

# The impact of juggling competing life priorities on aspirations and health for young women: 'Happiness not at any cost'

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# *Background*

- Gendered division of labour
- Women's work/life balance
- Gendered values around stress, life priorities, roles.

# *Background*

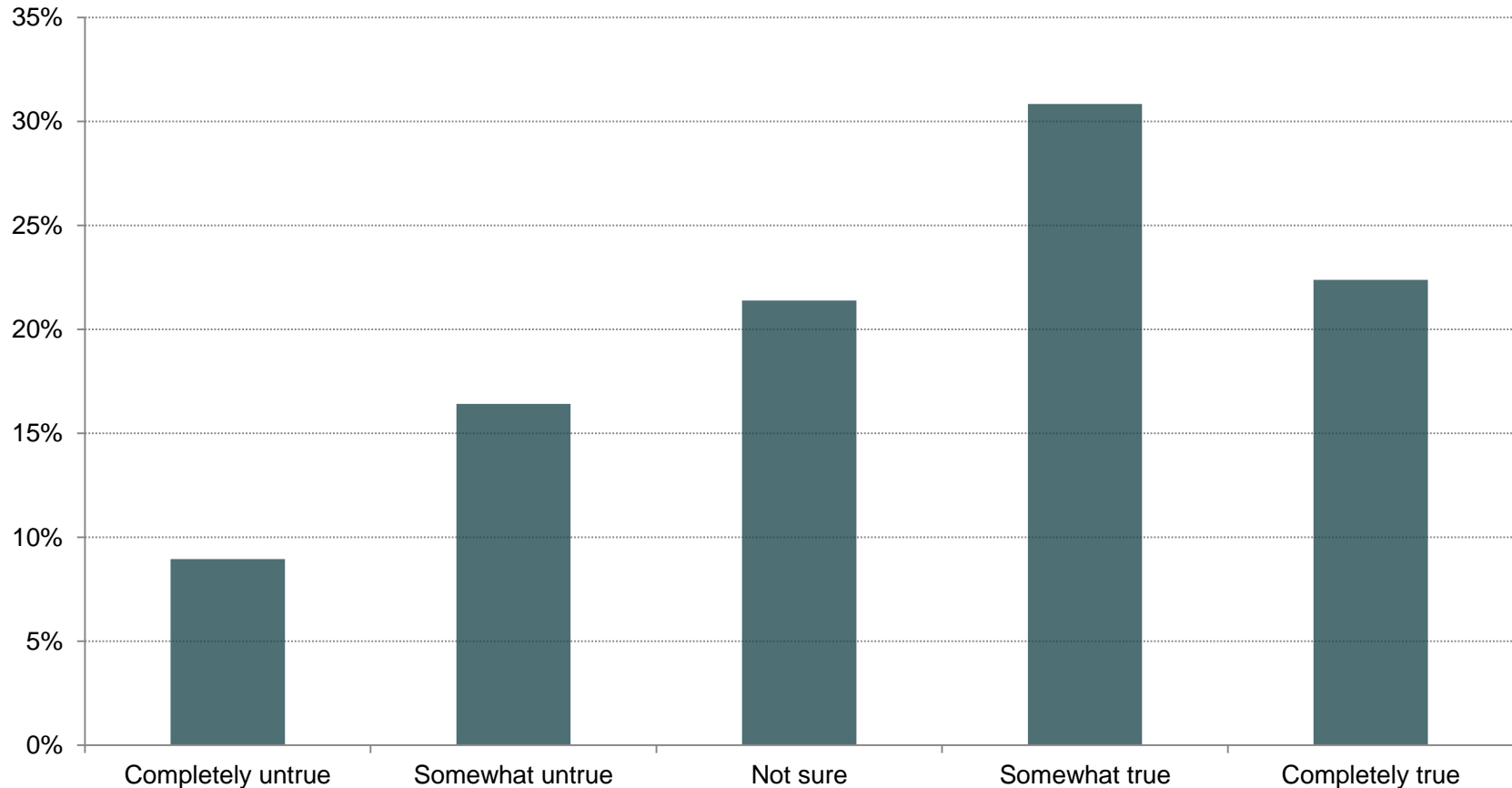
## Study Aims

- Explore the impact of ‘juggling’ competing priorities upon health, well-being and life aspirations: **young women 18-30**
- Investigate experiences of diverse groups of young women
- ‘Competing priorities’: unpaid domestic and caring work, study, paid work, volunteering, leisure
- Partnership with YWCA of Adelaide Inc.

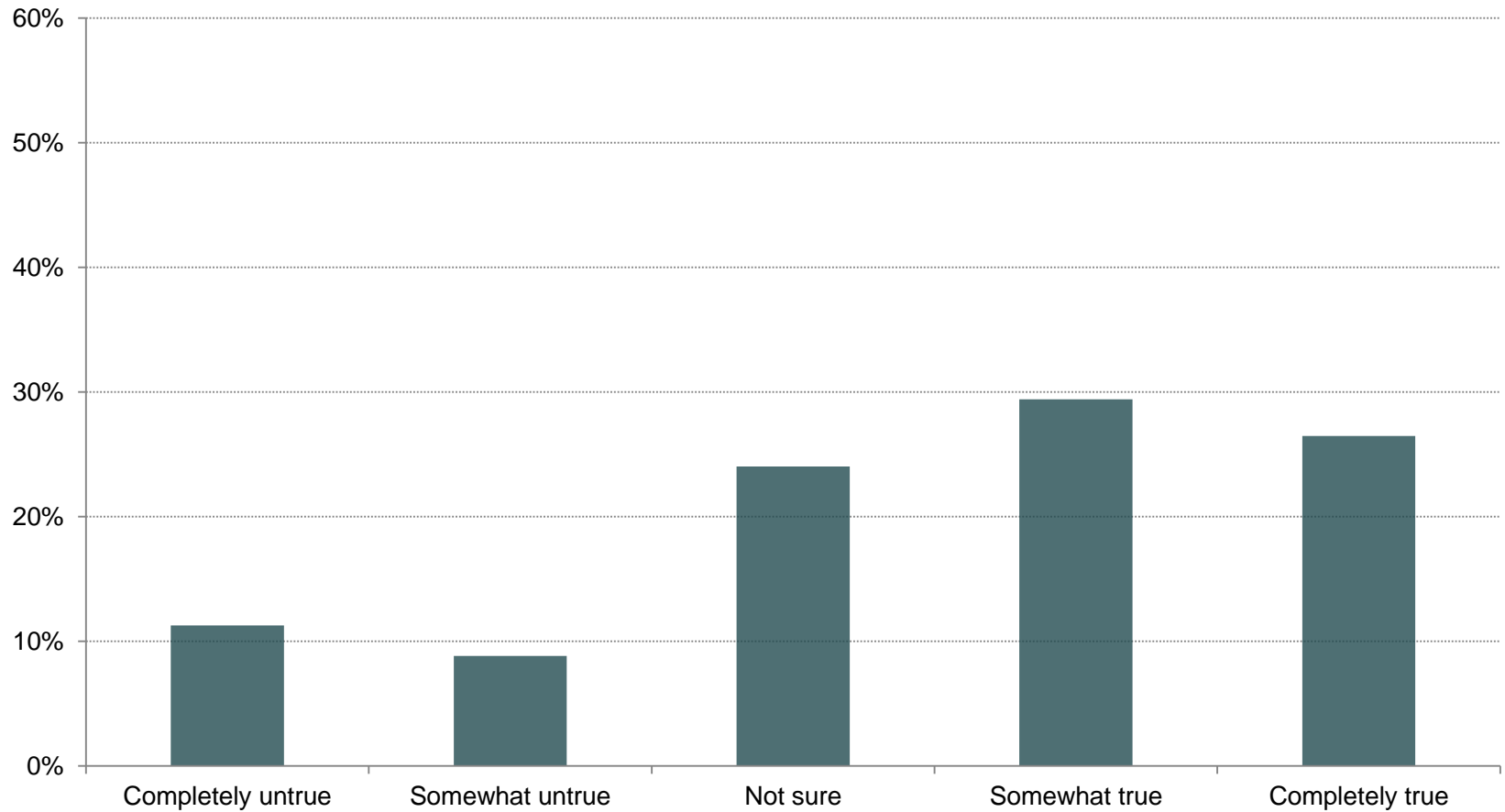
# *SHE Speaks* Online Survey

- Online survey: 300 young SA women aged 15-30
- Survey Items:
  - Aspirations: work, study, family, relationships, parenting, leadership
  - Perceptions of gender roles and gender inequality
  - Self image; Safety and violence
- Quantitative and qualitative items
- Convenience sample: YWCA promoted through membership and broader networks

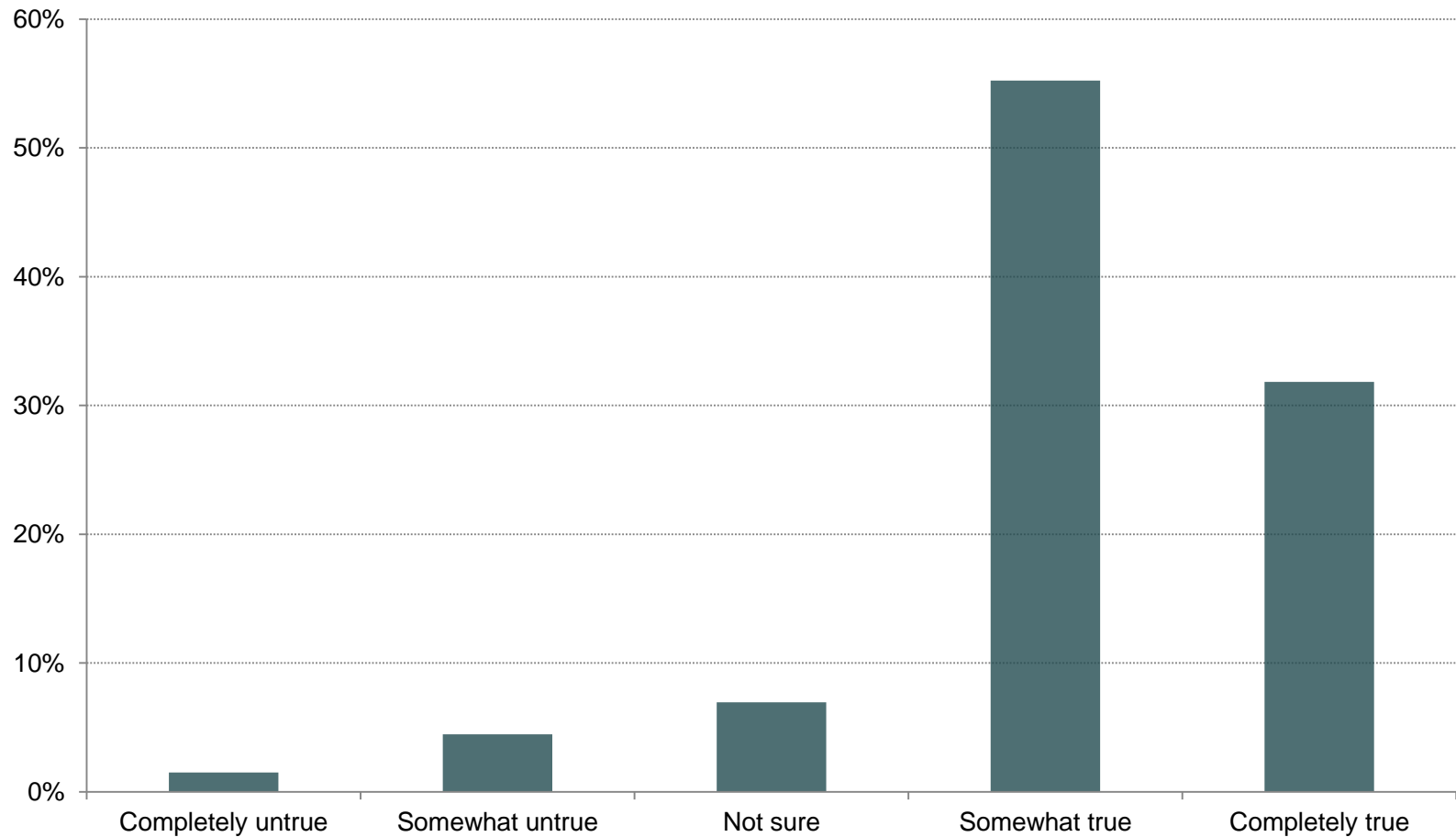
# *Young men don't have the same pressure on them to 'do it all' as young women:*



# *I am concerned about the lack of freedom I will have (or have had) as a result of having kids:*



# *Women experience barriers to success in life because of maternal duties:*



# *SHE Speaks*

Aspirations of young women were commonly related to obtaining '*balance*':

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

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

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



# *SHE Speaks*

## Pressures on young women:

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

## Perceived difficulties of having a family:

*'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.'*

# *SHE Balances* Qualitative research

- 3 Focus groups to date, women 18-30
- Focus groups explored:
  - Every day experiences of ‘juggling’
  - Supports and barriers to successful ‘balance’
  - Impact of ‘juggling’ on well-being and aspirations
  - Ideas for what support would be helpful/necessary

# *Financial juggling on limited resources*

*'Last week [son's] dad changed jobs...my income support payments went down, had to take [son] out of kindy... the day before I did that all [son] had eaten was bread and I had nothing, that's all there was.'*

*When you don't have much money it's really easy to be disadvantaged, you know, the poor get poorer ...something comes up like I get sick and can't work and then I have a debt that I can't pay unless we go without food ...sometimes I would have to borrow money from those horrible places, you borrow \$80 and it costs you \$100, but when you're desperate and hungry you do it, it's really easy to get behind.'*

# *Coping with parenting – limited support*

*‘Since I’ve been working 9-5, managing daily routine is hard... some days you can’t be bothered cooking tea or doing anything... I would like more support from my in-laws, they live close, their back yard joins our fence, and we hardly ever see them, it’s quite annoying.’*

*‘Routine occupies most of my time – I get sick of all days being the same...when [myself and son] get sick, it’s hard because I’ve got no-one to help.’*

*‘It’s a domino thing... you’ve been up all night with the kids... and then I have trouble dropping them off because they’re tired...’*

# *Volunteers - concerns about family/work balance*

*“I’m trying to figure out how to [make decisions] around how much time to take off, when do I go back to work, how will it affect my work... being Defence industry it’s highly male dominated.”*

*“There are so many other things I want to do [before children]... I want to be finished with other things.”*

# *Negotiating relationships*

*'My Partner's son lives with us... having him is a challenge, he's 13, now that he's in high school, it's attitude 24/7, he's only nice to me and my kids when his dad's around.'*

*'Whenever there is a conversation [with ex] that involves confrontation, it always ends up with 'well you're the one that took my son away from me' so I've got this guilt... I have to go the extra mile to facilitate things between them...'*

*'It was a tough decision to come here and stay here... how important is career and how important is my relationship?'*

# Juggling now - long term goals?

*'My plan was to do a Bachelor of Early Childhood, before I had [2<sup>nd</sup> child]... I was considering applying for [paid position] but it feels like a bit too much, having 2 young kids, wanting to do this course, and being [in that job] would just be too much... **As much as you'd like to have it all, you just can't ...**'*

*'I would like to go to uni ...I was thinking about doing some kind of science, botany...I'm worried about whether I could be committed to it, if I feel so tired sometimes that I couldn't sustain it – what kind of future could I make for [me and son]?'*

*'Money – there aren't a lots of jobs here in my industry... but I don't want to pack up and leave [yet]. But I don't want to go back to working in a café.'*

# *Structural factors*

- Inadequacy and unfairness of Child Support payment system
- Recent benefit changes – lower subsidies for childcare
- Lack of adequate mental health services Lack of financial support for crises
- Lack of adequate housing
- Gender inequalities e.g. maternity leave



# Summary

- Unobtainable: 'balance' vs pressures of 'doing it all'
- Self blame:
  - Obligations to be a 'good' mother, partner, step parent, family member: difficult to succeed!
  - Significant stress and Negative pressures on wellbeing
- Immediate demands all-consuming for young mothers: deferral of medium and long-term aspirations
- Structural issues: lack of adequate income support, health services, housing, job availability.

# *Conclusions*

- Different groups of women: different 'balancing acts'.
- Young mothers focus on immediate priorities whereas volunteers have more agency/freedom to bigger picture/longer term options.
- Tailored support for young women to assist them in being healthy and in reaching their goals is important.
- Structural factors are implicit in many of the findings.
- Empowerment of women through support and opportunities is seen by young women as a pathway forward.
- Future research: incorporate SHE Speaks 2012 data; explore male perspectives on gendered juggling.