

Out of stock: Half of Christmas shoppers having difficulty finding items in store; many are starting early

Nearly half of lower income households say this year is more financially stressful than past years

December 2, 2021 – It's supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year, but emotional and financial stress combined with supply chain woes have Canadians carefully calibrating how much they'll spend on Christmas shopping, and when they'll spend it.

Supply chain issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic – with labour in [short supply](#) and [production challenges](#) ongoing internationally – have been highlighted in recent months.

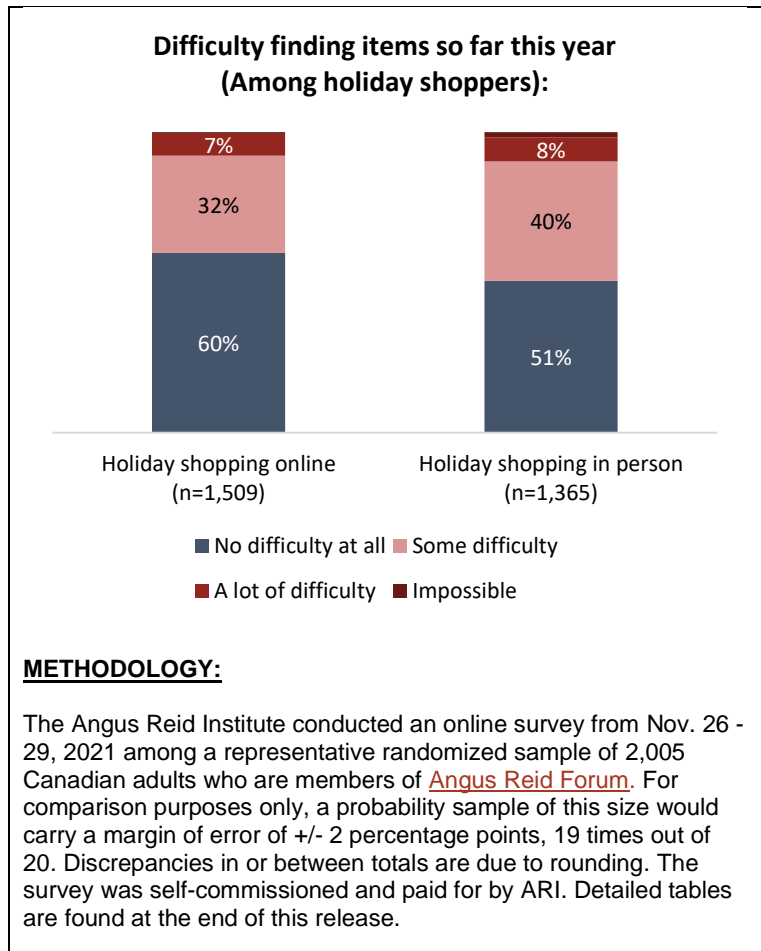
The latest data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds a significant segment of would-be holiday shoppers already putting retailers on the naughty list as they struggle to find what they're looking for in stock. Forty per cent of online shoppers report at least some difficulty adding to their cart this season, while nearly half (49%) of in-person shoppers encountered shelves lacking the items they wanted.

Many Canadians consumers are responding by starting their holiday shopping early this season. Indeed, 35 per cent say they are already underway, while a handful (6%) are waiting longer this year, hoping that some of the aforementioned issues will clear up in time to get their list completed while avoiding the logjam.

Inflationary pressure on Canadians has also added challenges for some, as costs for common household goods continue to rise. Asked to assess their financial and emotional stress this year compared to others, more than half (53%) say they are feeling worse emotionally and 41 per cent say the same of their economic anxiety.

More Key Findings:

- Three-in-ten Canadians (31%) say they are spending less this year than in most years, compared to 19 per cent who say their spending will actually increase.



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- Financial stress levels are highest in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and are lowest in Quebec. Quebecers are also least stressed from an emotional standpoint – though 42 per cent still say they are feeling worse this year than others.
- Those feeling stressed financially are twice as likely to be cutting spending (41%) than to be increasing it (22%) this holiday season.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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Part One: Another tough holiday season for many Canadians

Many Canadians are entering the holiday season under tough financial circumstances. They are being [squeezed by inflation](#) as incomes remain stagnant. That's not the only thing stressing Canadians. As the COVID-19 pandemic drags on, the day-to-day normalcy Canadians hoped for [one year ago](#) still feels far away. Instead, pandemic-related stress and the [isolation and loneliness](#) that come from social distancing look like they're here for an extended stay as new fears over the [Omicron variant](#) rise.

[Related: Nine-in-ten identify rising cost of living as a greater concern than job or income security](#)

Meanwhile, natural disasters struck both coasts as parts of British Columbia needed to be [evacuated again](#) after serious flooding killed [at least five](#) earlier in November, while Nova Scotia deals with a deluge of its own that [wiped out bridges and roads](#).

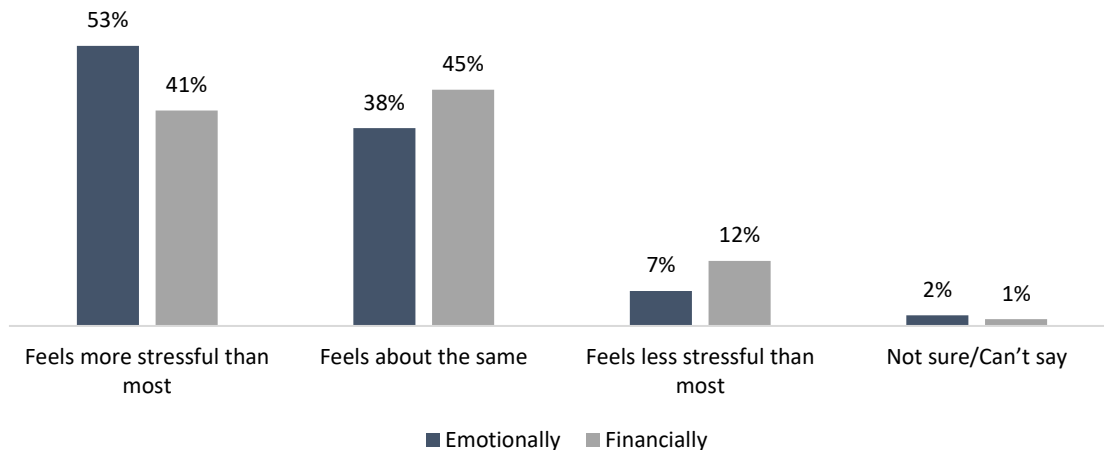
On the west coast, the flooding has had implications for the busy holiday shopping season. Ports across North America were already backed up due to overseas shipping issues [exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic](#) and the recent damage from flooding in B.C. has [choked the flow of goods](#) from the Port of Vancouver, Canada's largest port.

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Against this backdrop, many Canadians report feeling more stressed than in other years. Half (53%) say this year feels more emotionally stressful than past holiday seasons. Further, two-in-five (41%) say this year feels more stressful than most financially:

**Thinking about the two factors listed below, would you say this year feels more or less stressful than most other years:
(All respondents, n=2,005)**



Young women feeling most vulnerable

Women, and in particular those 54-years-old and younger, are feeling the most emotional stress. Three-in-five 18- to 34-year-old (59%) and 35- to 54-year-old (57%) women say this year has been more emotionally trying than an average year.

While half (47%) of men aged 55 and older say the same, they are the demographic least likely to report feeling this way. They are also feeling less of a pinch financially, compared to other demographics. For those aged 54 and under, a plurality in each age and gender cohort say this year has been more financially stressful than most, including a majority (52%) of women aged 18 to 34. Notably, young women were more likely to have lost working hours during the early portion of the pandemic, and more likely to need government benefits like the CERB as a result.

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Thinking about the two factors listed below, would you say this year feels more or less stressful than most other years:							
(Weighted sample sizes)	Total (n=2,005)	Age and Gender					
		Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=282)	35-54 (n=331)	55+ (n=370)	18-34 (n=274)	35-54 (n=341)	55+ (n=407)
Emotionally							
Feels more stressful than most	53%	55%	52%	47%	59%	57%	53%
Feels about the same	38%	38%	39%	46%	31%	31%	39%
Feels less stressful than most	7%	5%	6%	5%	8%	9%	7%
Not sure/Can't say	2%	2%	3%	2%	1%	3%	1%
Financially							
Feels more stressful than most	41%	43%	47%	27%	52%	45%	37%
Feels about the same	45%	40%	38%	56%	37%	42%	53%
Feels less stressful than most	12%	16%	14%	15%	10%	10%	9%
Not sure/Can't say	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%

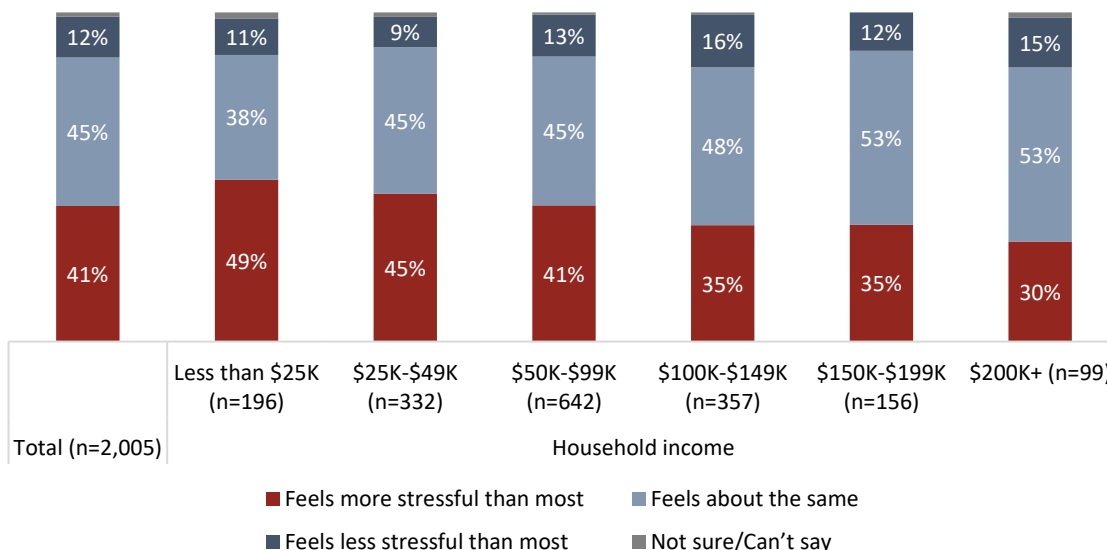
Lower income Canadians experience higher levels of financial stress

Income level is correlated with financial stress: half (49%) of those in the lowest income bracket say 2021 feels more stressful than most years:

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How does this year compare to others financially?



Quebecers less worried than rest of the country

Across the country, a majority are dealing with more emotional stress than usual. In all regions except Quebec, more than half of respondents say this year feels more emotionally stressful than a typical year, peaking in Alberta where two-thirds (64%) of respondents say this. The picture is only slightly rosier in Quebec, where two-in-five (42%) still say it has been a more emotionally stressful year than average.

Financial stress, too, is being felt less in Quebec, where one-third (33%) say this year feels more financially stressful than most, the lowest of any region in Canada. People in the Prairie provinces report carrying a heavier financial burden, as at least half in Alberta (52%), Saskatchewan (48%) and Manitoba (50%) say this year feels more stressful than most when it comes to their budget:

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Thinking about the two factors listed below, would you say this year feels more or less stressful than most other years:

(Unweighted sample sizes)	Total (n=2,005)	Region						
		BC (n=252)	AB (n=186)	SK (n=161)	MB (n=151)	ON (n=565)	QC (n=502)	ATL (n=188)
Emotionally								
Feels more stressful than most	53%	60%	64%	57%	53%	55%	42%	54%
Feels about the same	38%	31%	30%	37%	40%	37%	45%	41%
Feels less stressful than most	7%	7%	3%	6%	4%	6%	10%	4%
Not sure/Can't say	2%	1%	3%	1%	4%	2%	2%	1%
Financially								
Feels more stressful than most	41%	43%	52%	48%	50%	41%	33%	41%
Feels about the same	45%	45%	40%	41%	37%	43%	51%	51%
Feels less stressful than most	12%	12%	7%	10%	11%	15%	14%	6%
Not sure/Can't say	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%

Emotional and financial stress seem to go hand-in-hand. Of those who report feeling more financial stress this year than an average year, three-quarters (74%) also say they are feeling more emotional stress. For those who are in a better financial position than they usually are, a plurality (39%) still say they are more emotionally burdened than in a typical year:

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Emotional stress compared with financial stress				
(Weighted sample sizes)	Total (n=2,005)	More financial stress than normal (n=825)	Same financial stress (n=905)	Less financial stress than normal (n=249)
More emotional stress than normal	53%	74%	40%	39%
Same emotional stress	38%	22%	54%	36%
Less emotional stress than normal	7%	4%	5%	23%
Not sure/Can't say	2%	0%	2%	1%

Looking at these two factors combined yields four groups of Canadians heading into the holidays. The Doubly Stressed are more stressed this year financially and emotionally. The Emotionally Burdened are stressed on that front, but not financially, while the inverse is true of the Financially Burdened. The Comfortable are not stressed when considering either of these aspects of their lives.

The Holiday Stress Index	
The Doubly Stressed (n=608, 30% of the sample)	The Emotionally Burdened (n=464, 23% of the sample)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two-in-five in Alberta (41%) and Saskatchewan (37%) fall into this group Two-in-five (37%) women aged 18 to 34 are in this group More likely to be under the age of 55; two-in-five (38%) are aged 35 to 54 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More likely to be older than any other group; nearly half (45%) are over the age of 55 The most educated group; two-in-five (37%) have at least a university degree The highest earning group as well; a plurality (36%) live in households earning \$100,000 or more annually
The Financially Burdened (n=217, 11% of the sample)	The Comfortable (n=716, 36% of the sample)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three-in-five (58%) are women, the largest percentage of any group The least educated group, with two-in-five (42%) who have a high school degree or less The lowest earning group with a plurality (34%) who live in households making less than \$50,000 annually 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than half (55%) are men, the only group on the index where that's the case Two-in-five (41%) of Canadians over the age of 54 are in this group Half (47%) of Quebecers say they are neither emotionally or financially stressed more so than any other year

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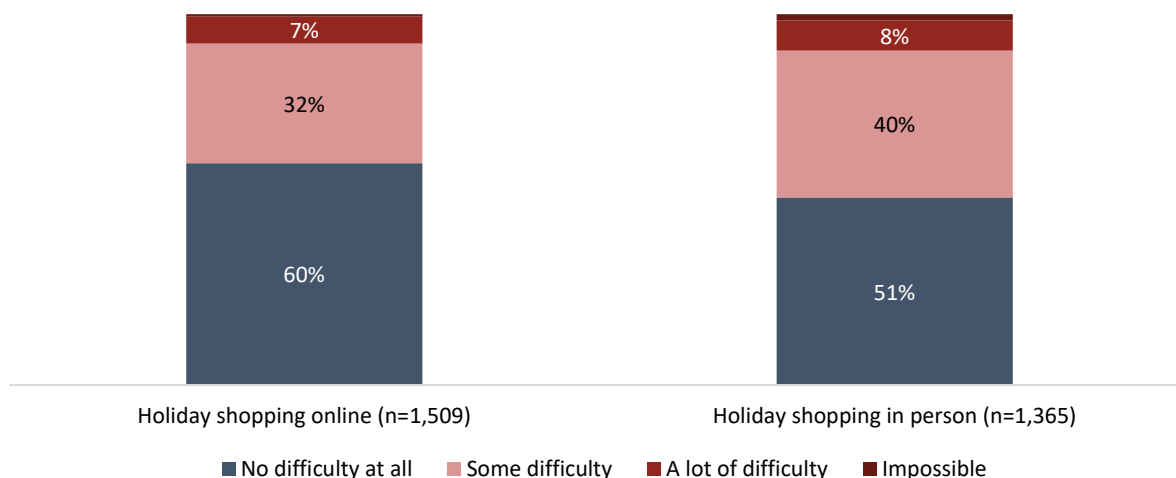
Part Two: How are consumers approaching the holidays this year?

Ships are waiting at major North American ports unable to offload them fast enough in a pandemic-adjacent supply chain crisis analysts have called “containergeddon.” To avoid the overburdened ports, and ensure stocked shelves for the holiday season, major retailers such as Wal-Mart and Home Depot have chartered their own vessels to avoid the backlog at ports such as Los Angeles.

Pandemic-related supply chain issues have been exacerbated by natural disasters, including the flooding in B.C., which halted rail service from the Port of Vancouver – Canada’s largest port – for eight days.

Significant segments of Canadian shoppers are already feeling the crunch, encountering more issues at brick-and-mortar stores than online. Half (49%) say they’ve had some difficulty finding what they need while holiday shopping in person; two-in-five (40%) say the same of their holiday shopping experiences online:

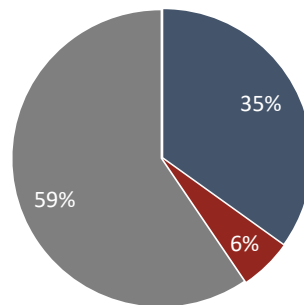
**Difficulty finding items so far this year, among each type of shopper:
(Among holiday shoppers)**



Many consumers responding to supply chain issues by early shopping

To fight the potential disruptions to their holiday shopping – and crucially – ensure on-time delivery – fully one-third (35%) of those who do shop for gifts at Christmas say they’re starting earlier this year:

**There have been concerns this year about supply chain disruptions due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and other problems. How have you responded to this?
(Holiday shoppers, n=1,844)**



- Started shopping earlier this year
- Waiting for longer to start shopping this year
- No change in shopping behaviour compared to normal year

Young men and women appear to be the most likely to try to beat any supply chain concerns by getting their shopping out of the way, while three-quarters (73%) of men 55 and older say they haven't changed their holiday-shopping behaviour at all ([see detailed tables](#)).

One-in-five spending more, three-in-ten spending less

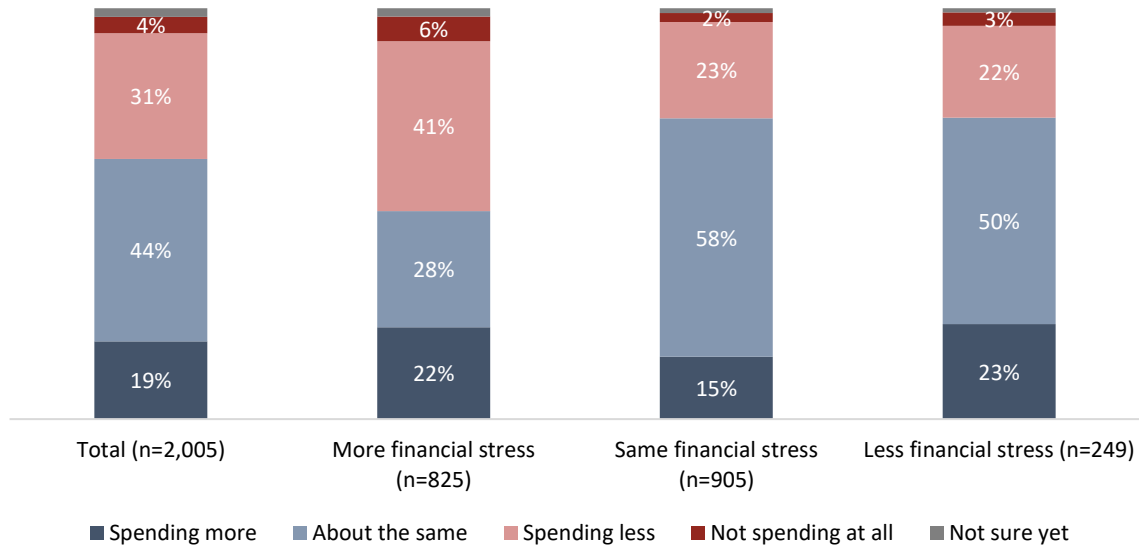
Many Canadians (45%) aren't changing their holiday season spending habits when compared to years past, but the number who say they will be spending less (30%) outnumber those who say they will be spending more (19%).

For those feeling greater financial stress than in a typical year, a plurality (41%) say they will be spending less than average in December. A majority of Canadians who feel less, or about the same, stress financially as an average year say they will be spending about the same as they typically do:

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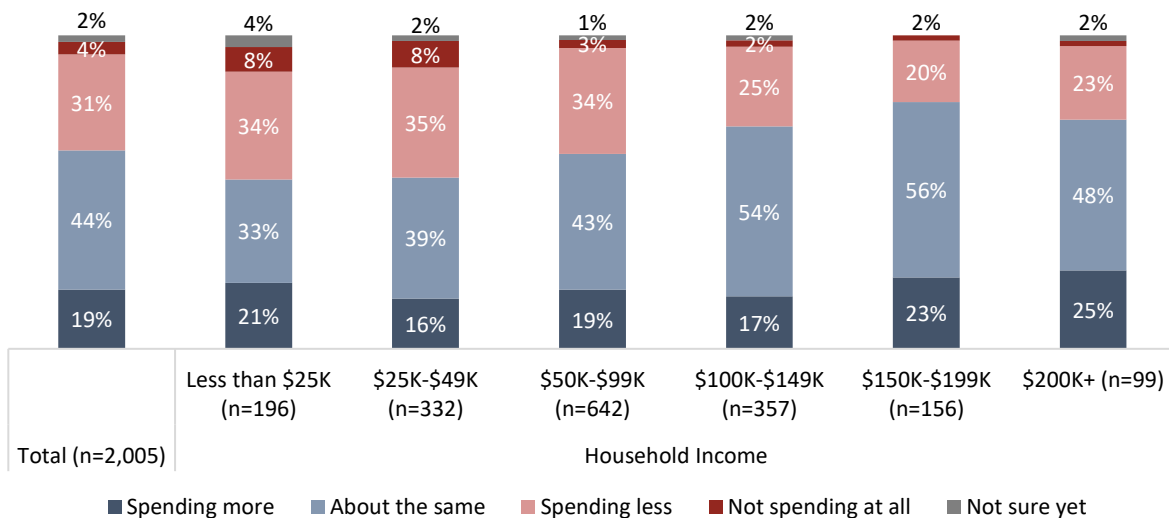
How will the amount you spend in December compare to the amount you spend most years?



A plurality in every region across the country say they will be spending at about the same level as they have in past years, but one-quarter (26%) of those in Saskatchewan say they will be much looser with the purse strings this holiday season, the most of any region in the country ([see detailed tables](#)).

For those in the lowest income bracket, as many say they will be spending the same (33%) as spending less (34%). Those in households earning less than \$50,000 annually are four-times as likely as higher earning households to say they will be not spending any money at all during the holiday season:

Now, turning to some of the financial aspects of the month ahead, how will the amount you spend in December compare to the amount you spend most years?



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by level of emotional and financial stress, [click here](#).

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