

Meeting Clothing Needs of Elderly Women in Port Harcourt Urban of Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the clothing needs of elderly women in Port Harcourt urban. It determined the factors that should influence the clothing preference of elderly women, styles/design features suitable for elderly women as well as the problems elderly women encounter with ready-made clothes. The study adopted a survey research design. A sample of 360 respondents was used for the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using means. The results indicated that elderly women desire comfort, fit, quality, reasonable prices and function (the kind of activity engaged in), among others, in selecting/designing their clothes. Elderly women encounter ten problems with ready-made clothes. The clothing needs of elderly women are closely linked to their self concept. Elderly women desire the latest in fashion but slightly modified to fit their new physique (due to physiological changes). Based on the findings it is recommended, among others, that designers should explore strategies of developing clothing and accessories that suit the older consumers' changed physiques.

Keywords: Elderly, Women, Clothing, Needs, Physiological, Changes

Introduction

The elderly women are those women who are aged 60 and above. They may have retired or are still actively engaged in careers outside the home, volunteer work, social activities (mostly church activities) and other economic activities. These activities tend to influence the clothing needs of the women. According to Solomon and Rabolt (2004), today's elderly women are active, interested in appearance and what life has to offer, take good care of their body to be fit and fashionable in order to look good and younger. As a result, elderly women in contemporary culture are more fashion conscious than their equivalent did in the past. They also tend to retain attitudes developed in earlier

years regarding the proper type of clothing to be worn for given occasions. They spend more money on clothes, more time shopping, do more reading about fashion and replace wardrobe more often than the same age did in the past (Walsh, Mitchell and Thurman, 2001). In the same vein, Twigg and Majina (2011) observed that older women are shopping for clothes more frequently than their equivalents did in 1960s though they are not spending larger proportion of their income. Tyagi and Alka (2013) further stated that clothing expenditures are usually lower for older age group than for any other group, hence value for price is important.

The economic situation of elderly women today has improved significantly

compared to their equivalent in the past and accordingly, their purchasing power has grown. According to Carrigan, Szmigin and Wright (2004) absence of financial and family obligation has made older women better and their accumulation of more education, wealth has improved their economic prosperity than their parents. Moody and Sood (2010) noted that elderly women today has acquired more wealth due to their educational background, which has brought about job opportunities, wealth creation and affluence though income may decline on retirement, so too do other financial demand resulting in relatively high discretionary income

Based on the National census conducted in 2006 in Nigeria, there is an increase in the percentage and number of those aged 60 and above. With a growing population of elderly women, elderly clothing demand will continue to increase and will offer a field to be explored by fashion designers and fashion industry. The elderly women are over looked and excluded from fashion because their clothing preferences and problems have not received the consideration and study given to other age levels and fashion industries see the elder clothing market as a dead-end sales opportunity (Guzel, 2013). Arthur (2003) further confirms that only small quantities of clothing are available to the elderly and that the available ones do not fit well due to lack of attention to proportion and physiological changes which result to poor aesthetic value and fit. Lee, Damhorst, Lynn, Min-Sun, Joy and Martin (2012) posits that putting the needs and preferences of elders into consideration will create awareness in both marketing and elders clothing problems and that fashion industries

should take elders consuming needs into considerations and respond to the expectations of elderly women in the market as one of the expectations of elder consumer is that dresses they bought should have features that meet their physiological changes and needs.

Ageing in human is a multidimensional process which involves physical, psychological and social dimensions. Some dimensions of ageing grow and expand while others decline. Physiological changes in old age are perceived as an alteration in the normal structure and function of the body. According to Tyagi and Alka (2013), the body grows shorter during ageing and the decline in height is due to a continuous bending and shortening of the spinal column. Also, there is a gradual and systematic calcification of the cartilage. The joints become stiffened, fatigued with general tendency of weakness. Weight generally increases and the location of fat deposit on the body shift. Expanding waistlines and an increase abdominal extension are common as are reductions and lowering of buttocks. The bust level is often lower for women. Change in muscle tone and in the tendons can result in shoulders slumping forward and an increase shoulder angle. These changes affect the body shape, posture and mobility of the elderly making them to walk more slowly with increasingly difficulty. This implies that clothing of the elderly women should be designed with their physical characteristics in mind.

Dwivedi and Lunia (2007) reported that significant physical changes gradually occur as the elder woman progress past middle age. Most of the changes are in body proportion and function. The contours of the face is not left out in these

changes as the cheek bones, nose, ears and lips become more prominent. The chin becomes double and fat cushions around the eyes and the eyeballs decreases. The face becomes lean with lines and wrinkles, the abdomen and hip expand and the leg gets increasingly thinner. Graying, thinning of hair and wrinkling skin also accompany ageing. This facial features in elderly women call for styles and colours that have softening effect.

Clothing is a supplementary tool presenting a person's presence, what she wants in the future, his point of view, where she stands in the society, anytime and anywhere Clothing frequently is important as a means towards acceptance by the group and there is a relationship between clothing and social status. Clothing is important for active elderly women because they want to have new social relationships and especially to hide their defects due to physical changes and relaxing psychologically (Ozipek, Tanyas and Mahmutoglu-Dinc, 2012). The physical changes influence the social aspects of the elder woman's life and choices including clothing preferences. According to Tyagi and Alka (2013) physical limitations may impair or disrupt social activities the elder has enjoyed over the years. Changes also occur as a result of retirement, death of family members or the breakup of close friends which may be very upsetting. Health issues can make it difficult to dress and perform personal care activities as well as to operate bra closures and buttons.

Challenges due to the above alterations in the body result to an array of figure types and variations. These make it difficult for the elderly women to find an appropriate clothing to fit their altered body. In all these changes, clothing design featuring comfort, fit and up-to-date is

preferred by elderly women (Twigg, 2007). Twigg (2007) opined that the changes that occur in the body of the elderly should be incorporated into decisions about clothing at an individual level because styles that once suited or fitted may no longer do so as the body changes therefore, clothing choices in old age should reflect changes in the body. Other factors contributing to improper fit are lack of pattern for elderly body size and shape, inadequate size ranges for current body type variation. Sizing based on out dated anthropometric data from voluntary product standard created in the 1940s based on their fit model that did not account for current body proportion and changes are still in use. Also, the body structure of elderly women in Nigeria differs from that of Europeans and Americans. All these constitute a problem to elderly clothing. Ashdow (2003) opined that improvement and implementation of sizing system based on current population study of the elderly will be financially beneficial to domestic clothing firms and marketers. Specialization in fit and size of the elderly may be key in retaining some domestic competitive advantage in the clothing industry (American textile institute, 2003). To acquire good fit, there must be agreement between several stakeholders: the clothing designer, the pattern grader/maker and the consumer. Each has a different role in the designing process. The designer creates aesthetic look taking into account its relationship to the body, the pattern grader/maker is responsible for the maintenance of the desired look on a variety of body types using few quantities of sizes (Ashdow, 2003).

In Nigeria, there is the tendency of not making accurate garment for proper fit using free hand cutting method (Shailong

and Igbo, 2009). In order to step up domestic production of elderly women clothes in Nigeria, there is need to investigate the clothing needs of elderly women as elder consumers have great importance due to their feature distinct from other consumer groups, will constitute a major consumer group that will shape the national markets, because the increasing number of elderly women will require giving goods and services in compliance with their needs and lifestyles.. It is in view of this that this study sought to survey the clothing needs of elderly women in Port Harcourt urban in order to sensitize for elderly clothing designers an pattern makers as this will lead to employment generation, wealth creation and poverty reduction.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the clothing needs of elderly women in Port Harcourt urban. Specifically, the study determined:

1. Factors that influence the clothing preferences of elderly women in Port Harcourt urban
2. Styles/design features preferred on elderly women's clothing due to physiological changes.
3. Problems elderly women in Port Harcourt urban encountered with readymade clothes

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research questions,

- 1). What are the factors that influence the clothing preferences of elderly women in Port Harcourt urban?
- 2) What are the styles/design features preferred on elderly women's clothing due to physiological changes?

- 3) What are the problems elderly women in Port Harcourt urban encounter with readymade clothes?

Methodology

Area of Study: The area of the study is Port Harcourt urban. Port Harcourt is the capital city of Rivers State. It lies along Bonny River and it is located in the Niger Delta. Port Harcourt urban is densely populated with active elderly women. There are many churches in the area. These churches include Catholic churches, Anglican Communion churches and various denominations of Pentecostal churches but the Anglican Communion church was sampled.

Design of the Study: The design of the study was survey. The survey design was considered suitable for this study because it would enable information to be gathered from fairly large number of elderly women with an intention of assessing their opinions on their clothing needs and preferences.

Population for the Study: Although the population size of elderly women in Anglican churches were not available, the population for this study comprised of all the elderly women 60years and above living in Port Harcourt urban who are educated and retired but are still actively engaged in careers outside the home, voluntary work, social activities (mostly church activities) and other economic activities. The entire population of elderly women in Port Harcourt urban is about 17,026 (National Population Commission, 2006).

Sample of the Study: The sample for the study was made up of three hundred and sixty (360) elderly women aged 60 and above. These women are actively involved in church activities to keep themselves

busy hence, the Anglican Communion churches within Port Harcourt urban were used for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 15 Anglican churches (St Cyprians church, hospital road, St Andrews church, mile one, St John's church, Bishop Johnson street, St Peters church, Hospital road, St marks church , Borokiri, Bishops Court Kings chapel, Harley street, St Paul's cathedral, Diobu, Chapel of God, Port Harcourt, St Thomas church, Diobu, Immanuel church, G.R.A, St Matthews church, Nkpogu, , Calvary Anglican, Emenike, Jerusalem church, Port Harcourt, King of Kings D/line, Diobu, New Convanant church Nzimero street) out of the 24 churches in Port Harcourt urban (Anglican Communion church year calendar, 2013). 24 elderly were sampled from each of the 15 churches. This yielded a total of three hundred and sixty (360) respondents who formed the sample for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection: The instrument used for data collection was a 4-point rating scale of strongly agree -4, agree -3, disagree -2 and strongly disagree - 1. It was developed based on specific purposes of the study. It was face

validated by three experienced Home Economics lecturers in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. These Home Economics teachers were given three copies of the questionnaire, and were requested to identify ambiguities and proffer suggestions for improving the instrument towards meeting the objectives of the study. The expert's inputs were used to draft the final copy of the questionnaire for the study. Test retest method was used to establish reliability. The coefficient of reliability of the instrument obtained is 0.89.

Data Collection and Analysis: A total of 360 copies of the instrument were distributed by hand through the pastors' wives who were also the women leaders to the respondents. All the three hundred and sixty questionnaire forms were retrieved. Data were analyzed using mean. A cut-off or 2.50 was considered as agreed while any mean less than 2.5 was considered disagreed.

Findings

The following findings were made:

a). Factors that influence clothing preference of elderly women

Table 1: Mean Responses on Factors that influences clothing preference of elderly women (N= 360)

S/N	Factors that influence clothing preference of elderly women	Mean	Remark
1.	Beauty of the clothing	3.40	Agreed
2.	Price of the clothing	3.40	Agreed
3.	Clothing in vogue	3.10	Agreed
4.	Classic clothing	2.80	Agreed
5.	Warmth /coolness in relation to geographic location	4.00	Agreed
6.	Ease of care	4.00	Agreed
7.	Softness of fabric	3.10	Agreed
8.	Comfort of the wearer	4.00	Agreed
9.	Colour of the clothing	3.00	Agreed

10. Style of the clothing	3.30	Agreed
11. Durability of clothing	3.40	Agreed
12. Ease of wear	4.00	Agreed
13. Weight of garment	3.20	Agreed
14. Culture	4.00	Agreed
15. Fit of clothing	4.00	Agreed
16. Function (the kind of activity the elderly is engaged in)	4.00	Agreed
17. Self expression	4.00	Agreed
18. Safety of wearer	4.00	Agreed
19. Quality of fabric and construction	4.00	Agreed

Table 1 revealed that all the nineteen factors that influence clothing preferences of elderly women were accepted by the respondents. Indicator/item nos. 5, 6, 8, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 (warmth/coolness in relation to geographical location, ease of care, comfort of the wearer, ease of wear, culture, fit of clothing, function, self expression, safety of wearer and quality of fabric and construction) recorded the highest mean score (4.00).

b) Style / design feature preferred by elderly women due to physiological changes

Table 2: Mean Responses on Style /Design Features preferred by elderly women due to Physiological Changes (N= 360)

S/N	Styles /Design features suitable for elderly women	Mean	Remarks
My clothing should:			
1.	be simple	4.00	Agreed
2.	be proportionate to my figure	3.70	Agreed
3.	be oversized	1.10	Disagreed
4.	be conservative (Not Revealing)	3.50	Agreed
5.	be Warm and light weight to prevent fatigue in Walking and working	3.20	Agreed
6.	be designed to accommodate the elongated breast	3.40	Agreed
7.	be suitable for all weather	3.50	Agreed
8.	be soft and non-irritating		
9.	be free but support sagging muscles for girdles	3.00	Agreed
10.	be low with nonslip soles for shoe	4.00	Agreed
11.	be easy to put on and take off for shoe styles	3.50	Agreed
12.	have smooth soft seams after construction	3.00	Agreed
13.	have tiny buttons	2.00	Disagreed
14.	have large and medium buttons	3.80	Agreed
15.	have empire bust line	3.50	Agreed
16.	have buttons and zippers in front or sides	3.80	Agreed
17.	have buttons and zippers at the back	2.30	Disagreed
18.	have no waist line	3.50	Agreed
19.	hide my figure problems	4.00	Agreed
20.	have suitable content of allowance	3.20	Agreed

21.	have enough allowance at waist line to accommodate protruding abdomen and enlarge hips	3.20	Agreed
22.	have soft and attractive colours	3.00	Agreed
23.	have front closures for bra	3.70	Agreed

Table 2 revealed that twenty out of the twenty three related views on styles/design features suitable for elderly women due to physiological changes were accepted by the respondents. However, three items were not accepted (nos. 3, 13 and 17) with mean scores below 2.5 cut off mark. Indicator/item nos. 1, 10 and 19 (my clothing should be simple, my shoes should be low with non-slip sole and styles of my garment should hide my figure problems recorded the highest mean score (4.00).

c) Problems elderly women encountered with readymade clothes

Table 3: Mean Response on Problems elderly women encountered with readymade clothes (N=360)

S/N	Problems elderly women encounter with readymade clothes	Mean	Remark
1.	Style of garment unsuitable for changed physique	4.00	Agreed
2.	Scarcity of ready to wear elderly garment	3.20	Agreed
3.	Need for special sizing	3.50	Agreed
4.	Some cultural attire are too heavy	3.18	Agreed
5.	Clothing items are not designed to meet real needs	3.75	Agreed
6.	Neckline of garment too low	3.00	Agreed
7.	Uninteresting colours of garment	3.00	Agreed
8.	Waistline of garment too low or too tight	3.00	Agreed
9.	Some garment lack the ability for independent dressing	3.20	Agreed
10.	Lack of basic block by designers for apparel production	3.65	Agreed

Table 3 revealed that all the items listed as problems encountered by elderly women with readymade clothes in Port Harcourt urban got mean scores above 2.5. This implies that elderly women in Port Harcourt urban encounter these problems with readymade clothes.

Discussion of Findings

The findings are discussed based on the research questions that guided this study. The study was conducted to determine the factors that influence clothing preferences of elderly women in Port Harcourt urban. The study indicated factors that influence

clothing preference of elderly women in the area of study. The data also shows that all the factors listed on table 1 were accepted by the respondents with response above the cut off. This means that the respondents support the fact that comfort of the wearer, fit of clothing, ease of wear and ease of care, durability of clothing, quality of fabric and construction, function, beauty of clothing, price of the clothing, clothing in vogue, safety of wearer, among others are very important in clothing preference of the elderly. These findings are in line with the view of some authors cited in review of literature. Thomas &

Peters (2009) opined that elderly citizens desire comfort, fit, aesthetics, style, value / good price and function. Creusen (2010) noted that older people pay more attention to three types of functional aspect namely functionalities, ease of use and quality when selecting clothing. In the same vein, Twigg (2007) reported that clothing design featuring comfort, fit and up-to-date is preferred by senior citizens. Thiry, 2009 supported this by stating that the elderly are not willing to sacrifice comfort for fashion and that they also prefer protective clothing in extreme environmental condition. Guzel, 2013 also noted that elderly women consider functionality important and seam quality partially important. In the research made by Lee *et al.*, (2012), it has been found that elder women are interested in the suitability with body, easy maintenance and low prices. Dress suitability is seen as an important matter in consumer satisfaction and dress quality in ready to wear garment. But since the definition of suitability depends on individual perceptions and it is determined by fashion, styles, and other factors, it is hard to identify a well adapted dress universally (Song and Ashdown, 2010). Tyagi and Alka (2013) reported that elderly women's clothes should be light in weight so that they are less tiring to wear and that clothing's should be warm to compensate for lowered activity, cold bloodedness and flexible enough for comfort in movement. He also added that soft fabrics and construction processes that do not irritate the skin should be used for elderly clothing and that in terms of safety, the safe choice is clothing that fits close to the body. The study revealed in Table 2 that the respondents agreed that clothing styles / designs of the elderly due to physiological

changes should be simple, proportionate to their size, conservative, proportionate to their figure, warm and light weight to prevent fatigue in walking and working, have no waist line, have buttons and zippers in front or side, have medium or large buttons, styles should hide figure problems among others. This is in line with Twigg (2007) who pointed out that clothing choice in old age should reflect changes in the body and that these changes in the body should be incorporated into decisions about clothing styles / designs at an individual level since physiological changes can differentiate varieties of people by different rate of aging and different combinations. In the same vein, Civitci (2004) stated that the designing of clothing for the elderly requires attention to both bodily changes from aging in order to facilitate and raise the quality of life. Tyagi and Alka, (2013) reported that clothing for elderly women should be designed with their physical characteristics in mind. He suggested that in considering elderly women who have difficulty in reaching back to open or close buttons and zipper, garment that button down the front are a must. Larger openings are also easier to pull on and off and relatively low -heel slip-on shoes or shoes with hook and loop closures are more suitable for elderly women. Thus indicating that women's body image is likely to influence their clothing preferences. Findings on Table 3 with regards to problems elderly women encounter with readymade clothes include among others (a) clothing items not designed, to meet real needs, (b) styles of garment unsuitable for changed physique, (c) need for special sizing, (d) waistline of garment too low or too tight and (e) neckline too low. These problems are in line with the opinion of Civitci (2004),

Smathers & Horridge (1979) who opined that readymade garment do not accommodate the clothing needs of elderly women and that readymade garment do not give room for changed physique of the elderly. Lee *et al.*, (2012) reported that elderly women agreed that they find it difficult in finding clothing that fits their body shapes and styles that are appropriate for their ageing body. Guzel (2013) in his work noted that one of the major problems with elderly women is the conformity of dress to the body and its size. As the sizes, patterns and designs are generally prepared according to young and healthy people with normal body sizes.

Conclusion

The findings provide valuable insight into elderly clothing needs and allow a deeper understanding of their preference when choosing clothing items. These findings have implications for pattern graders/makers, clothing designers, and manufacturers. Elderly citizens are still interested in fashion and are looking for designers and styles that allow them to express their identity. Designers and manufacturers should explore strategies of developing clothing and accessories that flatter the older consumers changed physique, and incorporate latest fashion with proper interpretation for their generation as functionality are among the priorities for the elderly consumer. Designers and manufacturers should strive to provide maximized value through comfort, proper fit and materials as well as good workmanship.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the follow recommendations were made

1. There is need for more research on elderly and clothing designs as the starting point of design for aging is researching and confirming the older users need
2. Designers should explore strategies of developing clothing and accessories that flatter the older consumers changed physique and incorporate the latest fashion with proper interpretation for their generations.
3. Designers should strive to provide maximized value through comfort, proper fit and materials as well as good workmanship.
4. Selected data from the body scan of typical elderly women can be made into basic blocks, tested and then used to develop style patterns.

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