

SHE Speaks

**YWCA of Adelaide's annual survey of South Australian
girls and young women aged 15-30 years**

March 2012

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South Australian Community Health Research Unit

YWCA of Adelaide

YWCA of Adelaide is the leading voice and service provider for South Australia's young women providing advocacy, programs and training in key areas of young women's leadership, employment, health and wellbeing, and safety.

As part of the world's oldest and largest women-led membership movement the YWCA of Adelaide has been working with and for young women in South Australia since 1880. The community organisation directs its energy and resources to early intervention and prevention and is committed to advancing gender equality, ultimately equipping young women to reach their potential.

SA Community Health Research Unit

The South Australian Community Health Research Unit (SACHRU) seeks to enhance health, wellbeing and equitable outcomes in South Australia by contributing to improving the quality of primary health care, health promotion and population health initiatives through research, evaluation and building the capacity of the workforce.

SACHRU provides support to a range of groups including community health services, government departments administering grants programs, community organisations, and others conducting community and primary health care projects, such as hospitals, and non-government organisations.

Sincere thanks

YWCA and SACHRU sincerely thank the 300 girls and young women who took the time to complete SHE Speaks. Your thoughts and ideas were insightful and well considered. Your input has allowed us to capture a broad cross section of opinions from participants of varying ages and backgrounds, and will no doubt contribute to action within and beyond South Australia.

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Introduction

SHE Speaks was developed in 2011 through a partnership between YWCA of Adelaide and the SA Community Health Research Unit (SACHRU).

SHE Speaks aims to capture the voices of girls and young women in South Australia by exploring a range of concepts and issues, both personal and social, in an online survey.

SHE Speaks was piloted in August 2011 and opened to the public during September, October and November 2011. It was promoted through existing YWCA of Adelaide members and networks including schools and other community based services and not for profit organisations. The survey was also promoted on YWCA of Adelaide's website and through social media. The online link was able to be forwarded among a variety of networks from the initial sources. *SHE Speaks* remained open until 300 young women had participated.

2011 is the inaugural *SHE Speaks* survey. YWCA of Adelaide hopes to use this, and future rounds of the survey to inform its program planning and advocacy. It is also envisioned that the results may be used by other sector services and policy stakeholders to inform their work with young women in South Australia.

Methods

SHE Speaks was developed through a partnership between YWCA of Adelaide and the SA Community Health Research Unit (SACHRU). The survey was developed based on the interests of YWCA and what they understand as being important to their target groups, and on identified gaps in the evidence around young women's issues in South Australia.

SHE Speaks is an issues based survey which aims to explore a range of concepts and topics which affect young South Australian women. It uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative (open ended response) questions.

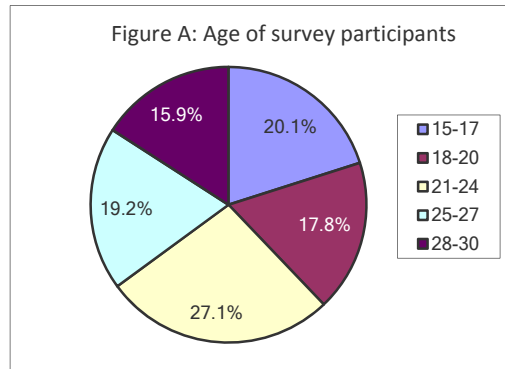
The development process involved a pilot round, whereby 10 respondents completed a version of the survey which requested their feedback on survey and question structure, ease of readability, and relevance. *SHE Speaks* was administered online by SACHRU through Survey Monkey. The survey was open for 3 months, during which time YWCA of Adelaide promoted the survey to young women across their membership and broader networks.

The results were downloaded from Survey Monkey in December 2011 and the quantitative responses analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Qualitative responses were analysed according to prescribed themes.

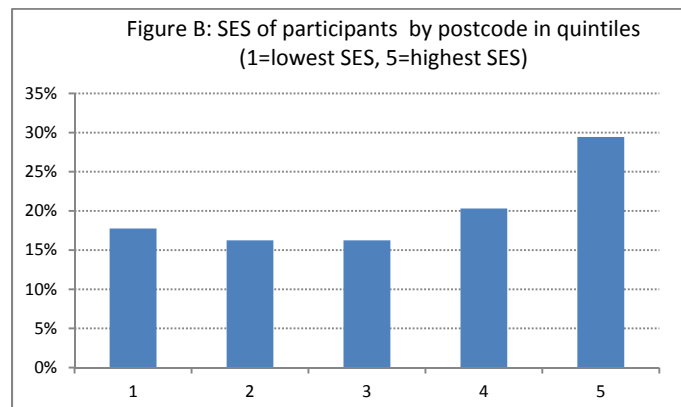
Thanks to SACHRU colleagues Dr Katy Osborne and Julie Johns for assistance with editing and analysis.

Survey participants

The girls and young women who participated in *SHE Speaks* were aged between 15 and 30 years, representing an almost even spread across age categories:



Participants also represented a spread of socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds as determined by quintiles of SES based on their postcodes. A slightly higher proportion of higher SES participants were included:



Results

1) Aspirations of young women

The aspirations of young South Australian women represent a diversity of interests, motivations and life paths. Some women identified immediate goals which were personally pressing, such as ‘finishing my uni assignment’, and others mentioned longer term goals such as ‘winning the premiership’.

The overwhelming theme amongst the ambitions of *SHE Speaks* participants was that of happiness and balance:

Achieve a good BALANCE - career, money, relationships, hobbies, relaxation, happiness, holidays, work, play, fun.

Have a happy life with people I love.

I just want to live my life to the best I can.

To forge a balance between a satisfying personal life and a successful career.

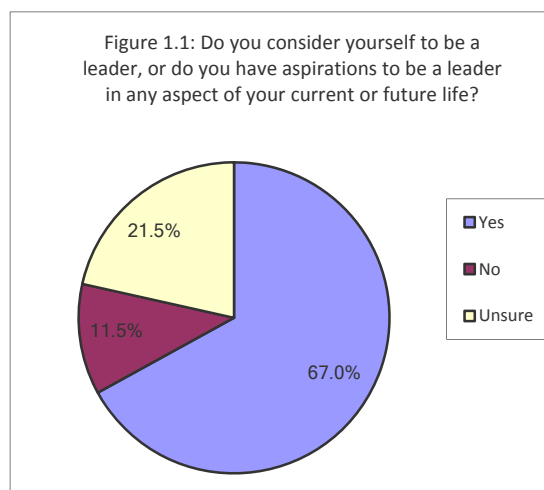
Many participants also aspired to help others, measuring their success through ability to create change:

When all is said and done, I'd love to look back on my life and say "I helped change the world and make it a better place"... I'm not a glory hog. I just want to leave the world a better place than it was when I arrived here!

To inspire others.

Young South Australian women aspiring to leadership

When asked about their perceptions on whether personally aspire to ‘leadership’, the majority of respondents identified that they are currently, or may aspire to be a leader in the future:



When asked why they do or do not see themselves as leaders, respondents often mentioned their personality and skills as determinants of whether they are 'natural' leaders:

I like to think that I relate well to people and offer good advice and guidance when in need.

I like to take charge.

I don't have the kind of "leader" personality.

It is not very important to me to be a leader in life.

I believe I have some of the skills a good leader has, such as directing people, but I there are other skills I don't think I possess, such as having 'big picture' thinking or vision.

Because I'm bossy. But also, I have the courage to speak out where others don't because they're afraid of how society will tear them down for it.

Others identified the roles that they have in their employment or other areas of life as creating leadership opportunities for them:

I've been at my workplace for 3 years now, although I'm part time, other workers still look up to me as a leader because of my work experience.

In my netball club I do, I am a coach and a team captain. But in my professional life, not so much.

I take on responsibility for the things I am passionate about. In particular my sports club. I consider myself someone that my colleagues depend upon.

Other respondents saw that their leadership aspirations were linked to wanting to create change and influence others:

Because I believe I have things to teach people and I want to lead them in the right direction

I have aspiration to be a leader in my future life, because hopefully people will follow and help other people apart from themselves, and outside their comfort zone

To make a real difference in the world we must work in groups and teams rather than just as individuals.

I get satisfaction from helping people.

The concept of leadership was described in different ways by respondents. Many saw leadership as being 'on top' or 'ahead' of other people, and in some instances this concept was challenging for respondents:

A leader is someone who is not afraid to stand alone, if they are standing for what they believe in. That is me.

I enjoy working with others not leading others

I like to be a leader, but I also like to work as a team.

Leadership and the concept of leadership a) scares me and b) kind of bores me. I'm not a sheep that likes to follow but I have no aspiration to lead a flock either.

However many respondents saw leadership as a less formal position or process, and much more about 'leading by example', 'sharing' and 'encouraging' other people:

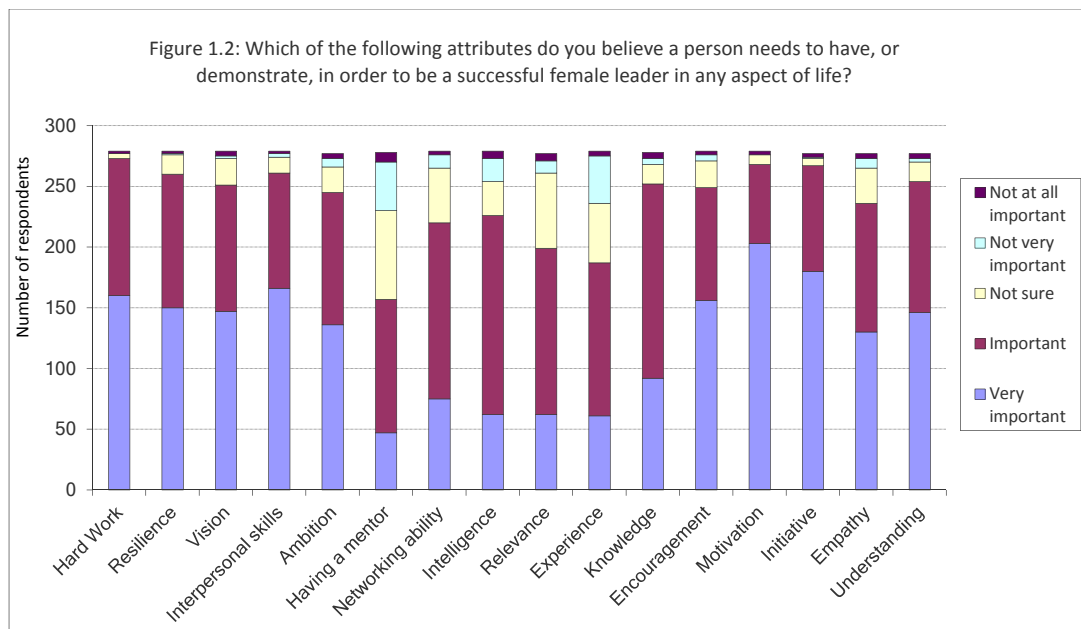
Everyone should think themselves to be a leader - it just takes courage to stand up and express your opinion.

[I] can utilise people's skills and am encouraging and have initiative in the programs and projects I care about.

I want others to be able to learn from my experiences and to be able to pass on my knowledge.

It is great to be able to mentor others and give the knowledge I have onwards.

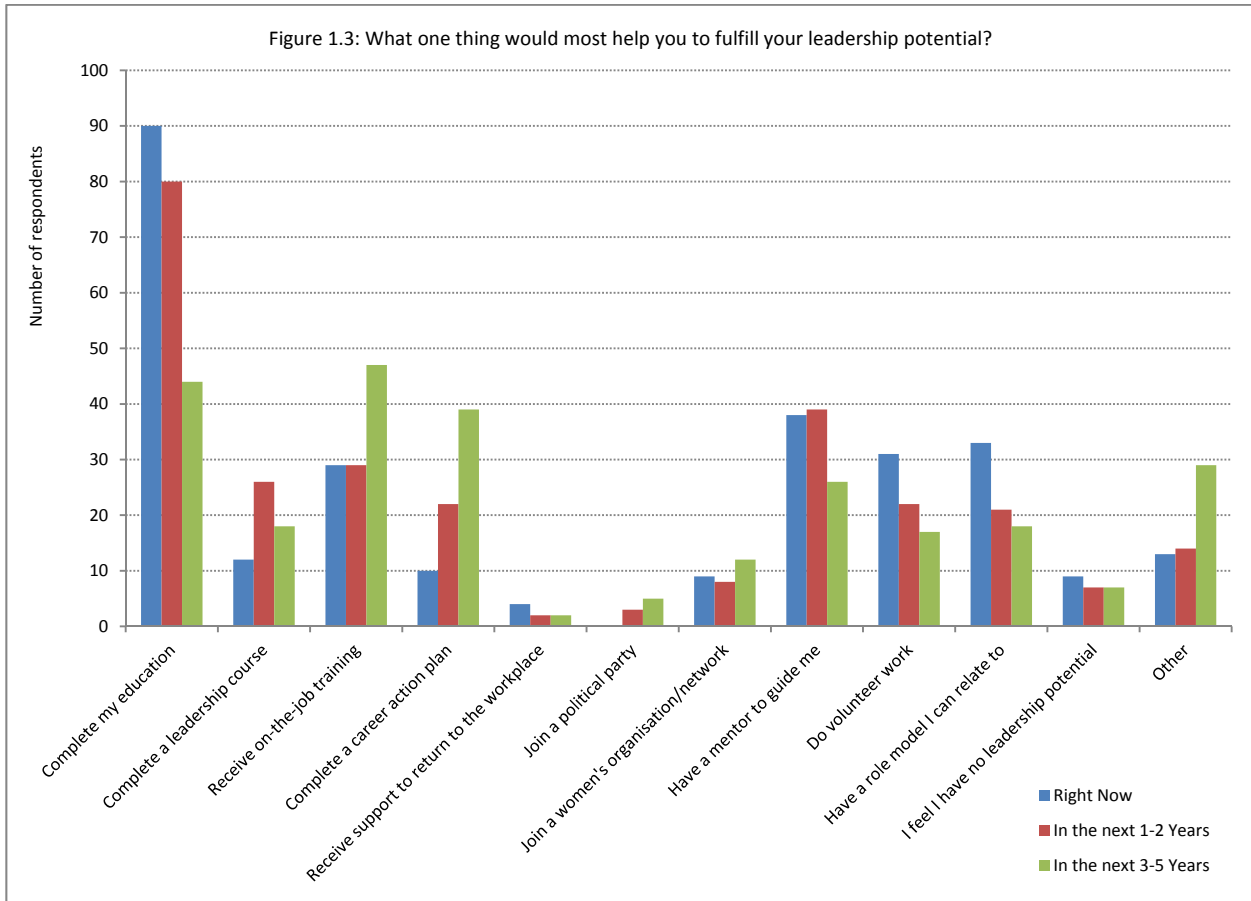
When asked what attributes or opportunities are required in order to be a female leader, respondents particularly highlighted motivation, hard work and initiative as being 'important' or 'very important'. Interestingly, experience, relevance and intelligence were seen by respondents as relatively less important.



Supporting young women to achieve their aspirations

Young women who participated in *SHE speaks* are overwhelmingly interested in developing their leadership potential. Many participants, perhaps because of their understanding of 'leadership' as a position to aspire to rather than being a leader in everyday life, see their leadership development as something that might

happen more actively in the future. In the short and medium term, participants identified completing their education as the one thing that will develop their leadership potential. Receiving on the job training and completing a career action plan become more important for participants as they considered the next 3-5 years. Other leadership development supports which were identified as important included having a mentor, doing volunteer work and having a role model:



Participants identified some other ways that they would personally like to be supported to achieve their leadership potential:

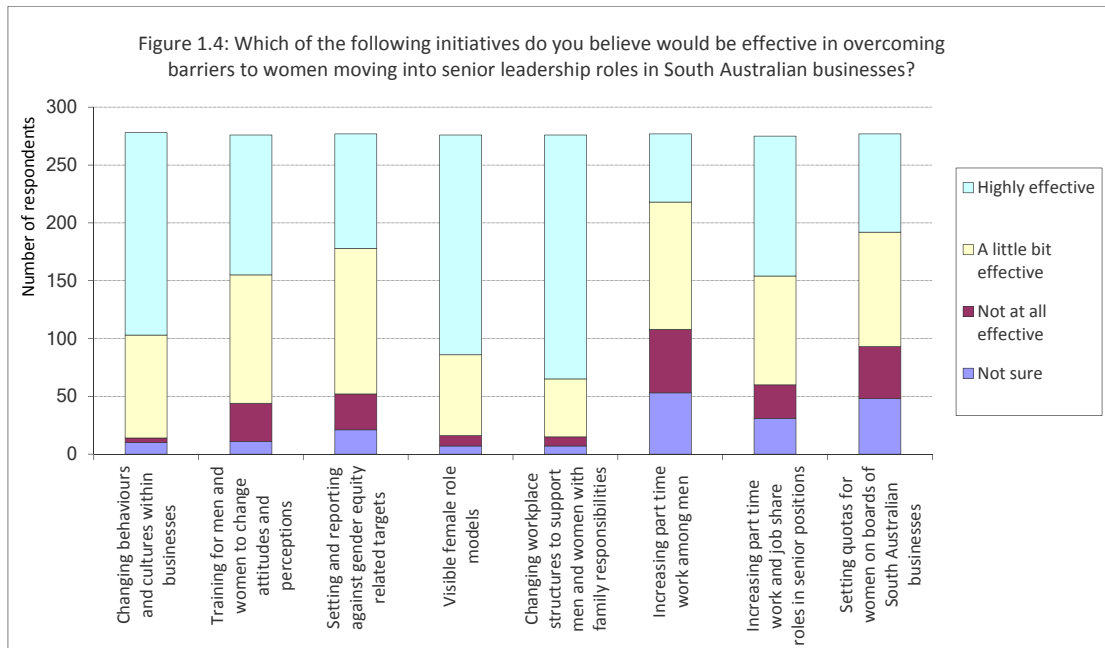
A job in which I have autonomy and am encouraged to lead.

Meet and hear from women who are doing the best for society not themselves.

Someone needs to take a chance on me.

Opportunity!

Further, participants were asked to identify structural or social changes which would support women to achieve their leadership potential in business. Setting quotas on boards, setting equity targets, and increasing part time work amongst men and in senior positions were seen as relatively less effective strategies, whilst changing behaviour, culture and structures to support employees with parenting responsibilities within businesses, and having visible female role models were seen as relatively effective.



When asked for any other ideas regarding strategies to combat barriers to women's leadership, respondents suggested:

Changing behaviours and cultures within the education system, primary secondary & tertiary - encouraging women to aspire to leadership roles and emphasising female role models.

Give more support and encouragement early on in life.

It has to change in women's mind as well. Many women think that they are no longer "feminine" or "sexy" when they are in a position of power.

There also needs to be a "female" way of leadership, and not women having to turn into men to be leaders and to be taken seriously.

I feel there needs to be more opportunities for working parents to be in leadership roles or to job share leadership roles. This currently does not seem to be an option. I am one of the most experienced workers at my agency and have been there for 7 years, but am not able to advance higher due to working part-time.

I think raising awareness of inequality and putting pressure on industries can be successful - improvements are slowly starting to be seen in the theatre industry.

Work place mentoring programs for young women.

When asked what message they would like to give the State Premier or the Prime Minister in order to create more opportunities for young women, a breadth of ideas was presented. Some of the more original ideas included:

Let's develop a program where all young women in SA are provided with positive and diverse female role models who can have a conversation with them about their potential...

Get rid of the 'men's club' culture.

Free or very low cost contraception! Unplanned pregnancy can inhibit a woman's opportunity and access to free or low cost contraception is very difficult.

More work experience opportunities and mentors for young women before they finish high school.

Listen to young people, what they have to say and their ideas.

I would discuss the opportunities for women in country areas... we need to promote women role models...

Reduce the amount of sexist advertising in the media... And do something about the rampant sexism in the military. And make sure that Tony Abbott does not become PM!

Fairness is the key to change.

Make a difference by educating men.

Role models for inspiration and leadership

SHE speaks asked participants to identify their favourite female role model and why. Given that having role models was identified in other areas of the survey as being important in developing the potential of young women, it is not surprising that participants each often mentioned multiple role models for different reasons. Interestingly, the attributes which participants described in their role models were often those which are directly associated with being female as opposed to a leader per se.

Many identified their close relatives and friends, as well as teachers or colleagues as being inspirational in 'small' but important ways, particularly around showing strength through adversity, stoicism, maintaining dignity, being kind to others, and leading by example:

My mum she went through the hard times when she was younger in those days and she has taught me to stand up tall and don't underestimate your capability.

My nana, she raised 9 children, and still has a successful family and life.

A High School teacher. She taught women's studies and is a passionate advocate of women's rights and gender equality.

My mother and grandmother. Why? They are my teachers and my nurturers.

Any female nurse who is compassionate and kind to nursing students and does not help to squash their ambition... is currently a big role model to me.

Many participants also described role models who have inspired them through their ambition, dedication, talent and poise:

Natasha Stott Despoja. She's not afraid to be feminine, even in an adversarial, masculine environment.

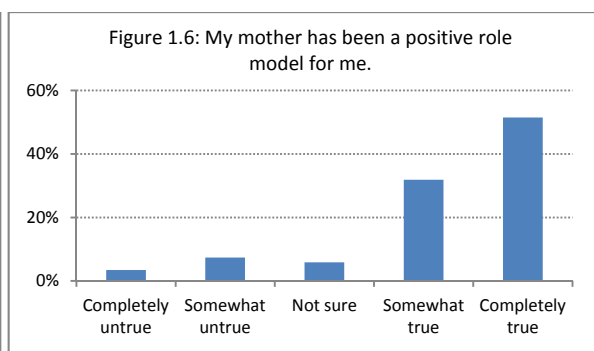
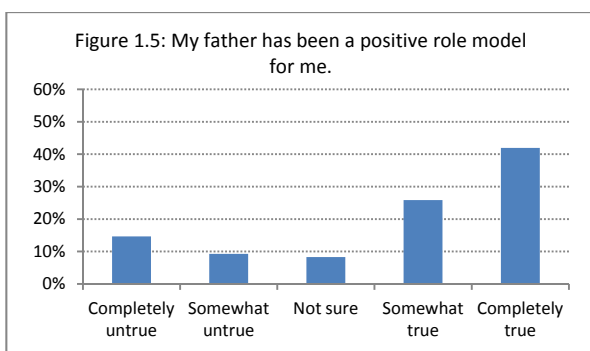
Maggie Beer--she took a basic concept (good, fresh food) and made an empire--and without formal training.

Female fighters (UFC etc) because of their dedication and courage.

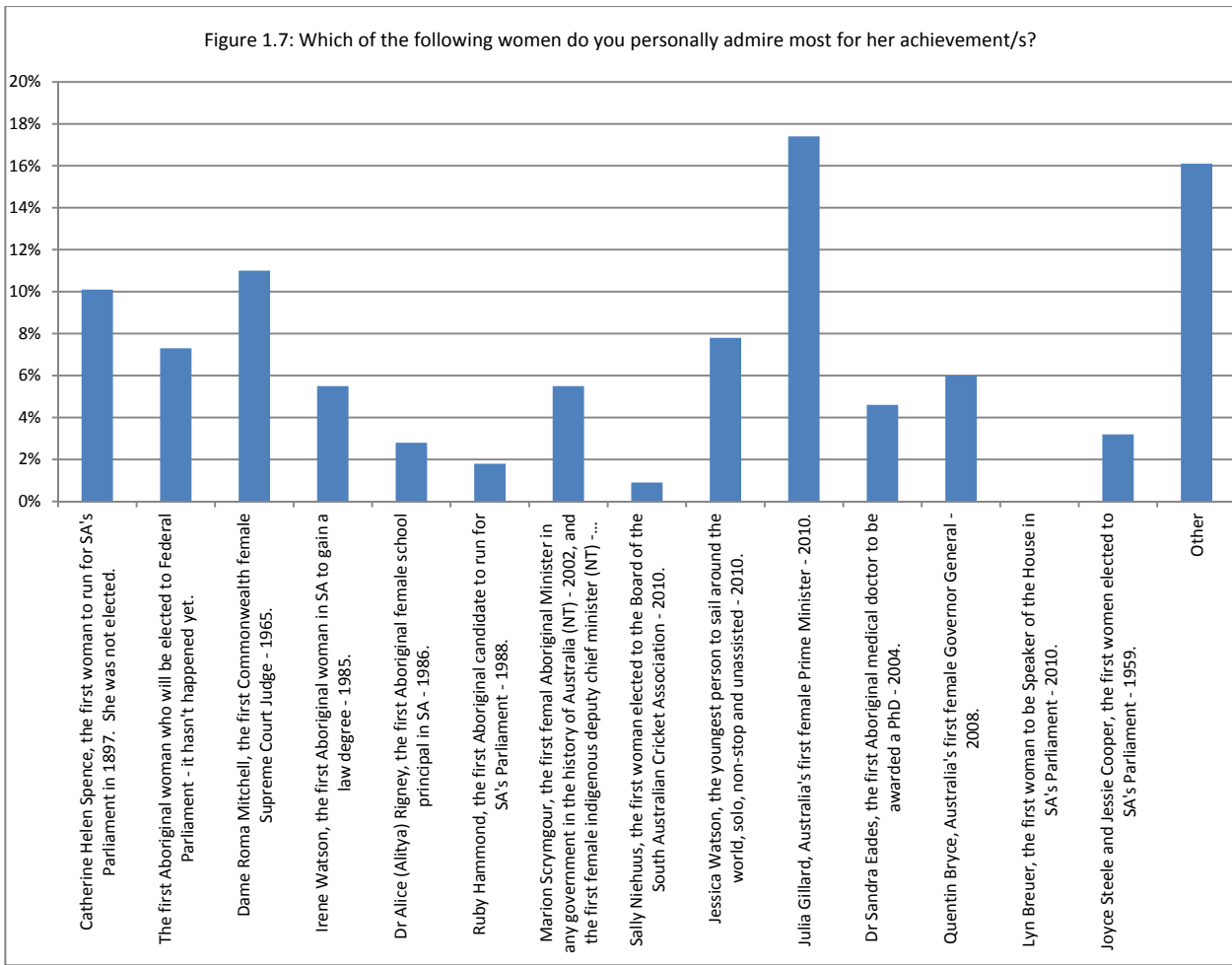
Quinton (sic) Bryce, the Governor General of Australia. She is a fantastic role model for me. Intelligent, driven, oodles of self respect and well balanced. What a woman.

Ellen Degeneres... she is a strong, compassionate, generous woman who is constantly fighting injustice and recognising the needs of others.

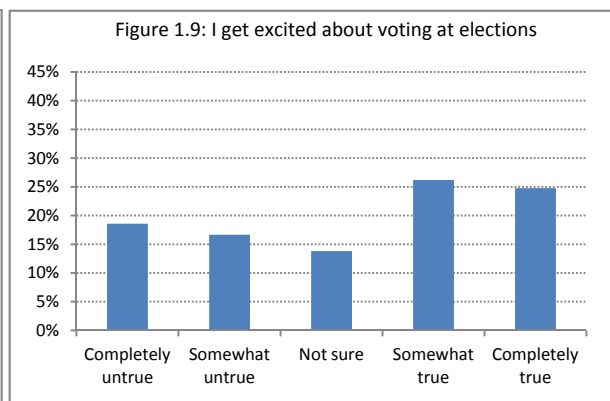
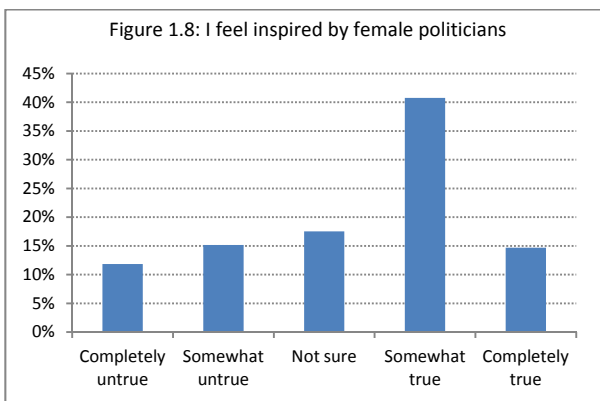
Survey participants were asked to identify whether their parents had been positive role models. 68% of young women responded 'completely true' or 'somewhat true' to the statement 'my father has been a positive role model' whilst 83% responded in the same way regarding their mother – thus identifying a gender gap in parental role modelling:



SHE Speaks participants were asked to select their most admired female role model from a list representing political, Indigenous, academic, business and sporting leaders. Julia Gillard was the most personally admired on the list, followed by Dame Roma Mitchell and Catherine Helen Spence:

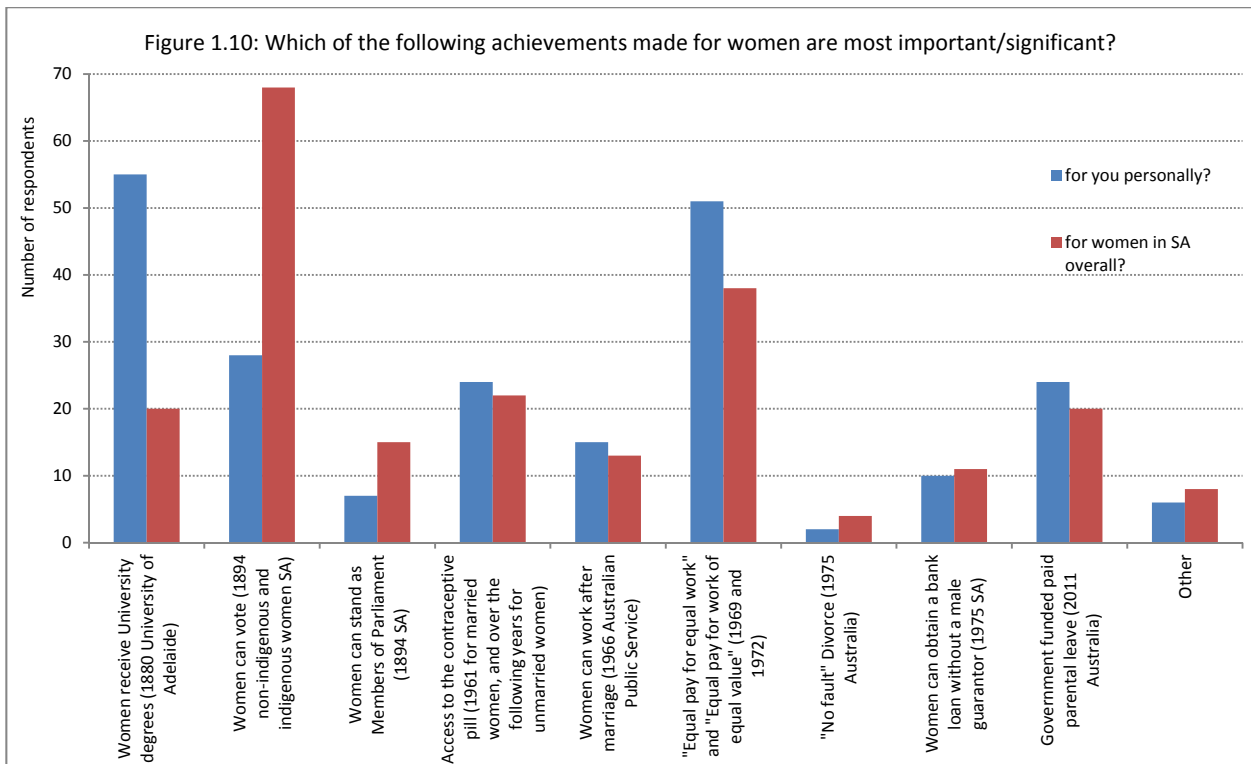


Overall, the majority of respondents (56%) found female politicians to be inspiring, and this spread of responses was somewhat mirrored by the engagement of young women in politics as indicated by how excited they are about voting:



Whilst politicians were often highly admired, comments suggested that the overwhelming reasons participants admired a particular woman were because of her ability to overcome barriers and adversity, and to challenge the 'unwritten rules' and give 'marginalised' women a voice. When asked what achievement was most important to them personally, and to South Australian women generally,

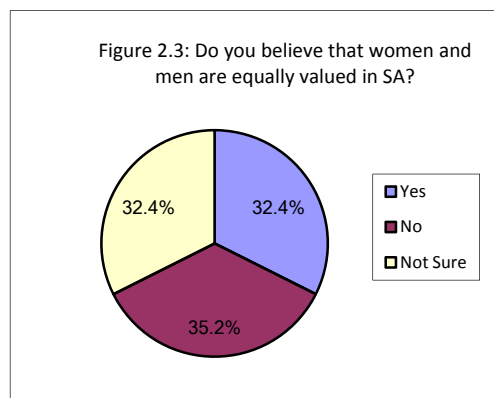
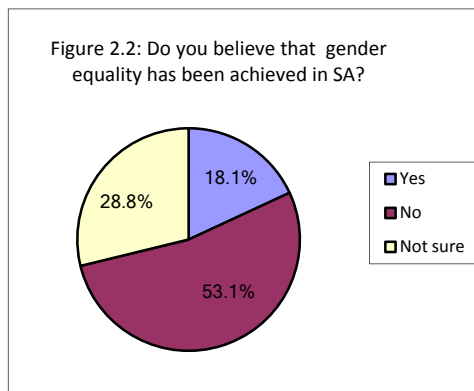
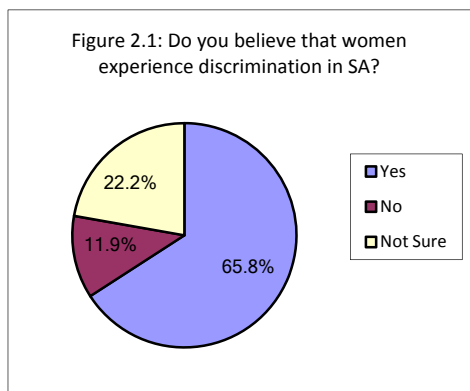
participants identified a range of achievements. The largest differences between the personal and social domains were with access to university degrees and the ability to vote:



2) Gender roles and perceptions

How do young women view gender discrimination and inequities?

SHE Speaks asked participants their views about gender inequality in SA in three ways. 11.9% of respondents believe that women do not experience gender discrimination and 65.8% believe they do, whilst 18.1% believe that gender equality has been achieved and 53.1% don't believe it has. The question around being 'equally valued' generated a more equally divided response. The number of 'unsure' responses to each question highlights both the complexities in these issues, as well as a potential lack of knowledge which could be addressed through increased public awareness:



When asked to respond to the statement 'young women have fewer barriers to success compared to young men', 60% felt that this was completely or somewhat untrue and 8% felt that this was completely or somewhat true. This aligns with the 12% of respondents who felt that gender discrimination does not exist in South Australia.

These responses suggest complexities around these issues, and differing understandings of what 'gender inequality', 'discrimination' and 'valued' mean. Survey participants also noted that their personal experiences have often been different to what they know to be true for other women:

Not sure because I haven't seen any discrimination against women personally but I know it goes on.

Participants highlighted various examples of discrimination and inequity, in a variety of areas such as:

I feel that we are looked over more for positions, due to the fact that we "may" have children and be out of the workforce for a while.

I think people value women as much as they value men, but that there is an inconsistency between their beliefs and their behaviours.

From a teenage perspective, I know that guys will 'use' girls, and I also think that girls are a lot more harshly judged.

The 'boys club' concept is still very prominent in SA.

I still see women being treated like crap in my everyday life (by men) - I have well-meaning friends who still think of a man when they hear the word 'boss' - and who think women shouldn't work as much so they can raise their children 'properly'. Even in the media we see this demonising of women in the workforce who should be instead having babies, and if not that they must live up to unrealistic beauty standards.

I think that things like inadequate access to childcare show that women are not as valued as men.

However, many participants outlined areas where they believe women and men are equally valued:

Women have equal access to education, training, healthcare, housing. The opinions of women appear to be respected.

Maybe not in the same way and maybe not in the same industries all the time but i do believe both men and women are equally valued.

We're all given the same opportunities if it's something we are driven to do.

Interestingly, some respondents felt that by declaring women as undervalued or discriminated against, that this exacerbated the issue:

Why wouldn't they be [equally valued]? Stop believing they aren't just because some people might think so. This is social polarisation!

It [equality] was done ages ago, stop going on about it!

Others felt that, although discrimination is an issue for women, that there is a broader context:

People experience discrimination, not just women.

Other participants highlighted the complexities around this issue:

On the surface for sure [women are valued as much as men]. There is still a lot of sexism around, but, in my opinion, women are also sexist towards men. But unsure of whether these two are as deep rooted as each other.

It depends on what values you're basing this on, and in what context.

We've come a long way, but there's a lot of subtle sexism.

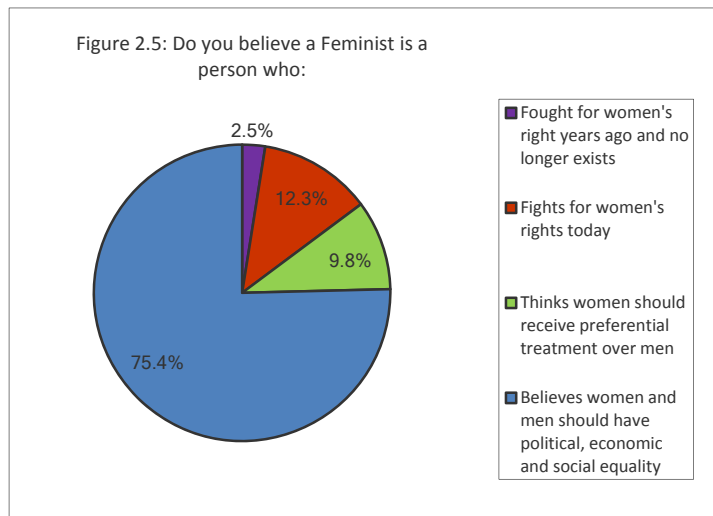
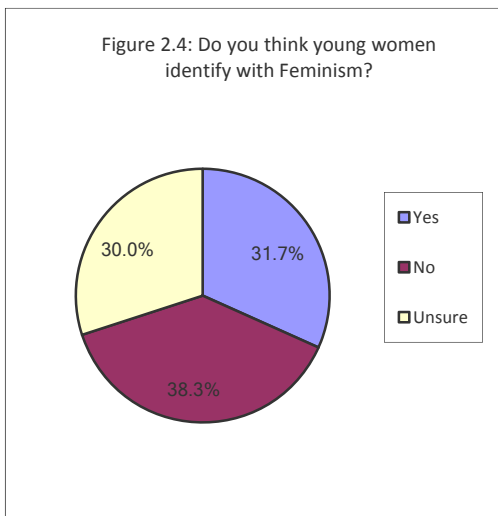
Officially, they are [equally valued] - unofficially, I've experienced first-hand - always being the last choice in a group of male(s)..., hearing sexist remarks that favor men.

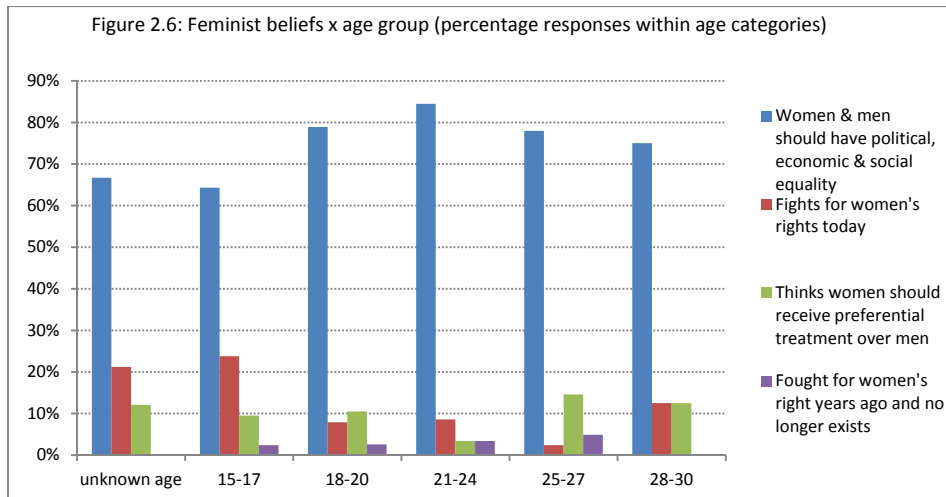
I think that it is dependent on the situation, generally no we are not equally valued, but this does not always mean that women are undervalued, sometimes men are undervalued as well.

How do young women in SA view Feminism?

When asked to identify whether they believe their peers identify with Feminism, 32% of participants responded 'yes' and 38% responded 'no'. 30% were 'unsure'.

The majority of respondents (75%) believe that a Feminist is a person who 'believes women and men should have political, economic and social equality' and 12% believe a Feminist 'fights for women's rights today'. Interestingly, 2.5% of respondents felt that Feminists 'fought for women's rights years ago and no longer exist' and 9.8% felt that a Feminist is someone who 'thinks women should receive preferential treatment over men'. This, supported by some qualitative responses, suggest that over 10% of participants feel at least disconnected and possibly at odds with Feminist ideals. Figure 2.6 demonstrates some differences in Feminist beliefs by age category.





When asked to respond to the statement ‘*young women have fewer barriers to success than the last generation*’, 72% felt that this was completely or somewhat true, whilst 10% felt that this was completely or somewhat untrue. This spread of responses is reflected in the qualitative data. Many respondents, when asked what Feminism means to them, provided responses which align with ‘mainstream’ Feminist ideals:

Striving for equality between the sexes.

It means realising that we do not have gender equality, that it is a falsity to think otherwise and to recognise that the empowerment of women is key to achieving it.

Empowerment, self belief, achieving goals and living life regardless of gender bias or stereotypes, not believing the stereotypes.

Others reflected a more nuanced or complex meaning:

Humanitarianism

I know how lucky I am that people of my mother’s age fought for women’s rights.

Having freedom as a woman to be yourself, be respected and treated the same way as everyone else.

Some of the time I worry that Feminists give women a bad name as they seem to want better rights than men. I think that there is still a gap between how men and women are treated and we just need to make sure that don’t alienate men by coming across as thinking we are better than them. I believe that if a woman is up to the job then she should expect equal chance of getting it and the respect that goes with it.

A small number of participants responded that Feminism is meaningless to them, and in some cases, participants were hostile towards Feminist ideals:

Feminism has ruined it for women everywhere. Women are now expected to pursue a high ended career whilst maintaining a household and raising a family. If we choose one over the other we're seen as less of a woman. We have lost our place in society...

(Feminism is about) women who take it too far, equality is key.

I think most feminists are very left wing people with strong opinions. I can't relate to them.

One word: cult.

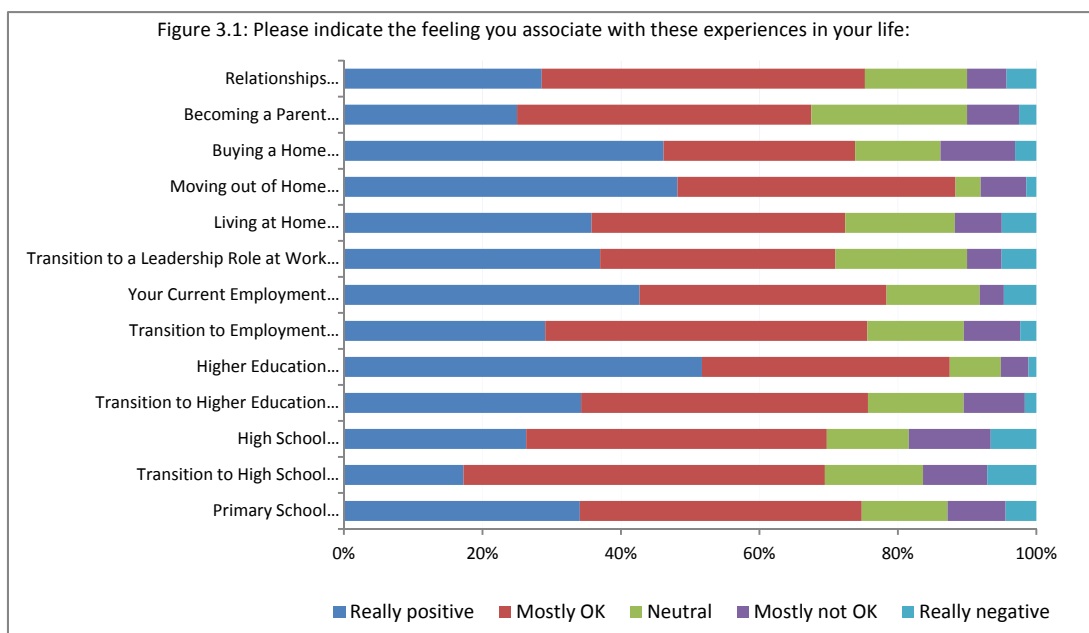
I don't really relate to Feminism.

I am against feminism. I think it means a rigid hatred of men without justification.

There are clearly very different perceptions around what Feminism means, and around how young women see Feminism as impacting on their everyday lives. Whilst most respondents feel that the Feminist movement results in positive changes for women, a number were either disconnected or hostile towards Feminist ideals. However, most respondents felt strongly that Feminism, or their personal understanding of Feminist ideals, continued to be relevant in the current fight for gender equality.

3) Issues facing young women in SA and ideas to support women around these issues

SHE Speaks asked participants to indicate the feelings they associated with key transition points or experiences in their lives. Those for whom statements were 'not relevant' were removed from the analysis. The majority of respondents reported 'really positive' or 'mostly ok' feelings towards all categories. Particularly positive periods included moving out of home and higher education. The categories which had more negative responses ('mostly not ok' and 'really negative') included high school and buying a home:



When asked about their most positive experience, most young women described a period of time or an experience which represented independence, freedom, empowerment, feeling supported and valued. Participants also mentioned ways that positive experiences could be enhanced for young women:

Buying my own place and starting my life on my own has been amazing. I think more information about the options and more financial training would have helped.

I was recently awarded the "best prevocational student award" in my class. I felt as though all the hard work I had put into the course had paid off. I believe the only thing that could've made this experience better was either employment already lined up, or job offers made on the night, but I can't have everything too easy, what's the fun in that?

Meeting my now husband, developing our relationship over the years and getting married. We've had our share of adversity but I think all relationships need that to help remind you why you're together and strengthen the bond you share.

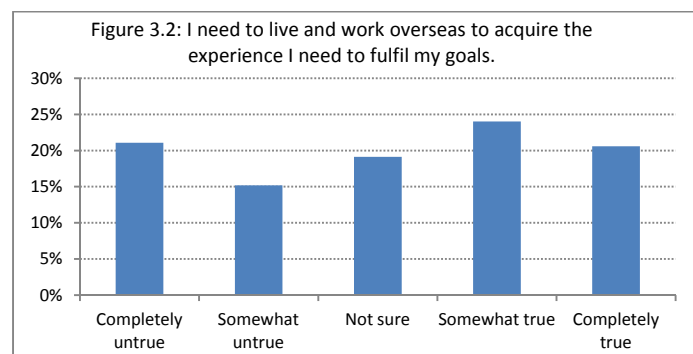
My current employment due to flexible managers, friendly staff and strong relationships within the work place. Better pay would make my job even more enjoyable.

My most positive experience was (despite the ups and downs) my pregnancy.

My transition into high school was great. I felt stimulated and excited to do well at school. I don't think there could have been anything to make it better.

Employment. I feel valued where I work and my contribution is recognised. Staff treat me as an equal. Perhaps some older staff need to be more tolerant and when I make mistakes, not blame it immediately on my age or lack of experience.

Many participants referred to travelling as a positive experience or as an ambition. There was an almost even spread of responses regarding the need to live overseas in order to fulfil goals:



When asked about their most negative experience, young women reported that family breakdown, family dysfunction and bullying were particularly difficult. A number of respondents also mentioned mental illness and sexual abuse. Coping with change was a theme to emerge across a number of responses, particularly around transition points such as going to high school, moving away from family for higher education, and learning the 'social norms' in different settings. In terms of better support during challenging times, the need for positive role models and either formal or informal mentors was consistently raised as being important. Strong family supports were also noted as being important, but many called for more counselling, teachers who are equipped to deal with bullying, career advice, and health and welfare services:

Primary school I found difficult because I had a lot of turbulence in my home life, and being so young I didn't understand it all and couldn't process it, so I had some problems at Primary school. More stability could have helped.

I hated high school. I didn't know where I wanted to go or who I was... What would have helped was... a seminar discussing various life paths - all of the occupations I knew of at school were doctor, teacher (the really basic ones) and nothing much else. I didn't see a future that suited me until I started out one year of a degree and stumbled upon, by chance, my now current degree which is much better suited.

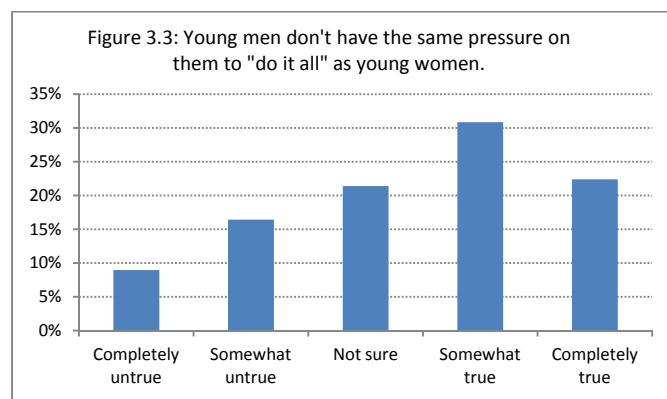
Being subjected to sexual violence - being believed [would have helped].

Bullying in High School and during tertiary education... an environment with more males [would have helped], or for the women to support each other rather than attack.

Trying to find a job once I have finished Uni – it would have been nice to have had some more support especially from people that had been in the same position.

Gendered issues for young South Australian women

When asked to describe their most pressing personal issue, many participants referred to the juggling which they do in their everyday lives to 'fit everything in', and furthermore, to do all things without compromise and lead a balanced life. In fact, 67% responded that it is 'completely true' or 'somewhat true' that they experience pressure to 'do it all'. Meanwhile, 53% of respondents felt that it is 'completely' or 'somewhat' true that young men experience less pressure to 'do it all', whilst 25% felt that this is 'completely' or 'somewhat' untrue:



Respondents also felt that this issue was a broader gendered issue:

Being able to 'do it all'... having the pressure on you to be a good daughter, friend, girlfriend, etc. while also doing study, working.

Balancing the demands of my new job, my social life, fitting in the gym and my new man.

Cost of living pressures, ability to have a family and continue in my profession.

How to achieve everything that I want to in life?

These and broader issues were also represented when participants were asked what they believe is the most pressing issue affecting young women more broadly:

Global warming

Equality and respect.

Security when walking down a street, to not get mugged or raped. It scares me every day.

Self Esteem and Body image.

Professional vs personal goals (careers vs children).

Pressure to look good, and sexualisation of women in the media

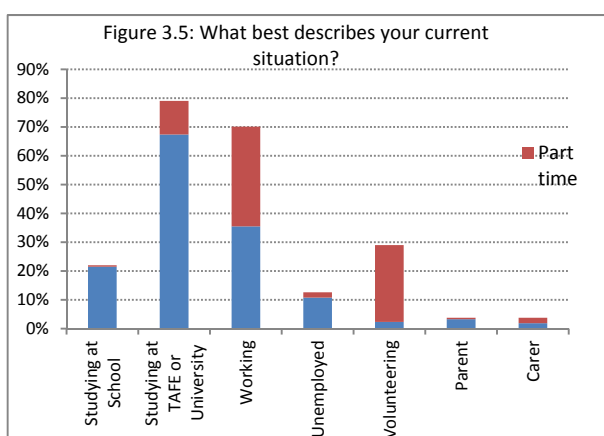
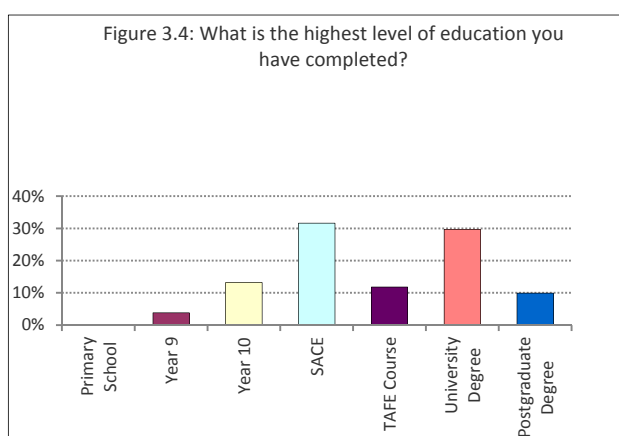
These issues amongst others, will now be explored in more depth.

Issues in depth

a) Study and Employment

Participants represented a range of educational levels, with approximately 30% each having completed SACE or a University degree as their highest level of education. Approximately 10% each had TAFE qualifications, year 10, or postgraduate degrees as their highest level of education.

Approximately 80% of participants were studying at TAFE or University at the time of doing the survey, and approximately 25% each were volunteering or at school. 70% were working.



The issues facing younger, school aged participants were in some cases similar to those studying for or who had completed higher degrees. The pressure to achieve good grades as a gateway for future success was frequently mentioned. As mentioned previously, the pressure of study when combined with other commitments was frequently described as an issue for young women:

Managing schoolwork, Scouting, Finding Work, Family and beginning French lessons, without corrupting the quality of each.

Being able to juggle all of my commitments - Study, fulltime work, family and friends, healthy lifestyle... and being taken seriously at work.

For the younger survey participants, many responses indicated that students are experiencing stress regarding pressure to achieve:

[My most pressing issue is] to pass the final year 12 exams. Get a high ATAR.

Whether I will get into university?

Many respondents who had completed school reflected that it had been a particularly challenging period. Partly, this was due to huge changes in environment and social connections, but partly this was due to bullying (or what was often described by participants as 'mean girls'):

The transition to high school was negative. That's the time when kids are going through puberty, which is different for everyone. For me, I thought that bleaching my hair and wearing too much make-up and buying clothes a size too small were the ways that I would be accepted. I had also just discovered sexuality and was a bit too excited about it. In addition, the transition to high school is a time when you go from the very top of the feeding chain (year 7) to the very bottom (year 8) and it's noticeable so everybody puts their guard up. It's very scary going through such a big, public change while you're trying to go through a very personal one at the same time. What this meant for me was a lot of rumours, a lot of name calling and a lot of disrespect. Had my parent(s) been more strict, I may have been better off. Having a role model may have helped too.

Moving from a small country primary school of 20 kids, to a high school of 300 - totally overwhelming!

The transitions to university or TAFE and employment, were also challenging times for a number of participants, although many also found these times to be empowering. The following examples highlight an issue which cuts across many of the challenging experiences for young women through study and employment:

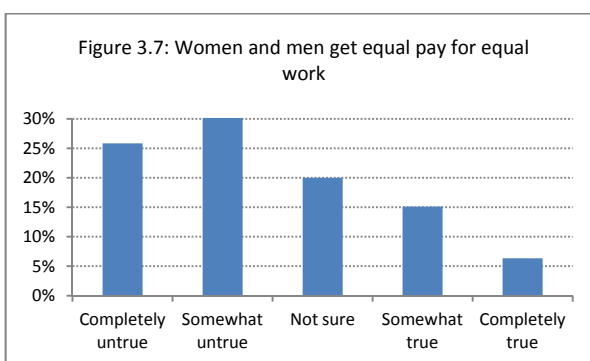
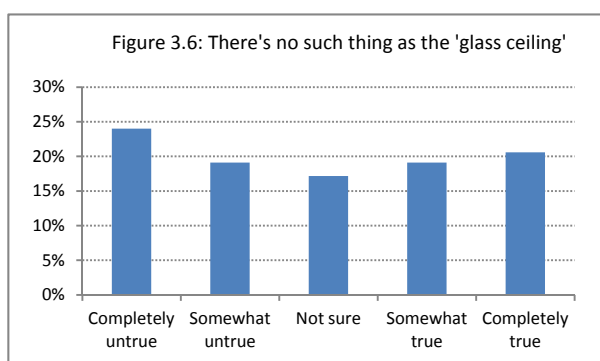
Starting university... was a very lonely experience.

Moving into work, felt like there was no one to guide and I was left on my own

Despite the challenges of study and employment, many *SHE Speaks* participants found these times to be very empowering. Participants saw completing their current education as the best way for them to reach their leadership potential in the short term, and many identified that further study in the future is an ambition.

Finding 'meaningful work' which at least in part contributes to a balanced life, was often mentioned by participants as an issue. Taking the positive employment experiences of many participants, and sharing these ideas and principles with other young women such that they feel similarly supported and empowered in employment, will be an important way forward in addressing the wellbeing of young women, and gender inequality in South Australia.

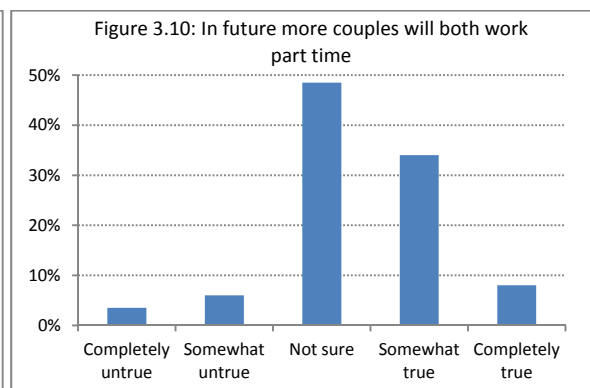
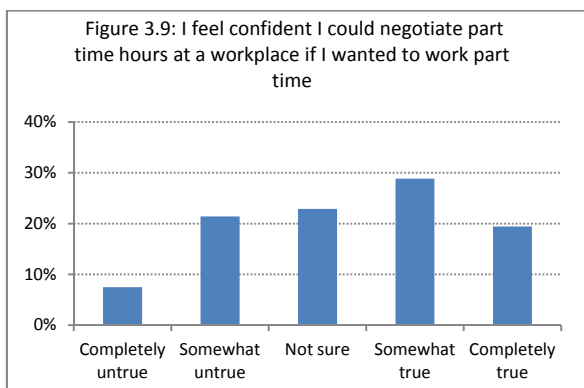
Interestingly, participants had a breadth of views regarding employment and gender inequality. For example, almost equal numbers of participants believed that there is, and is not a 'glass ceiling' which inhibits the potential of women in their careers. Likewise, there was a spread of responses regarding whether or not there is a gender pay gap:



Participants were asked whether they believed young men and women experience barriers to working in their chosen field. 78% 'somewhat' or 'completely' agreed that young women experience barriers, and 57% believe young men experience barriers:

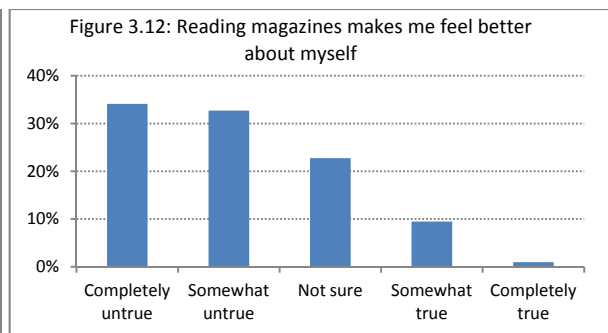
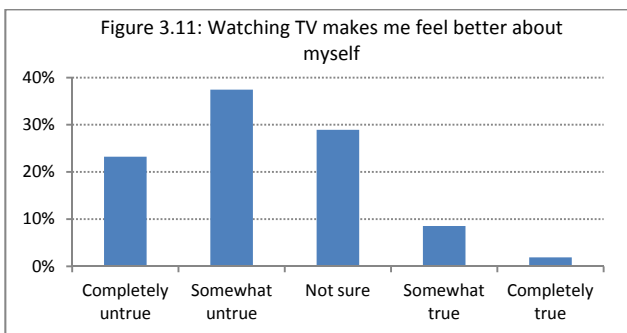


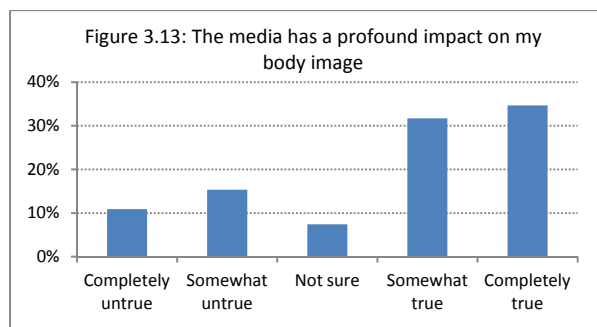
SHE Speaks also asked participants to comment on working part-time hours - for both men and women – as this may be a strategy to promote gender equity and quality of life:



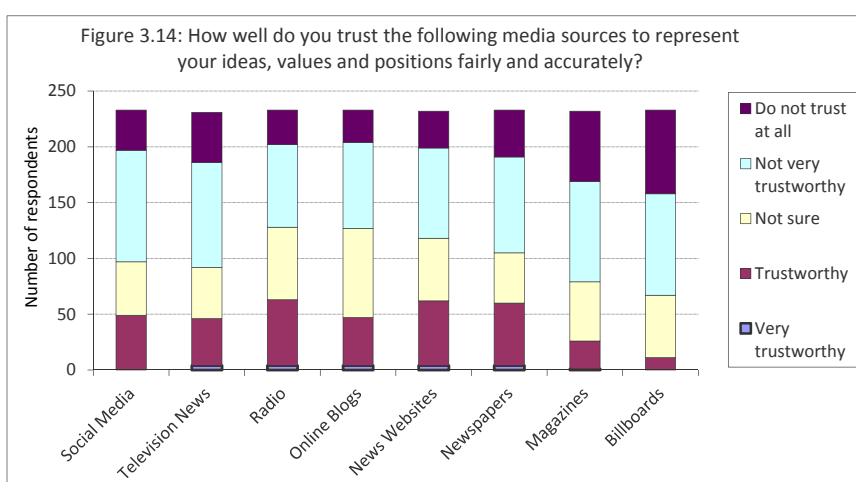
b) Self image and the media

Young women were asked to respond to a number of statements around self image, with interesting results. A theme to repeatedly emerge from the results is the strong impact of the media on the self-image of participants:





Aligned with this feeling is the belief that on average, the below mentioned media sources cannot be trusted by young women to represent them accurately. Self-image concerns may be an underlying aspect of this distrust:



Many participants were empowered to make assessments about the quality of information provided by media, and to make informed decisions regarding their choice of media:

I guess it depends on the social media, blogs and radio I choose to listen to. The sources I access do represent my ideas, values and positions fairly and accurately.

Opinions of young women on blogs etc encourage me to think more.

I feel that most media outlets present only broad generalisations of views, and are often dominated by one perspective

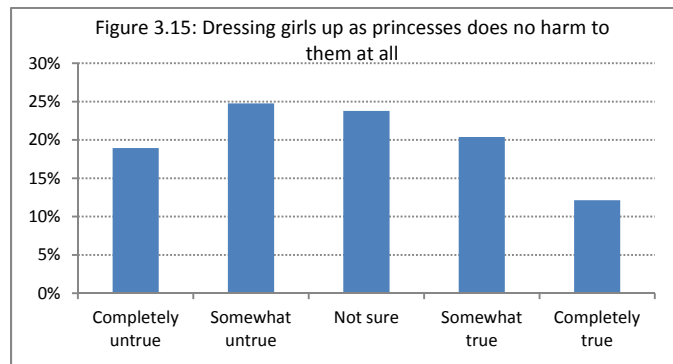
Often, young women felt that mainstream media outlets were about making money, and that trustworthiness was therefore lower. In particular, some participants noted the objectification of women in order to 'sell' products or lifestyles.

Other *SHE speaks* questions asked participants about the role of women in creating positive or negative self-image for other young women. A common theme was the concern held by participants around 'women attacking each other', either through bullying, jealousy or stereotyping:

[It's about] making sure we all stick together - girls can be bitchy to each other, when we're the ones who need each other.

When asked whether they believe young women get jealous of other women who are more successful, 58% responded 'somewhat true' or 'completely true'. When asked whether 'talking about eating disorders will make more young women suffer from them', 79% responded 'completely untrue' or 'somewhat untrue' – suggesting that participants feel that the open support of others around this important health issue facing young women is vital.

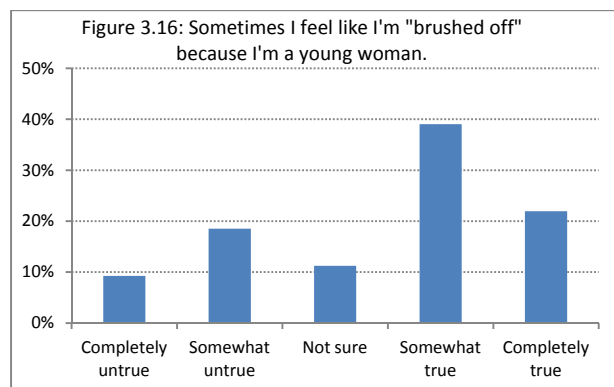
Another question which was asked by *SHE speaks* was regarding the role of gender stereotyping in parenting - participants provided divided responses on whether dressing up girls as princesses is harmful:



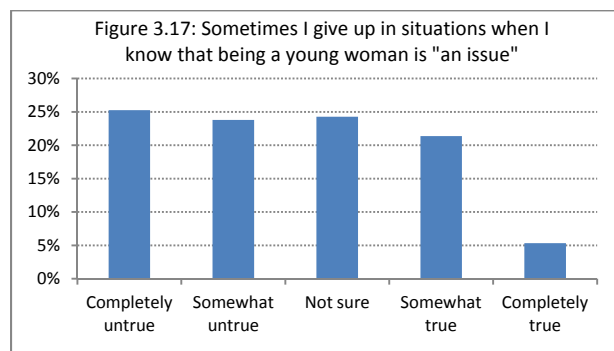
The issues of body and self image are complex and multi-faceted. Participants reflected this in their open ended responses, and in particular called for more to be done in addressing self image issues facing young women. Self image concerns were seen as being linked to the (dis)empowerment of women, and such were often raised as pressing issues by participants.

c) Empowering young women

The empowerment of young women is fundamental to gender equity, their health and wellbeing, and the health of society. Empowerment is a process which is socially determined, and which can only be enhanced through broader social change. Different experiences regarding gender discrimination amongst participants were reported, as per Figure 3.16 below and in other areas of the survey:

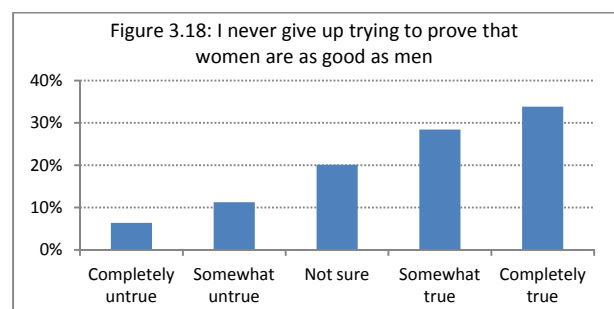


The internalisation of social problems related to gender inequality was quite common amongst participants. Sometimes, this took the form of pragmatism – accepting some forms of gender inequality because of the difficulties and complexities in dealing with gender inequality in everyday life:

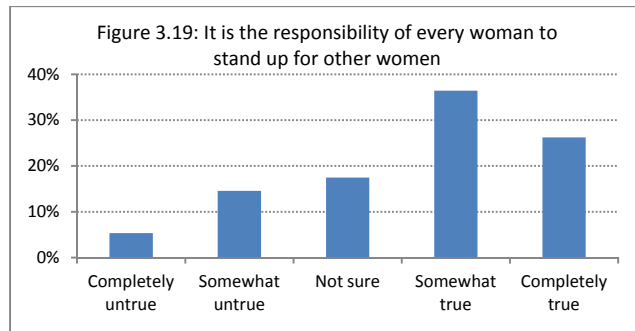


Other times, social problems were internalised by participants in perhaps more concerning ways. For example, when asked to respond to ‘young women should cover themselves up if they don't want to be stared at’, 54% responded that this is ‘completely or somewhat untrue’, but 37% felt that this was ‘somewhat or completely true’. Similarly, when asked to respond to ‘I feel responsible when I get unwanted male attention’, 66% felt this was ‘completely or somewhat untrue’ but 19% felt that this was ‘completely or somewhat true’.

Empowerment was also a theme which was evident in terms of how young women ‘fight’ for the cause of gender inequities. Overall, *SHE speaks* participants appear to be very motivated in their role as advocate for gender equality:

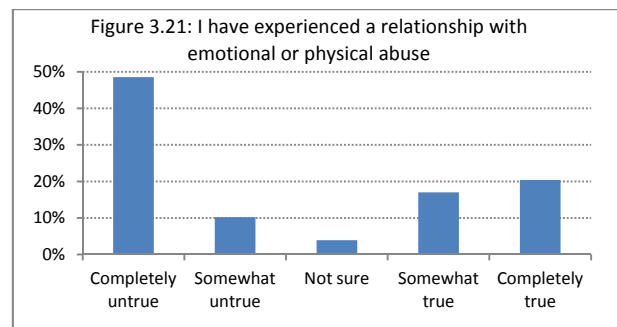
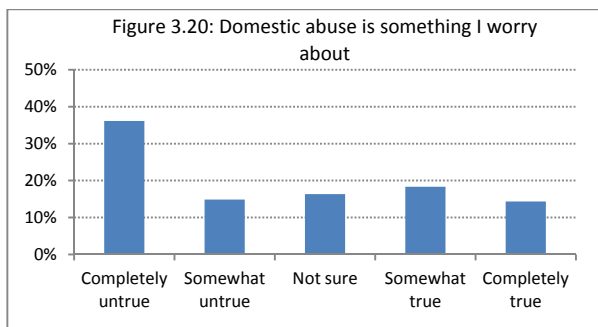


The vast majority also supported empowering their peers, as 90% responded ‘somewhat or completely true’ to the statement ‘I would like to help young women who are less fortunate than me’. 80% responded ‘completely or somewhat true’ to the statement ‘I feel like I can speak up when I see another women being put down’ – yet fewer women (58%) believe that it is the responsibility of women to stand up for other women:



d) Safety, sexual harassment and domestic violence

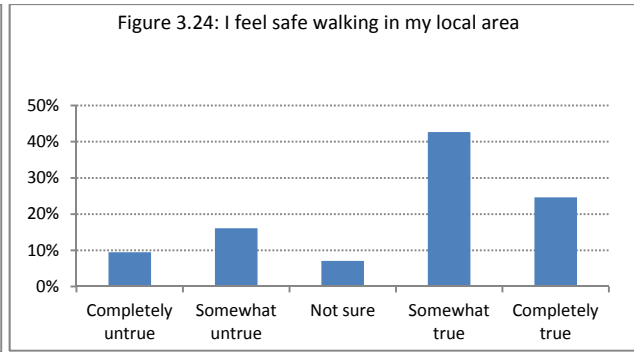
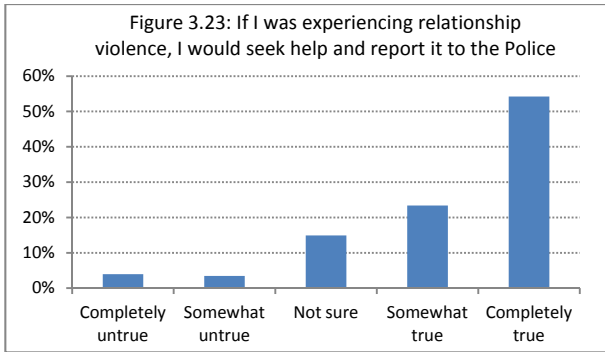
Domestic violence and sexual harassment were less common but recurrent themes for young women who participated in *SHE Speaks*. 32% of participants responded that it is ‘somewhat or completely true’ that they worry about domestic abuse, whilst 37% have experienced a relationship with emotional or physical abuse:



29% of participants responded ‘completely or somewhat true’ that they get unwanted attention from males at work. Even more concerning is that 71% of participants believe it is ‘completely’ or ‘somewhat’ untrue that young males treat young women with full respect:



Reassuringly, 77% of respondents stated that it was ‘somewhat’ or ‘completely’ true that they would report relationship violence to the police and seek help, and 68% stated that it was ‘somewhat’ or ‘completely’ true that they felt safe walking in their local area:

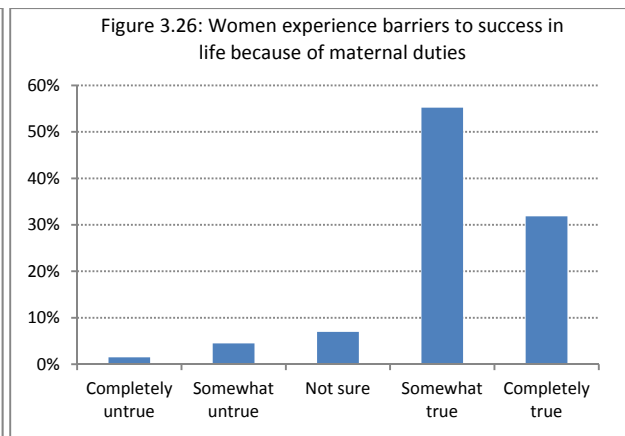
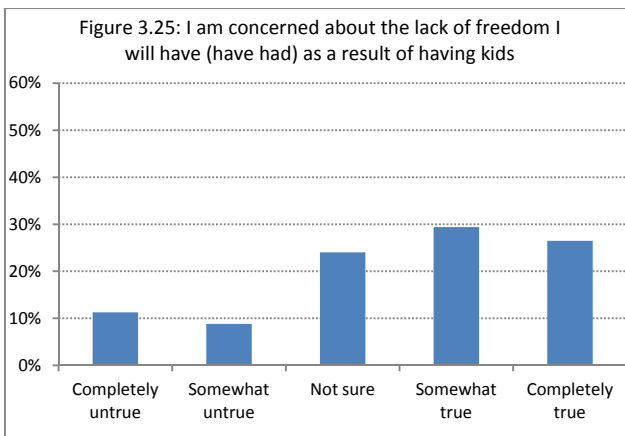


e) Parenting, partners and marriage

Relationships and parenting were frequently mentioned as complex personal issues for respondents. Often, the challenges of balancing relationships or parenting with employment or study were mentioned as important for young women (now or in the future). The idea of ‘juggling’ whilst trying to find balance has been raised elsewhere, and is illustrated by this young woman:

Whether to have a family or not.... My desire to have one is almost outweighed by my worry about the financial difficulties I will face, the stress on my relationship, the double work burden, the lack of being able to pursue a career.

Participants were often aware of the realities of trying to balance everything which they wanted to achieve and mindful that they couldn’t necessarily ‘have it all’. The desire to have children was tempered for 55% of participants who responded that it was ‘somewhat’ or ‘completely’ true that they were concerned that a loss of freedom would arise upon having children. Aligned with this belief was the clear message from participants around women experiencing barriers to success because of maternal duties:



Finding an appropriate partner was an issue for a number of participants:

Finding someone to marry that respects women...

Failure to have a long term relationship (is the most negative thing for me).

Overall, many women noted that finding a stable, happy relationship was a key ambition for them:

[My ambition is to] have a fantastic loving man who loves me back unconditionally

Hopefully I will have one or more healthy children... Although I wish to be married, I do not want to be dependent on my spouse, so I hope I have a successful career.

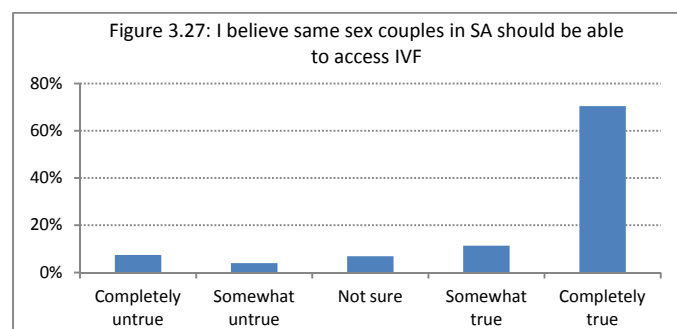
87% of respondents felt that it was 'completely or somewhat true' that 'same sex couples should be allowed to marry'. This issue - 'my rights to get married' - was reflected as a personal ambition for some participants also.

Having children was an ambition for many participants, although this was, again, often tempered by caution around juggling family life, employment and other commitments:

[The one thing I would most like to do is] raise wonderful children.

A big family who know they are loved.

Although women often reported being concerned about juggling family life, 96% believe that men and women should be equally involved in caring for children. 88% of participants believe that paid maternity leave supports women (8% were unsure), and the vast majority were in favour of same sex couples being able to access IVF treatment:



f) Financial and housing pressures

The financial stress of everyday life, and more specifically purchasing a house, were often raised amongst participants. Financial stress appears to be impacting on other areas of young women's lives, for example on their decisions around study and employment, and parenting:

Financial issues really worry me. Finding a balance between 'job' and 'career' is very difficult, but I know I have to push through and work as hard as I can, so that one day I'll only be doing 'career' and not 'job'.

Housing affordability and career development - I feel like these things are holding me back from having a family.

Participants rarely made a link between the gender pay gap and their financial concerns, but many made a link between parenting responsibilities and their ability to work full time, or to climb the ladder in employment. Overall however, participants referred to financial stress as being related to the everyday cost of living

Recommendations

Whilst there are a detailed and extensive range of ideas generated by *SHE Speaks 2011*, the recommendations will focus on 6 key areas:

Leadership

- Most participants aspire to leadership roles in some form and are keen to take up leadership opportunities
- Positive role models and mentors are seen as helpful ways to promote leadership potential
- Leadership is seen by some as a role 'above' other people, and sometimes as a supportive, inclusive role
- Changing attitudes, behaviours and structures in workplaces to better support women (particularly with caring responsibilities) are seen as highly effective ways of promoting women in leadership roles.

These results indicate that raising awareness about female role models who are in leadership may have a self-perpetuating effect and increase young women's participation in leadership; and that supporting young women with mentor programs will likely support more young women in to leadership. The results also clearly indicate there is a responsibility for workplaces to address attitudes, cultures and structures to support young women in to leadership roles.

Balancing education, employment and caring duties

- Young women report significant pressure to 'do it all'. Many recognise that the reality of having the opportunity to take certain life paths includes compromises. The idea of 'juggling' was frequently mentioned.
- Participants often described big picture ambitions which could be at odds with 'doing it all', such as achieving balance, quality of life, and happiness.
- Young women feel that men do not experience the same pressures, particularly because of less pressure around juggling parenting duties.
- Many participants recognise the inability but feel the pressure to 'do it all' and many internalise this pressure. An overwhelming majority believe men should play an equal role with women in caring for children, but few respondents indicated they believed changing workplace patterns (such as increasing men's participation in part time work) would support women moving in to senior leadership roles in SA businesses.

The results indicate there is a need to raise awareness about the institutional, cultural and structural influences on the (in)ability of young women to balance a successful career with having children, when these are among their aspirations, to avoid the 'self blame' many young women indicate in these findings.

Health and well-being

- Young women described the transition points in their lives during which they were most in need of support, particularly including the start of high school, university or employment.
- Nevertheless, these times were often very positive as participants could explore, grow and experience independence.
- Mental health was a concern for a number of participants, for themselves and family or friends.
- Self-image was also a strong theme to emerge from the survey. Young women appear to recognise the complexities of the issue, including the role of the media, and are individually and collectively concerned about the impact of self-image issues in young women.
- Achieving well-being was often discussed in terms of balance and feeling supported.

The results indicate many young women would benefit from formal and informal mentors and support networks and role models at key transition points in their life; and that influencing the media's role in relation to negative self image among girls and young women is a priority.

Safety

- Young women are experiencing a number of challenges to their personal safety, including domestic violence and sexual harassment.
- Bullying appears to be a particularly concerning and common issue, not least because a number of participants referred to bullying amongst women. The desire for women to support each other was a clear theme from the survey results.
- An overwhelming majority of young women indicated they would seek help and report to Police if they experienced relationship violence, which indicates a generational change among reporting relationship violence.

The results indicate that strategies and measures to reduce bullying would be beneficial across the lifecycle for women; and that ongoing legal and social change to reduce and prevent rape, sexual assault and relationship violence is required.

Feminism

- Whilst most participants were appreciative of the efforts of previous generations of Feminists, some participants believe that young women do not identify with Feminist ideals today.
- The issue of popularising Feminist ideals in ways which are meaningful to today's young women is important.
- The overwhelming majority of respondents understand who a Feminist is and many recognise Feminism's role in advancing gender equality; but one in four respondents feel that Feminists either 'no longer exist' or that they 'think women should receive preferential treatment over men'. These perceptions, alongside some hostile responses, indicate how polarising the word and the movements are.

The results indicate an opportunity to raise awareness about the 'facts', history and current role of Feminism, as well as a challenge to overcome stereotypes associated with Feminist movements.

Gender inequality

- A number of participants noted that they personally felt equal to men and that they had not experienced discrimination. However, the majority felt that there is gender inequality in South Australia – but there were different understandings of how this manifests.
- A small but vocal minority of respondents felt that women were doing themselves a disservice by ‘banging on about’ gender inequality.

The results indicate there is a challenge to increase understanding among young women about how gender inequality impacts on their opportunities and outcomes; and to broaden the perspective beyond an individual’s experience to perceiving how gender inequality affects women generally.

Empowerment

- Young women identified various ways that they have felt empowered to achieve certain goals in their lives. They noted role models and support as key factors, alongside periods of freedom, independence and growth.
- Empowerment was often identified in individual ways, but the empowerment of women generally was also discussed – alongside the importance of supporting each other.
- In sharing their stories of times when they felt disempowered, participants highlighted structural and individual supports as important strategies to ensure that young women are not left feeling alone or undermined.

The results indicate the need for young women to receive support at critical times, in particular from other females.

Conclusion

SHE Speaks has investigated a large breadth of issues and ambitions for young women in South Australia. To their credit, participants have provided a depth of information across a number of topics also, and told their personal stories in many instances.

The results highlight that overall, young women in South Australia are facing a number of challenges, and are generally quite mindful of the complexities around those issues. Many women provided responses which indicate they are strong, empowered and clever. Others highlighted times when they had struggled and had no one to turn to.

There are a number of issues on which *SHE Speaks* has shed some light. Further analysis of the qualitative data would be useful to investigate some issues in further depth. The YWCA of Adelaide and broader sector will be able to use these results to inform their policy and programming platforms in the coming year and beyond.