

Report on Business

Affluence

U.K.'s rich: Women overtake the men

Female numbers boosted by longer lifespans; male wealth hit by aggressive investment before crisis

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The number of rich women outnumbered men in Britain for the first time last year, their numbers and wealth boosted by longer lifespans and an aversion to risky investments, new research showed on Thursday.

The survey by consultancy MDRC published this week shows women now make up 51 per cent of the population of British people with more than 500,000 pounds to invest, up from 49.8 per cent a year ago and 47 per cent in 2005.

The shift in relative wealth mostly reflects the fact that wealthy women have the longest life expectancy of any group in the U.K., the report said.

But a more aggressive approach to investment by men that left them exposed to riskier assets during the financial crisis, also boosted the relative wealth of women, the report said.

Richard Williams, managing director at MDRC told Reuters wealthy men were more likely to have held shares in British banks such as [Royal Bank of Scotland](#), Lloyds and HBOS which all came close to collapse.

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The research is based on a survey of 3,800 rich individuals, 800 of whom are worth more than £5-million.

It also found that in aggregate, Britain's rich prospered through the back end of the recession, growing in numbers and becoming significantly wealthier during 2009 as stock markets rallied.

The annual report said the total number of people in Britain with more than 500,000 pounds in assets increased by 53,000, or 11 per cent, to 518,000 during 2009.

The value of their assets rose by 13 per cent during the year, the survey added.

The survey also said the population of superrich people, with at least £5-million to invest, grew at an even faster rate of 16.5 per cent. Britain has seen its share of the European Union's mega-rich population fall from a fifth in 2008 to around 16 per cent at the start of 2010, the report said.

Britain's merely affluent – those with assets over £100,000 – also grew in numbers by close to 10 per cent to 1.82 million people last year.

But the recovery in the U.K.'s moneyed population does not reflect a pickup in entrepreneurial fortunes, the report notes, as three-quarters of the increase can be attributed to gains on the stock market during the year.

“The remaining 25 per cent (comes) from a wide range of factors including excess income, inheritances, divorce settlements and other capital gains,” the report said.

The average age of British rich people with more than 500,000 to invest stands at 56, the report said, while the average age of a newly rich individual is 43.

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