

ABSTRACT

Clothes are an outward expression of how people feel about themselves and the world around them. They are also regarded as one of the chief determinants of the wearer's personality, way of living and way of thinking. Clothes are a powerful communicator, especially when people interact at work. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction with clothing affects the mood and actions of individuals which in turn can influence productivity, credibility and effectiveness of the wearer. The office clothes or uniforms of a working woman are an important part of her wardrobe and it is imperative that these clothes are suitable for her profession, job profile and work environment. Office wear clothes should be comfortable and provide the person with a sense of confidence so that she can concentrate on her job.

India is an emerging economy with an increasing number of women entering the workforce at various levels. Working women, who form an important segment of the population, spend six to ten hours on their jobs and their office clothes or uniforms form an important part of their wardrobe.

In the **present study** existing clothing styles and preferences for formal office wear of 1161 working women in the age group of 20 to 60 years from different professions from Pune and Mumbai were investigated. Comfort and satisfaction from office wear clothes- both in uniforms and non-uniform category were evaluated and analyzed with reference to the demographic details of the respondents. The respondents were selected using purposive stratified cluster sampling technique. Structured questionnaire was pretested and used as a tool for data collection after establishing its reliability and validity. Statistical analysis of data was done using SPSS 15.0 version. Descriptive statistics, Chi-square test, Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis test and Kappa statistics were used to analyze the data.

The findings from the study reveal that for women working in **uniforms** - comfort and satisfaction was affected by the age, profession, duration of working hours and also the city of residence. Amongst the various professions, Nurses expressed maximum comfort and satisfaction from their uniforms. Elderly working women were not very comfortable with uniforms. Women working for short duration of hours were comfortable and satisfied from uniforms. Whereas, longer working hours in uniforms decreased their comfort level. Most of the respondents had positive views about the influence of uniforms on job performance and wanted to continue wearing uniforms to work.

In the **non-uniform** category majority preferred to wear salwaar/churidar and kurta as office wear. Sari & blouse were preferred by older women. Comfort was the most important factor considered for selecting office wears. Age of the respondents, duration of working hours and mode of transport used affected the comfort levels from office clothes. Family members influenced the clothing choices of the respondents to a great extent. Majority of the respondents were not in the favour of switching over to uniforms as office wear.

Suggestions for suitable office wear were- Fabric colours, textures and surface embellishments should be chosen to suit and complement the skin type and highlight the best features of the wearer. A formal look can be created by using fabrics that drape well in neutral colours like- grey, black or white. Construction details like collars, belts, pockets and top stitching can give a formal structured appearance to the garment. Jackets and coats with soft padding at the shoulders and the company name or logo on the front/lapel worn over clothes of own choice is ideal as partial uniforms. Salwaar-kurta in stylish cut with suitable accessories like scarf or stole can be ideal uniforms for professions in travel, tourism and hospitality industry. Foot wear should be stylish and comfortable. Low heels, broad toes and straps with buckles or elastic will give adequate support to the feet.

In an organization, clothes can reflect and create a variety of organizational dynamics. Clothes can also affect individual and organizational outcomes, including employee compliance, organizational image and utilization of human resources. It is thus important that office wear should be selected with great care as it can make an impact on the individual as well as the organization. These findings and suggestions could be used as data base and guidelines by designers as well as policy makers in corporate offices in order to enhance the working women's efficiency and confidence along with higher level of satisfaction and comfort from appropriate office wears.
