



Study on Existing Clothing Practices of Rural Elderly Women of Hisar

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KEYWORDS Ageing. Armhole. Constructional. Fitting. Style

ABSTRACT The major objective of this research was to determine the clothing needs of rural elderly women. An interview schedule was developed to elicit information about existing clothing practices, preferences and problems with existing dresses from eighty rural elderly women residing in Hisar district. Findings indicated that majority of rural elderly women used to wear short *kameez* (a long tunic worn by many people from South Asia, typically with a *salwar* or *churidars*) with *lehnga* (a full ankle-length skirt worn by Indian women, usually on formal or ceremonial occasions) followed by short straight *kameez* with *salwar*. (Salwar: A pair of light, loose, pleated trousers, usually tapering to a tight fit around the ankles, worn by women from South Asia typically with a *kameez* (the two together being a *salwar kameez*). Nearly half of rural women were not satisfied with length of front opening and with length of armhole. The style preferences of rural elderly women included cotton blend fabric of light color with small dense floral prints and straight all over loose *kameez* with up to waist line front openings or closures and simple three-fourth length sleeves. Majority of the respondents reported at least one body location which caused fitting problems with existing clothing and expressed a definite need for special sizing.

INTRODUCTION

Every individual needs some kind of thing or other to protect, to cover and to beautify his/her body which is of great importance to him/her (Singh and Arya 2017a). Clothing is one of the most important factors in the development of an individual personality. It influences a person socially, psychologically and emotionally (Arya and Singh 2017). A dress should be suitable for the person for whom it has been designed. Some of the important considerations which should be taken are climate of the region, season of the year for which the garment is made, the time or type of occasion when it is most likely to be worn, the type of role and age of person (Singh and Arya 2017b).

Clothes tell stories of ageing, embodying the passage of time through changing styles, as well as the material decay and ageing of garments. They can retain past identities and histories, or may be cast aside as our lives and identities change (Buse and Twigg 2016). Today humans rely on clothing which protects body from cold and heat throughout full range of human activities; otherwise it leads to discomfort (Bhatia and Malhotra 2016). As the need regarding clothes varies, the choice of color, material and print also differs from person to person. These variations are due to difference in age, personality, sex and

role, the individual has to play (Lawrence et al. 2005).

Every change in a life-situation-birth, entering school, college, getting a job, marriage, parenthood and even death requires a change in wardrobe. Even in the course of daily life, situation after situation requires a change in dress to facilitate and symbolize the situational change. Old age is a period when women experience lot of changes (Arya and Singh 2016). Clothes mediate between the naked body and the social world, the self and society, presenting a means whereby social expectations in relation to age act upon and are made apparent in the body. They, thus, play a potentially important role in our understanding of the cultural processes of ageing (Arya et al. 2017).

Clothes are central to the ways older bodies are experienced, presented and understood within culture, so that dress forms a significant, though neglected, element in the constitution and experience of old age (Twigg 2007). Dress is, however, also an arena for the expression of identity. Clothing is one of the basic needs of human kind. Sufficient and appropriate clothing is especially important for life quality improvement at elderly stage of human life (Palamutcu and Goren 2015).

Clothing for elderly women require easy dressing, comfort and style while addressing the

challenges of potential decreased mobility, need for maintenance of independence and the possible need for assisted dressing. Clothing has a major impact on the comfort feeling of people. The clothing properties that will affect this comfort feeling are the fit, touch and feel (Raeve et al. 2018). Comfortable clothes can be designed for the elderly by taking care of various garment construction parameters such as design and fit.

Much of the literature on ageing is presaged upon a model of advocacy that seeks to combat what is seen as the negative stereotyping of old age and old people. One consequence is that ageing studies has difficulty in confronting the darker side of ageing except in so far as age associated disability and distress can be attributed to extrinsic disadvantage (Gilleard 2018). To prevail over the darker side of ageing and to eliminate disadvantage, clothing with accurate design can facilitate overcoming the specific problems faced by the elderly people. Clothing for elderly should be such that it makes them feel good about their appearance and that is easy to wear and care for. While selecting clothing for older people, the person's need for clothing that he/she enjoys and enhances appearance, increases independence, allows for function and provides comfort must be considered. Clothing can help older people feel better about themselves and present a positive image to those around them. Sending positive appearance messages may increase older people's opportunities for social interaction. Good clothing choices for older people enhance appearance, increase independence, allow for daily functioning, and provide comfort, safety and convenience.

This elaborate study revealed a lot about clothing, ageing and culture. It concluded that clothes are the principal means through which the body is presented and seen, therefore how dress operates in relation to age, is significant for understanding how cultural expectations act directly at a bodily level. Furthermore, it revealed that clothing choices in old age reflect changes in the body and dress thus offering a field in which the complete interplay between physiological and cultural influences in the constitution of old age can be explored. Clothing has also traditionally embedded age ordering even though the phenomenon seems elusive. Clothing therefore is seen as an everyday bodily practice in which various influences including those of fashion, culture, age, identity etc. come into

play. Hence, study was conducted to determine the clothing needs of rural elderly women by gathering information on existing clothing practices, preferences and problems with existing dresses.

Objectives

- ♦ To study the existing clothing practices of rural elderly women.
- ♦ To study the preferences of rural elderly women for various garments.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted under the research scheme "Development of designs for preferred garments of elderly women" in the Department of Textile and Apparel Designing, CCSHAU, Hisar in the year 2017-2018. The study was carried out in four villages of Hisar district of Haryana state. The villages selected were: *Gawar, Burak, Mangali and Shahpur* on the basis of easy approachability. The data were collected from twenty respondents from each village, comprising a total of eighty respondents using a self-structured interview schedule. The subjects were personally interviewed to identify the existing clothing practices and problems encountered by them with existing clothing practices. Preferences of rural elderly women for different types of garments, fabric, color and various constructional features for upper garments like silhouette, fitting, necklines, openings, length of openings, sleeve type and sleeve length were also studied.

The qualitative data were quantified according to the laid down standards and tabulated to draw meaningful inferences. Statistical parameters like frequency and percentage were applied to assess and interpret data.

RESULTS

Clothing practices of elderly women and their preferences for different types of garments, fabric and various constructional features for upper garments were studied using self-structured interview schedule. Information regarding clothing practices, problems encountered by rural elderly women with existing clothing practices, has been presented in this section.

Data regarding existing clothing practices of rural elderly women has been presented in Table 1. It is clear from the data that half of the rural women used to wear short *kameez* with *lehnga* (47.5%) followed by short straight *kameez* with *salwar* (a pair of light, loose, pleated trousers, usually tapering to a tight fit around the ankles, worn by women from South Asia typically with a *kameez* (the two together being a *salwar kameez*)), which was worn by 42.5 percent respondents. Only a few rural women (10%) also used to wear *kurti* (a loose collarless shirt worn by people from South Asia, usually with a *salwar*, *churidars*, or *pyjama*) with *salwar*. Thus, majority of rural women used to wear short *kameez* with *lehnga* followed by short straight *kameez* with *salwar* (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).

Table 1: Existing clothing practices of rural elderly women (n=80)

Dresses	Frequency (Percentage)
Short straight <i>kameez</i> with <i>salwar</i>	34 (42.5)
<i>Kurti</i> with <i>salwar</i>	08 (10)
Short <i>kameez</i> with <i>lehnga</i>	38 (47.5)

The data presented in Table 2 reveal that nearly half of rural women (42.5%) were not satisfied with length of opening in upper garments that is *kameez* and *kurti* followed by the problem of improper length of armhole in upper garments faced by 27.5 percent respondents. Twenty percent rural women also considered the use of stiffening material that is *tetron* in band, collar, cuffs and *pauncha* (circular ankle band of *salwar* stiffened with inter-lining and decorated with different decorative stitches), uncomfortable. A few rural women (5%) also considered use of string in lower garment for tying as un-

Table 2: Problems encountered by rural elderly women with existing clothing practices(n= 80)

S. No.	Problems	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Use of stiffening material is uncomfortable	16	20
2.	Improper length of armhole	22	27.5
3.	Improper length of opening	34	42.5
4.	Use of string	04	05

comfortable. Thus, nearly half of rural women were not satisfied with length of front opening and thirty percent with length of armhole.

The data related to various attributes of fabric preferred by rural elderly women have been presented in Table 3. The data reveal that majority of rural elderly women (82.5%) preferred cotton blend fabric, followed by cotton fabric (17.5%). Light colors were preferred by majority of rural elderly women (85%). Fifteen percent respondents preferred dark and dull colors. As far as print of the fabric was concerned, it was found that hundred percent respondents preferred small and dense floral prints, followed by scattered prints, which were preferred by twenty-five percent rural elderly women. Plain fabric was also preferred by 17.5 percent respondents. Thus, majority of rural elderly women preferred cotton blend fabric of light color with small dense floral prints.

Table 3: Preferences of respondents regarding fabric (n=80)

Features	Categories	Frequency (Percentage)
Fabric	Cotton	14 (17.5)
	Cotton blend	66 (82.5)
	Synthetic	-
Color Intensity	Dark	12 (15)
	Dull	12 (15)
	Bright	-
	Light	68 (85)
Fabric Print	Plain	14 (17.5)
	Floral	80 (100)
	Abstract	-
	Small	80 (100)
	Bold	-
	Dense	80 (100)
	Scattered	20 (25)

The data regarding preference of rural elderly women for various constructional features of upper garments have been presented in Table 4. The data pertaining to silhouette of *kameez* showed that hundred percent respondents preferred straight silhouette of *kameez*, followed by A-line silhouette of *kurti* with round hemline preferred by ten percent respondents.

It was also found that nearly half of the respondents (42.5%) preferred 8" to 12" long side slits in their *kameez*, followed by 6"-8" long side slits in their *kurti* by 47.5 percent respondents.

As far as fitting of upper garments was concerned, hundred percent respondents preferred all over loose upper garments that is, lady's *kameez* and *kurtis*. It is evident from the data in Table 4 that approximately half of the respon-

Table 4: Preferences of respondents regarding various constructional features of upper garments (n=80)

Features	Categories	Frequency (Percentage)
Silhouette	Straight	80 (100)
	A-line with round hemline	8 (10)
Fitting	Flared	-
	Fitted all over	-
	Loose all over	80 (100)
	Loose at bust to hip level	-
Necklines	Square	-
	Round	46 (57.5)
	Neck with band /collar	34 (42.5)
Openings	Front	80 (100)
	Back	-
	Shoulder	-
Length of Opening	Up to bust line	-
	Up to waistline	80 (100)
	Up to hip line	-
	Full length	-
Sleeve Type	Simple	80 (100)
	Designed (with cuff)	08 (10)
Sleeve Length	Half sleeves	-
	¾ sleeves	80 (100)
	Full sleeve	58 (72.5)
Side Slits	Up to 6"	08 (10)
	6-8"	38 (47.5)
	8-12"	34 (42.5)
	More than 12"	-

dents (57.5%) preferred round neck, followed by neck with band or collar (42.5%). Hundred percent rural elderly women preferred front opening upto waist line in their upper garments. The data regarding type of sleeve and length of sleeve indicated that hundred percent respondents preferred simple sleeve with three quarter length followed by full sleeve with cuff.

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to obtain information regarding existing clothing practices, problems encountered by rural elderly women with existing clothing practices, preferences for different types of garments, fabric and various constructional features. The results of the study indicated that majority of rural elderly women of Hisar district used to wear short *kameez* with *lehnga*, followed by short straight *kameez* with *salwar*. Elderly women did not perceive a need for garment alterations if they thought the garment is attractive and comfortable. As a result of major physiological changes

due to old age, the clothing requirements of the elderly women, shift towards comfort and that is why they preferred classic and functional clothes instead of designer or fitted clothes. Piacentini and Mailer (2009) reported that the clothes choices made by young people are closely bound to their self-concept, and are used both as a means of self-expression and as a way of judging the people and situations they face. In the past, this was true of older people also, and certain forms of dresses were traditionally thought appropriate for older men and women such as the long robe, caps and kerchiefs were sober and quiet dress.

It was observed that nearly half of rural women were not satisfied with length of front opening and length of armhole. This might be due to the reason that at this stage of life, getting dressed and undressed is a common problem of many rural elderly women due to decreased mobility. The style preferences of the rural elderly women, included cotton blend fabric of light color with small dense floral prints. Due to decreased mobility and strength, elderly women prefer fabric that is wrinkle resistant, wash and wear type of fabric that can be easily taken care of. That is why they preferred cotton blended fabric. According to Lawrence et al. (2005), as the need regarding the clothes varies, the choice of color, material and print also differs from person to person. These variations are due to difference in age, personality, sex and role that the individual has to play.

Regarding various constructional features of upper garments, rural elderly women preferred straight all over loose silhouette of *kameez* with upto waist line front openings or closures and three-quarter simple length sleeves. At this stage of life functional clothing with comfortable ease can be of great help to support them in living independently. Long front openings make the dressing incredibly easy. Tuchtan (2015) also suggested in a study conducted on elderly, that one should select clothing that is free of complicated buttons, studs or buckles. Clothing with velcro, zips and elasticized waistbands are easier dressing choices for elderly people.

CONCLUSION

A common problem many rural elderly women face is the act of getting dressed and undressed themselves. This can be the result of a physical

disability, chronic condition, and/or other restrictions that may come with age. Therefore, as a result of major physiological changes at this stage, the clothing requirements of the elderly women have changed from beautiful and designer to classic and functional. This is the specific stage of life where functional clothing can be of great help. Functional clothing can make life easier for elderly women and their caretakers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The clothes for elderly women should be comfortably fit to accommodate physical health issues. They should not have a sense of restraint but should be loose enough to move and act. One should choose the light, soft and flexible wrinkle resistant wash and wear fabric for the elderly, which is not only comfortable but also looks luxurious and neat. The style of clothing should be simple and functional. The decorative lines and accessories should be graceful and appropriate. Long front openings with easy to grasp and manage fasteners makes the dressing incredibly easy. Velcro-type closures instead of buttons can be used for comfort, exceptional fit and to accommodate weight fluctuations. Drawstrings can also be used for an easy adjustable fit in lower garments. Soft elastics are the ultimate solution for enhanced comfort.

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Paper received for publication on November 2018
Paper accepted for publication on December 2018