long-term financial health.

Additionally, the circumstances leading up to his financial losses are fairly traumatic in and of themselves. Ross and Coambs (2018) note that in trauma therapy, there are four recognized phases of recovery through which victims generally move: unawareness, discovery, recovery, and restoration. They suggest that individuals who exhibit forms of financial denial might concurrently be repressing personal trauma as well (Ross & Coambs, 2018, p. 42).

Financial Practices

At the start of his involvement in the Financial Diaries project, Ochieng estimated his annual income at $9,000. He described very frugal spending habits, prioritizing rent and utilities, and then only using what was left for his food budget. Ochieng focuses on purchasing simple staple items such as beans, sugar, and cornmeal in bulk, and bulk cooking his meals. He does not subscribe to cable TV, saying his source of entertainment is the internet.

Ochieng noted that he prefers to rely on social assistance and volunteer rather than take on casual work. He explained that EIA de-incentivizes recipients from engaging in casual work by deducting earnings from their benefits:

> So it is like they are forcing you to work to get rid of you. But even when you work, you make whatever you make, because I did it once, then you have to take the slips and they cut it all. And they give you less from EIA. And if you keep it, it will show on your statement. Then that is another big problem that you're going to fight with those people. So we are scared to find a job, but we want still to work, you understand.

Ochieng told the research team that he enjoys working as a volunteer, explaining that he saw this as an opportunity (especially for newcomers) to learn about Canadian culture and find friends. Ochieng told the research team that he considered volunteering to be a way to develop references for potential future job applications. He noted, "Some of the people, they don't know how to deal with other people, but the volunteering, yes, you go there, you may think you're working for nothing, but you gather information which would it be in your mind. To know, you get friends."

TABLE O1 Ochieng Financial Assets and Liabilities

	Start
Furniture	$700
Computers, electronics	$1,050
Chequing	0
Savings	$163
Money owed to him	$1,000
Credit cards	None
Total	**2,913**

* Excluding $500,000 liability

Given his limited income, Ochieng told researchers, he does not save as he has nothing left after spending on necessities. He stated that he owes his bank almost half a million dollars and that he receives phone calls about repaying this debt. Ochieng commented that he approached an agency that could potentially help him apply for bankruptcy; however, he needs to pay $2,000 to begin the process, money he does not have now.

Assets and Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

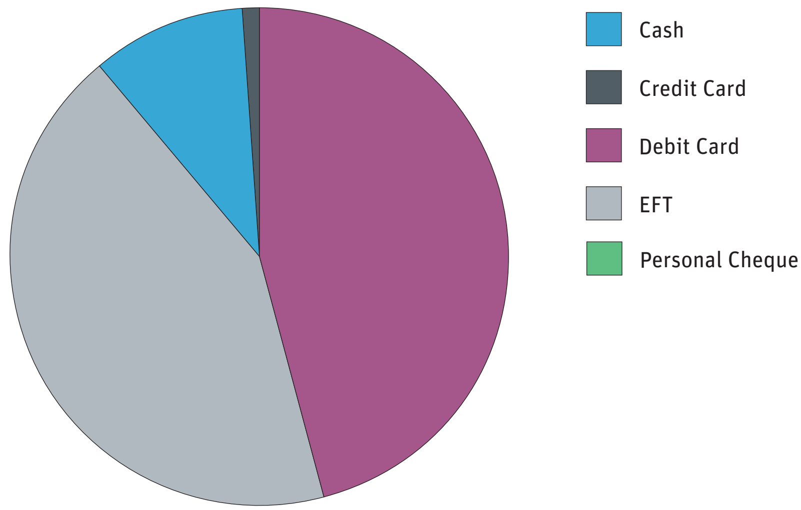
Ochieng's assets are minimal (Table O1). He owns furniture (a bed and a couch donated by a local church) along with two computers — a desktop and a laptop. Ochieng disclosed that he has a $500,000 debt owing to his financial institution because of a credit card issue, but he did not share more about this. There was minimal change in Ochieng's assets and liabilities over his time with the diary process.

Income and Spending Patterns

The data for Ochieng's income and spending over time was erratic, and therefore no figure can be supplied. His income, however, was consistent and low, with little or no money left for discretionary expenditures. Ochieng has no access to credit, and he tends to prioritize his bills. His financial transactions can be described as consistent over time.

Ochieng prioritizes rent, utilities, and food (Table 5). He relies on the food bank and only shops for those items not given out by the food bank. When shopping, he does not buy fresh produce and saves money by shopping at inexpensive grocery stores, buying and cooking in bulk.

FIGURE O1 Ochieng Transaction Methods



Ochieng's main source of income is EIA (Table 4). He also makes a nominal amount (11%) from casual employment.

Transactions

Ochieng makes about 46% of his transactions using a debit card (Figure O1). He also frequently receives income through EFT (43%). He uses cash for only 10% of his transactions.

Figure O1. Transaction methods

Rupi

Rupi is in her mid-forties. A recent newcomer to Canada, she immigrated to Canada from Bangladesh in 2017. Her year with the Financial Diaries project was her first winter in Canada. Rupi was not employed at the start of her participation in the project; however, she later got a job cooking for a local restaurant—work that she noted was challenging because of ongoing health issues. Rupi was actively working to contribute to her daughter's RESP.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Rupi started with the Financial Diaries project in March 2018 and continued for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the project from a local non-profit organization. Before this, Rupi was not formally tracking her financial transactions but noted that in doing so for the project she has become more aware of her inflows and outflows. Rupi also told the research team that she feels more in control of her spending: "I am more focusing [on] self-control when spending and budgeting and monitoring that, how much I'm spending and how much I'm left with and how much I should control."

Rupi noted that as a child, she used to have a "piggy bank" for saving money and that a local Bangladeshi bank opened savings accounts for students when she was in primary school. She told researchers, however, that when she was a student her parents supported her, and when she subsequently gained employment as an adult, she went through a period of less restrained spending. She explained that she had only learned to save after arriving in Canada and finding herself on a limited budget.

When asked what financial well-being meant, Rupi responded, "I think that [to be financially well, you are] self-sufficient, you're already in control of your money, management, finances, inflow and outflow." She explained to the research team that financial well-being is also about being able to set short- and long-term financial goals. One of her long-term goals was to own her own home. "But I don't know, I have no clue how to achieve it. But that is my inner dream."

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Rupi is single and has one teenage daughter. She describes her cultural background as South Asian/Bangladeshi. Rupi and her daughter live in subsidized Manitoba Housing, for which she pays from her EIA. She shared that she has had adjustment and health issues since arriving in Canada.

From conversations with Rupi, it became evident to project researchers that she places a high value on education. Rupi earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in business administration before she left Bangladesh. She invested in driving lessons and earned her driver's licence during the project. Rupi also reports contributing regularly toward an RESP to ensure her daughter will be able to realize her hopes of attending university. Rupi owns a smartphone and has internet access at home.

Despite physical health challenges, Rupi feels pressure to earn money to save for her daughter's future education. She talked about how difficult it is to not have a job. She also revealed that she misses the identity that goes along with having a "respectable" job. Rupi had earned $3,000 to $4,000 per month in Bangladesh working as a deputy manager with an electric company. She talked about how she was once able to help so many people but now she is not able to do so.

At the start of her participation in the Financial Diaries project, Rupi was working only casually as a school lunch monitor (one hour per day). She later found a job cooking for a local restaurant. Rupi described this work as difficult (owing to health issues) and precarious. She was paid informally and noted that at times she had to negotiate for her overdue wages.

Although Rupi would like to pursue training and work in a helping profession, she revealed that she faced several employment barriers. She told the research team that EIA does not consider her to be employable because she cannot work full-time with her various health ailments. For this reason, they will not place her in a training program to upgrade her skills. At one time, Rupi had applied to go on disability but was not accepted. This would have provided an extra $100 per month. She noted that she feels that she is on her own and expressed interest in learning about other community supports.

Rupi faces systemic barriers. Her employment situation is like that of other newcomer women, especially those of racialized minorities. Although educated, her skills are not considered sufficient for employment. English training classes, which could boost employability, are often unaffordable for parents who must work to provide for their children, sacrificing their opportunities to prioritize their children's futures. Frequently, women in such cases turn to poorly paid jobs in the service sector. Sometimes — as in Rupi's case — these types of jobs are especially precarious and poorly paid as they are "under the table."

In addition to her health issues, Rupi also spoke about her poor mental state and her need for more social interaction. She told researchers that she feels that she cannot cry at home because she needs to be strong for her daughter. She also spoke about how difficult it had been to be a single mother in Bangladesh.

Rupi shared that her marriage to her ex-husband had been abusive, which introduced trauma into her life. They had met only a brief thirty minutes before their wedding and were married for only three years before she left. Rupi told the research team that up until the year of her participation in the project, her ex-husband had not seen or supported his daughter since she was one year old. He finally come to Winnipeg to visit his daughter (then sixteen) in the fall of 2018, taking her out for meals and shopping. While he initially agreed to his daughter's request to provide $200 per month in support, he later reneged on this promise. Rupi shared that she is not even certain that the divorce is final, and although her daughter was born in the United States and is a U.S. citizen, she is uncertain about her entitlements.

Financial Practices

At the start of her participation in the project, Rupi estimated her annual income at approximately $8,800. This amount does not include her CCB payments. Rupi brought $20,000 of savings with her when she first came to Canada; however, this has since been deleted. In addition to her EIA income, Rupi receives a nominal income from her job as a lunch monitor. She receives less than minimum wage for her part-time restaurant job in the informal economy.

Rupi regularly saves to contribute to an RESP for her daughter and a TFSA. She is cautious with credit and avoids debt, using her credit card as a debit card mostly to avoid going over her twelve free transactions for her debit card. She does not spend much money on eating out, noting that

> [m]ost of the time we cook at home. So that's how we save. And I don't go out often to order food and restaurants and all that. We don't go on outings. Our life is very simple, Monday to Friday, I wake up in the morning, I make food and I'm at home and I go browse around to look for a job.

TABLE R1 Rupi Financial Assets and Liabilities

	Start ($)	Finish ($)
House Contents	6,900	6,900
Chequing	2,362	1,400
Savings	90	20
RESP	3,805	4,600
TFSA	1,361	1,600
Credit Cards	488	300
Other	CCB payback (undisclosed amount)	Resolved
Total	**7,618**	**7,620**

Assets and Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

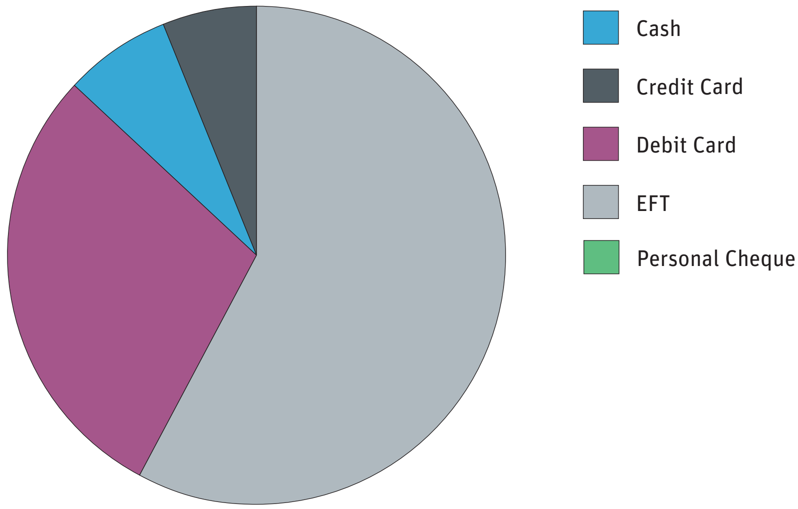
Rupi has one checking account and one savings account (Table R1). She also has an RESP) for her daughter and a TFSA. She owns approximately $6,900 in household contents (including a computer). Rupi's net assets increased negligibly over the diary period.

Income and Spending Patterns

Rupi's outflows generally follow her inflows (Figure R1). The spike in outflows in May was because Rupi sent $650 to her uncle in Bangladesh to help Rohingya refugees. She also paid for lodging for an upcoming trip to Toronto and train tickets between Toronto and Ottawa. In February, Rupi was able to contribute just under $1,000 to her savings plan, which accounts for the spike in outflows for this month. There was a spike in inflows in May, when Rupi received $1,000 for a GST rebate and $327 from a tax return from a previous year. The spike in inflows in September was due to a lump sum payment of $3,300 of her CCB, which had been cut off a few months prior and was now reinstated.

FIGURE R1 Rupi Income and Spending by Month

FIGURE R2 Rupi Transaction Methods



Rupi prioritizes housing and utilities, food, and saving money for her daughter's RESP (reflected in the Other category) (Table 5). She values healthy eating and shops for her groceries selectively, prioritizing quality rather than price. In this regard, Rupi is like Donna, who also tends to spend more on food than the other participants.

Rupi's main source of income is EIA (Table 4). She also earns a small amount from her part-time position as a school lunch monitor.

Transactions

Rupi makes about 58% of her financial transactions using EFT (Figure R2). She uses her debit card for 29% of her transactions. She uses cash and credit infrequently.

Sarah

Sarah is a single woman in her mid-fifties. She is employed full-time in early childhood education. Sarah described herself to the Financial Diaries team as a lifelong budgeter. She also revealed that long-term debts, lack of professional certification, and ongoing health concerns are all factors that she feels limit her efforts to make financial progress toward her desired goals, which are to pay off her debts and become a homeowner.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Sarah began participating in the Canadian Financial Diaries research project in 2018 and participated for fifty-two weeks. She learned about the project from a local tax clinic. When she joined the project, Sarah was already regularly keeping track of her finances. She informed the Financial Diaries team that she had received financial counselling in the past, which had helped her gain an appreciation for how small expenditures accumulate over time. Sarah also shared that she found it challenging to be consistent with filling out her financial diary, but she appreciated the clarity that the financial tracking sheets provided. She came to meetings with a diary that appeared to the Financial Diaries team to be thorough and accurate. Sarah revealed that she feels financial education is valuable and expressed to researchers her interest in the results of this project, including any potential policy recommendations that might be made.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Sarah describes her cultural background as Scottish/Irish/Welsh. She has two adult children whom she raised as a single mother. They are now both financially stable, a fact that she credits somewhat to her instruction and guidance. In conversations with the research team, it was evident that Sarah enjoyed a strong social support network of family and friends, along with the expectation of financial assistance from this network. She also noted that she expected an eventual inheritance from her family in the future. It appears that despite Sarah's current debt load and modest income, these social supports provide the reassurance that forms the basis of her financial confidence.

Sarah rents a private basement apartment in Winnipeg and receives a monthly amount toward her rent through the provincial Rent Assist program. During the year in which she participated in the Financial Diaries project, Sarah earned a gross income of just over $21,000. Sarah noted that although she had changed her career, owned her own business, and returned to school, she felt that age discrimination held her back from pursuing her career of choice. Sarah had also struggled with a painful chronic health issue for some time and revealed to one of the researchers that the resulting pain creates an added barrier to better employment and better wages because it limits the amount of time that she can spend working.

Sarah told researchers that she has managed a variety of businesses in the past and that she has had training in accounting. She expressed confidence in her ability to make financial decisions and recounted learning the value of tracking her finances as a child and seeing her father keep meticulous financial accounts. Researchers noted that she emphasized the importance of knowing what you have but that at the same time, Sarah's financial flows did not reflect this knowledge. The question arises whether this disconnect might reflect the continued impacts of financial trauma. Sarah noted that she had experienced sudden financial loss after her marriage to her children's father ended and one son fell ill. Suddenly a single mother of two young children (ages six and sight), Sarah became overburdened with medical bills for her son and had to declare bankruptcy. In Sarah's view, this was a pivotal point in her financial well-being: "So that kind of got me behind the eight ball and I ended up having to declare bankruptcy so that I could pay the medical bills. From there, I've just never had extra. I've always been in the low-income spectrum; I guess you'd say."

Although Sarah suffered the financial trauma of bankruptcy after her divorce and was left a single parent to two young sons, and has struggled with illness, she seems very resilient. She is unable to reduce her debt but also expresses confidence in her family and an expected inheritance in the future to buffer the shadow of debt that looms over her.

Financial Practices

In addition to her annual income from employment, Sarah receives Rent Assist amounting to $168 per month, on average. She has also received personal loans from family members in the past.

Sarah prioritizes expenditures on rent, phone, utilities, medicines, and pet food, using what is left over to go toward her food purchases. As someone on a fixed income, Sarah said that she has always been deliberate with her spending choices. The Financial Diaries team noted that she spent money freely on the things that are important to her, such as personal health products and pets.

Sarah indicated to the research team that before she participated in the Financial Diaries project, she was aware of her income and expenses and kept informal tabs on her spending. She came into the project carrying significant personal and student loans, as well as credit card debt. Sarah noted that she considers herself to be a good financial manager but that her debt and health prevent her from moving into a higher income bracket. During her time with the project, Sarah acquired a pet dog, which increased her expenditures. She managed to pay down some debt in one area but incurred more in another area. Sarah was not able to significantly reduce her overall debt load during the year that she was involved with this project. She commented during an interview that her family of origin also habitually carried credit card debt.

Sarah admits to struggling with finances. Her checking account balance regularly dips below zero. She shared that she lives paycheque to paycheque but that she finds ways to save small amounts of cash at home, such as keeping a piggy bank for small change, and would ideally love to be able to save enough to serve as financial padding to offset unexpected expenses.

Assets and Liabilities: Start and Finish of the Diaries Project

Sarah has one checking account and one savings account. During the period of her participation in the Financial Diaries project, Sarah's net assets remained relatively stable. At the start of the project, Sarah had an outstanding balance on her credit cards. Throughout the project, the outstanding balance on one card increased while the other decreased. While she was able to clear her provincial student loan by end of her participation in the project, Sarah still owed a substantial sum to a family member. However, her RRSP had accumulated $2,400 by the end of the project.

Income and Spending Patterns

The graph below shows Sarah's pattern in income and spending from March 2018 to March 2019 (Figure SA1). The trend in income and spending are similar, with gaps in some months including August and December. Compared to July, spending on cigarettes decreased by approximately 50% in August, and food and pet costs also decreased considerably. There was a spike in income in August because of the high income received from employment, constituting an increase of about 36.7%. An income dip occurred in October because of missed employment due to surgery.

The spike in November income resulted from the receipt of insurance payments of just over $1,600. Sarah had been experiencing an ongoing insurance issue related to one of her credit cards. She had paid for balance protection, which her credit card company had refused to honour. Payment for this issue reflected a positive resolution for her. In February, the income received was low compared with past months. Although Sarah mostly keeps

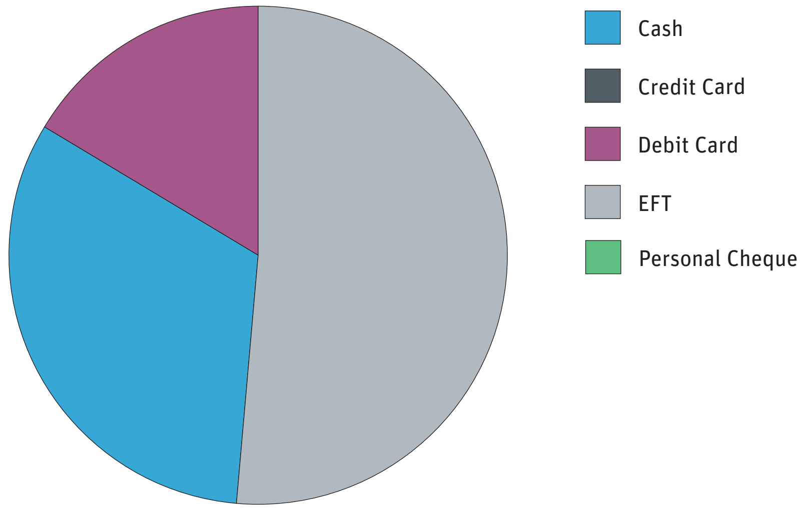
FIGURE SA1 Sarah Income and Spending by Month

a negative balance in her chequing account, for most months her savings account contains about two-thirds of the amount of her monthly rent payment.

The main items that Sarah spends on are food, housing, health, leisure, and transportation, trends in line with her stated spending priorities (Table 5). Sarah regularly purchases soda and other items at convenience grocery stores or purchases meals at fast food outlets for the sake of convenience. The higher expenses in the Other category reflect spending on cigarettes and her dog. Sarah informed the Financial Diaries team that she considers her dog to be a part of her family, and therefore deserving of adequate financial attention. Most of the transportation expenses go toward car insurance and gasoline.

Sarah's main source of income is employment (73%) (Table 4). The next largest source of income is a recent tax refund and a GST rebate (government inflows), which constitute about 17% of her income. She also received some income from medical insurance, which enabled her to manage medical expenses incurred by a medical procedure and her subsequent recovery. Sarah received a nominal amount as proceeds from lottery winnings.

FIGURE SA2 Sarah Transaction Methods



Transactions

Sarah mostly uses cash and debit card for transactions (32% for cash and 16% for debit cards) (Figure SA2). Credit card transactions comprise only 1% of her transactions; Sarah had exceeded her credit limit in the past and was paying this debt off during her time with the Financial Diaries project.

Sylvie

Sylvie is in her early thirties. When she began participating in the Financial Diaries project, Sylvie was in the process of transitioning out a recovery program for women healing from abuse and addiction. She was also in the process of regaining custody of her children and was therefore not looking for employment.

Connection to the Financial Diaries Project

Sylvie started with the Financial Diaries project in May 2018 and continued for sixteen weeks. She learned about the project from a local Indigenous healing organization. As she was transitioning back to independent living and would now be more actively involved in financial management, Sylvie shared with the research team that she was excited about her participation in the project. Researchers found Sylvie to be very organized for their biweekly meetings. Sylvie mentioned that it was her practice to keep a rough copy of her transactions over the two-week period and then transfer these to the tracking sheet prior to the meeting.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Sylvie is single and has never been married. She describes her cultural background as Métis. She has six children, ranging in age from two to seventeen years. At the beginning of the project, Sylvie's younger children were in foster care and she lived alone. She regained custody of her youngest child soon after starting with the project and was actively working to regain the custody of the others. Midway through her participation, Sylvie's eldest daughter moved in temporarily after giving birth to Sylvie's first grandchild. Child custody issues have given Sylvie challenges that could be identified as traumatic.

Sylvie has a grade 10 education and lives in a rental unit paid for directly by EIA. Sylvie is not looking for work and stated that her priority was to care for her children. While there is sometimes stigma attached to those who need to rely on support through EIA (this was alluded to by both Sylvie and another participant included in this group summary), the research team observed that receiving this income enables Sylvie to dedicate her time to parenting. She owns a smart phone and has an internet connection.

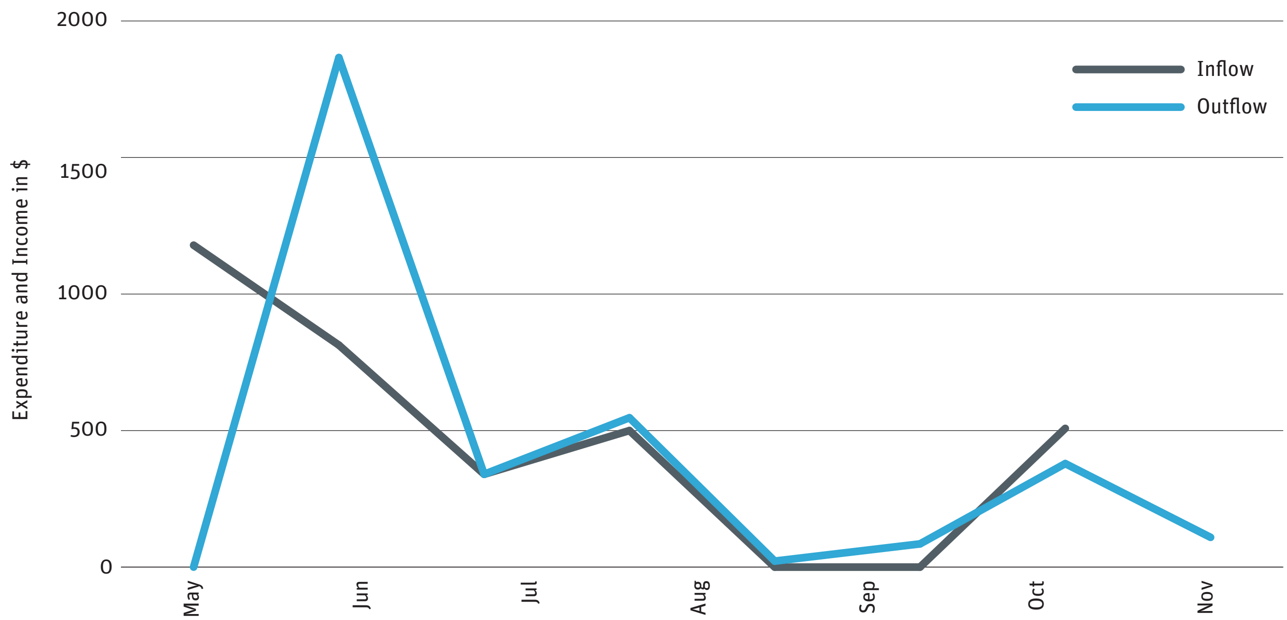
Financial Practices

Sylvie earns an annual income of just under $8,200 from EIA. She receives a weekly purchase order for around $65 dollars worth of groceries from a local grocery store. She also receives in-kind groceries when her children (currently in care) come to visit. After her youngest daughter was returned to her care, Sylvie began once again to receive CCB payments. She supplements this income by selling beadwork.

Sylvie's income from EIA amounts to only $280 per month, and she and lives from deposit to deposit. Of this amount, $142 goes toward her monthly cable, internet, and landline bill. Her rent is given directly to her landlord from EIA but does not cover her utilities, which can sometimes exceed $100.

There are no data for Sylvie's assets and liabilities. When asked, Sylvie told the research team that she was "not interested" in completing the forms, but that she might be after she had given birth. Shortly after the birth of her

FIGURE SY1 Sylvie Income and Spending by Month



child, another two of Sylvie's children were returned to her care and she could no longer continue with the project.

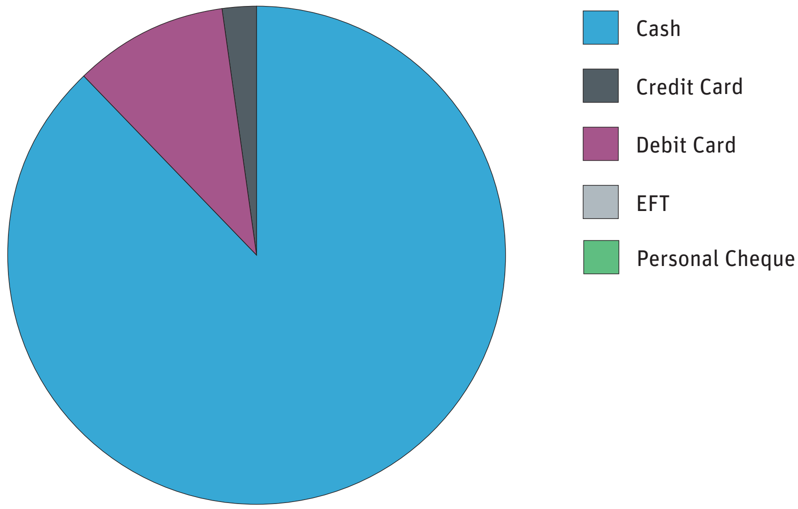
Income and Spending Patterns

The graph below shows the limited information the research team obtained for Sylvie's income and spending from May to November of 2018 (Figure SY1). The spike in outflows in June resulted from paying rent and purchasing household items when Sylvie moved into her apartment. She also spent more money on cigarettes in June.

Sylvie prioritises housing among her spending areas (Table 5). This is followed by expenditures in on food and communications. Spending in the Communications category is high because this includes Sylvie's internet connection, cable, and a landline for which she pays a total of just over $140 per month.

Sylvie's main source of income is EIA (Table 4), which comprises about 97% of her income. The remaining 3% of her income came from casual labour (cleaning, baking, and beading).

FIGURE SY2 Sylvie Transaction Methods



Transactions

Sylvie uses cash for 88% of her financial transactions (Figure SI2). She uses debit only about 10% of the time and rarely uses credit (2%).

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