

Online survey: one-third of SA women live in debt

The fifth *Female Nation Survey*, which is conducted annually by Women24.com, has revealed that few save, are “cautiously optimistic” about the government and are happiest when they take “me” time.

South African women haven't yet found their niche in life, are “cautiously optimistic” about a Zuma administration, dabble in “going green”, and are happy “almost all the time” - despite living a life in debt. These are among key findings from the fifth *Female Nation Survey*, claimed to be the most comprehensive of its kind in the country.

Turning a blind eye

Conducted annually by Women24.com - claimed to be the largest online community of South African women - the *Female Nation Survey* - which ran in June this year and attracted participation from 8641 women of varying shapes, ages and races. It explored a mix of “new reality” topics like the recession and carbon footprints and traditional themes like sex and a work/life balance.

“While we found some typical trends - men don't understand them, they want more passion, are under pressure to look good - we were shocked to discover South African women are turning a blind eye to the financial crisis. They don't save for themselves or their kid's education and can't afford to settle their debt at the end of the month,” said Women24 editor Sam Wilson.

Despite money troubles, today's woman has an optimistic outlook, with 91% saying they are a “positive person”. “Surprisingly, she's keeping up a good attitude and indulges in 'me' time, hangs-out with her friends on and offline and takes time out to relax in the spa or between the sheets,” quipped Wilson.

Despite the general good mood, scratching beneath the surface, the study revealed some salacious, and at times surprising, findings.

Living in debt (but having a secret stash on the side)

At the end of the month, a shocking 33% of South African women cannot afford to pay their credit card bills. And some (21%) have more than just one card. “Credit's temptation is still rife, despite the country in the grip of a recession,” said Wilson. “If that wasn't bad enough, we're not saving - for anything!” Some 36% say they don't save a cent. And among those with kids, only 31% have started an education fund. “Bizarrely, almost a quarter of women say they have a secret stash of cash. So while saving for their kid's future may not be a priority, having a private nest egg may well be.”

Crime top issue for women

When it comes to the country, on a scale of 1 to 5, the most pressing issue for women was crime. This was followed by reducing unemployment and education. "Given the amount of abductions and child murders in South Africa, it's not surprising crime came out trumps," commented Wilson. Despite this, 45% are "cautiously optimistic" about a Zuma administration and one-third (33%) are "worried about the future of SA".

She still hasn't found what she's looking for

A staggering 70% of those surveyed said they aren't living their dreams. "While the idea of becoming a supermodel, a travel writer or joining Green Peace may be their aspiration, it isn't always practical," said Wilson. "That said, while it's important to be realistic, following your dreams - at least to become the best, and most talented person you can be - is key to a happy and fulfilled life."

Is green really the new black for young fashionistas?

While over half of the respondents (56%) "choose green" - saving electricity was the most popular (94%) followed by using low-energy bulbs (89%) - the majority aren't young, single professionals (44%) but their more mature, home-making sisters (63%). "If going green is the trend du jour, then why are the over-40s housewives pioneering it?" asked Wilson. One answer could be the kids, as among moms, 52% are eco-conscious compared to 42% of childfree women.

Young women: Going digital good for the soul

Unsurprisingly, 83% of respondents said they went online daily and among younger digitally-savvy women, they use smart phones, write blogs and are involved in social networking on a regular basis. "While there has been some take-up of online communication tools among over 40s, they are still lagging behind. Given 66% said being online made them happy (compared to 62% who were online less) going digital may also be good for their well-being."

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned

Women who've had the dirty done on them give what they get and brazenly indulge in affairs once their partner's infidelity is out in the open (41%). "There's nothing quite like a women's revenge and South African ladies aren't afraid to get their own back," said Wilson. This said, an affair does have disastrous affects on marriages with 52% failing because of it. Among bread-winning loved-up women, the inclination is even higher, with 51% saying they've had it on with another man (against 28% of women who are not the main breadwinner).

Money can buy love (or at least a husband)

When it comes to matters of the heart, over a quarter of those surveyed said they would marry for money. "Alarmingly, Anna Nicole Smith was a role model," said Wilson." However, on the flipside, 14% say marriage is outdated. "This statistical dichotomy reveals SA women's Jekyll and Hyde persona. On the one hand, they are happy to shack up with Mr Millionaire whether they love him or not, and on the other there are a handful of ladies out there doing it for themselves, snubbing the very concept of marriage."

Despite these trends, the majority (77%) of women said they are snugly hooked up with their man, are fulfilled (62%), supported (69%) and understood (72%).

Kids do the darndest things

While having children is not for everyone (only 57% of respondents were mums), among those who do, 33% report they neither stunt their career growth (against 41% of non-mums) nor cause havoc to their sex life. "Age is the culprit, not the kids," said Wilson. Some 64% of 30-year-old mums with partners have lots of sex (more frequently than once a week) compared to 62% without kids. However, for wealthier women and those over 40 who have a partner and kids, only 54% say they have lots of sex compared to 56% of those with children.

“Bizarrely those with some bucks - who can probably afford to hire a nanny or au pair to look after their kids - are the most likely to say kids hold them back.” Most eyebrow raising, however, were the married professionals. “Hitched working mums think kids hold them back more than single childless women (36% against 30%), which doesn't say much for the husbands.”

More want to work from home

Despite almost half (46%) saying they are satisfied with their jobs, almost three-quarters (70%) said they would work from home if they had a choice. “Women never have enough time. From getting ahead at work, fetching the kids from ballet, cooking gourmet and keeping trim and manicured, it's exhausting,” said Wilson. “And for many, the idea of setting up a home office is a sure-fire way of killing two, if not three birds, with one stone. But starting from scratch as a writer or event planner isn't easy and may put the brakes on the family income for a while. Sticking it out in accounts may not be their life dream, but does pay the bills.”

Happy pills not all they're quacked up to be

While an overwhelming 91% describe themselves as “positive people”, 9% need an anti-depressant crutch. Ironically, “happy pills” may fail to deliver the desired results. “Among those on anti-depressants, only 39% said they made any difference,” said Wilson. They also have a penchant for the bottle and spending money when they want to relax. “This suggests that those with depression or anxiety issues are more predisposed to indulge in addictive behaviours compared to a happy person's idea of fun, which is going to a spa, exercising or getting jiggy with it under the sheets.”

“Me-time” is the best medicine

When it comes to taking a time-out, women who write for pleasure or meditated were among the happiest. “Taking a break from the busy world, jotting thoughts down in a journal or blog or doing the lotus position in a yoga class have significant benefits for women's well-being,” said Wilson. “And, with a staggering 76% of women saying spending time on their own to recharge makes them happier, sometimes 'dinner for one' is just what the doctor ordered.”

More friends: better times

While “me” time is important to re-boost, having trustworthy, supportive relationships is too. Interestingly, when it comes to friends, 22% said they don't have many. “For the gender that is hard-wired for relationships and sharing, this is unexpected,” said Wilson. Unsurprisingly, those with friends are happier (68% against 55%). “It just goes to show, having a good gossip or girl's night out is good for the soul.”

Shoe fetishes alive and well

While *Sex and the City* made women's wardrobes the talk of the town, having that many shoes may well be a reality in South Africa, particularly for single, childless professionals over 40s who claim having more stilettos makes them happier. “A woman and her heels is something to be reckoned with,” said Wilson. “And, with 70% of childless women saying it's a source of well-being, there must be some truth to it.”

Keeping up appearances

On the topic of looking good, 41% said they would consider plastic surgery and 55% think living in a certain suburb is important to them. “Women are under enormous societal pressure to look trim and slim 24/7,” said Wilson. Being perfectly groomed trickles over into other areas of their lives too. And like the ladies from Wisteria Lane, having a nice house in the right neighbourhood is of utmost concern. “Otherwise what would the neighbours say?” concludes Wilson.

For more information about the survey and to find out what SA experts, high-flying women and readers thought of the results go to www.femalenationsurvey.co.za.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>