

A Review on Midlife Body Changes and Clothing Needs



By: Vidya Rakesh
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Synopsis

Indian women of 35-55 years of age witness many physical changes in the body. These body changes causes shift in clothing patterns and apparel preferences. These women require major adjustment in the available readymade garments which have many fitting problems. Younger women are lapping up the merchandise on offer by the women's apparel brand but the mature women are still hesitant in accepting the readymade garments because sizes and dimensions of the readymade garments are not suitable for their body. This is the reason why this age group still prefer customized fitting of their garments. The present paper deals with the reviews on midlife body changes and clothing needs of the people.

Introduction

Demographic studies all around the world show that the world is ageing. Population aging is going to be most prominent global phenomenon of the 21st century. This process of aging is going to continue for next few decades. Median age that divides the population of the country in half, is an indicator of aging of the population, is also gradually increasing. Europe has the median age of 39 years and Japan which has the world's oldest population has median age 43 years. Median age for India is 26.2 years and China has a median age of 33 years. India is younger country in comparison but it is also gradually maturing. The middle age group is growing at a faster rate of 39.7 per cent during the review period of 1995-2007 and is expected to grow at a rate of 23.5 per cent till 2015. Now the 35-55 age groups constitute the largest portion (21.2 per cent) of the population (Euro monitor International, 2008).

The aging phenomena will have many socio-economic implications. Countries are slowly gearing up to take the challenges. Apparel sector also need to cater to the needs of aging population. Researches are going on in the world to study the body changes during different phases of aging to develop suitable clothing. Women constitute half of the world population. The middle age is a very important phase for women. They are leaving behind the child bearing age and slowly maturing. They go through many physical changes that affect their apparel needs. Their bust to waist and bust to hip ratio change and she finds that available clothes are not suitable for their changed figure (Laitala et al., 2011).

Jackson and Neal (1994) concluded that most prevalent physical changes that occur with advancing age, thickened waist, enlarged hips, protruding abdomen and drooping bust line. As a result of this observation some researchers have concluded that new sizes and measurements standards needed to be established for elderly females.

They have conducted a study to examine the relationship of 55 and older women's perception of aging and dress response. Twenty nine research documents from year 1961 to year 1990 were integrated by Meta analysis. The elderly female opinion about their aging bodies, their need to look youthful by cosmetics, undergarments and tailored clothes was studied by using approaches like physical changes in body required different clothing fit and sizes than what was available. The conclusion was derived that age related changes in the body led to change in self- image and people responded to it by altering ready-to-wear garments, wearing flattering color, design and styles.

Langley (2000) observed that during peri-menopause (30-35 years) the female fat cells grow larger in response to declining estrogen production, a time when women are at higher risk for osteoporosis. This resulted in an increase in body fat, especially in the abdomen, which allowed estrogen to be stored for ready access to help keep calcium in the bones.

Shukla et. al. (2002) studied the height, weight and body mass index of adult population of urban India to find out the tendency of severe thinness and overweight. 99,598 people (men-40,007 and women-59,527) from Mumbai were selected. It was concluded that urban India faced both the problem of thinness and overweight. The risk group of thinness was illiterate/ less educated and elderly, while the college educated middle age groups were at risk of overweight.

Alexander (2003) used 3D scan Shape Sorter to assess the body shape. The Body Shape Assessment Scale (BSAS) studied 529 female scans and found that 45 per cent of the samples were pear shaped while 33 per cent were of hour glass shape. Shape as well as the configuration of body measurements was important and needed re-evaluation to ensure good fit as body standard evolved over time. It was observed that women were dissatisfied with the fit of RTW for the lower body and relatively satisfied with the upper body. 70 percent women's dissatisfaction was related to their abdomen

Sternfeld et al. (2004) conducted a study to know the extent to which age, menopausal status, and lifestyle behaviors accounted for the increased weight, fat, mass and central adiposity experienced by midlife women. Longitudinally examined the relations of ageing, menopausal status, and physical activity to weight and waist circumference in 3064 racially /ethnically diverse women aged 42-52 year. The results showed mean weight increase by 2.1 Kg and mean waist circumference increase by 2.2 cm in 3 year (1996-1997 to 1999-2000). These findings implied that women in their forties and early fifties were, on an average, expected to gain approximately 1.5 pounds (0.7 Kg) per year during their middle years, regardless of age, initial body size or race/ethnicity.

Pisut (2007) applied shape analysis technique to 3D body scanning and found that the shape of female body has changed from 1950's, when most standard sizes were developed. Women now were larger and more pear shaped than in previous decades. It was also found that 40 per cent of 222 subjects were pear shaped when they were tested by FFIT II (Female figure Identification Technique). Only 21 people were found to be of hour glass categories. Body shapes were fairly distributed among all age group, except for 19-35 year old respondents who were more likely to have an hour glass silhouette.

A study was conducted by Pisut (2007) to find out the correlation between body cathexis and self-esteem in relation to measures of waist, hips and weight. Result showed that in women the correlation was high. Hip, thighs and waist were negative suppressors of self-esteem and self-perceived physical attractiveness. Women were dissatisfied with the fit of RTW for the lower body and relatively satisfied with the upper body. 70 per cent women's dissatisfaction was related to their abdomen.

Sharma et al. (2007) conducted a study in Jammu to assess the menopausal symptom in women above age 40. Sample of 117 women from urban area belonging to middle socioeconomic class were selected. It was concluded that mean age of menopause in Indian women was 47.53 years, which was less in comparison to developed countries. It also showed that the number of symptoms was more in early and late menopause period and most common symptoms were fatigue and lack of energy (72.93 per cent), headache (55.9 per cent), hot flush and cold sweat (53.86 per cent) and weight gain (43.13 per cent). Mean age at menopause ranged in Indian women from 40.32 to 48.84 years and in developed countries from 48 to 51 years.

Kozar and Damhorst (2008) conducted a study that examined the relationship between age, body image and women's proclivity to compare themselves with fashion models. A survey of 281 women between 30 to 80 years was conducted. Women were worried more than men about appearance changes, throughout their life span and also reported more dissatisfaction with their body image than do men, especially as women got older. Women were much more vulnerable than men to conform to society's expectation of achieving an ideal look especially as one experienced natural age related changes in appearance.

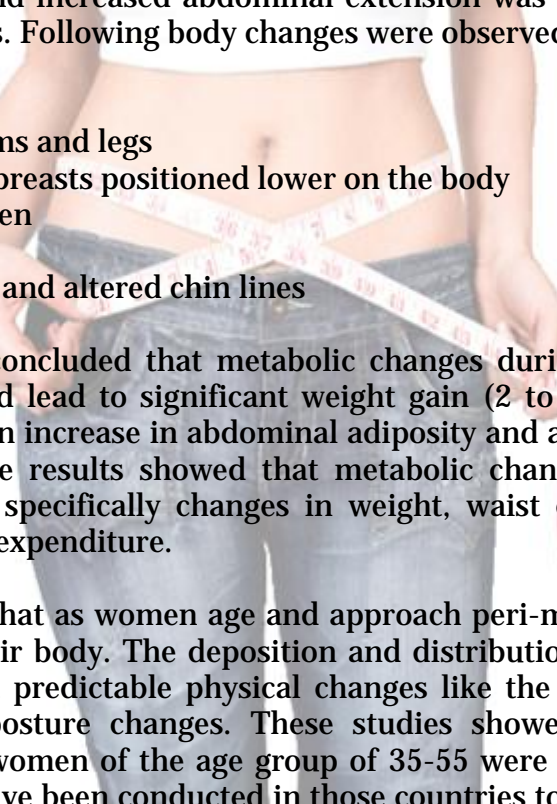
They arrived at a conclusion that women between the age of 30 and 45 experienced the culminating phase of early adulthood slowly transitioning to middle adulthood which lasts from about age 40 to 65 years. Within these stages of human life cycle, transition of women began to assert more authority within their lives thus creating new ideals and goals. Throughout the transitional periods of adulthood women explored various possibilities for changes both in the self and the large micro environment and strived for a sense of greater individualization

Vishwanathan and Sharma (2009) studied the height variation of adult Indian woman. National Family Health Survey for 2005-2006 data was utilized. The results were different in different regions but in similar socio-economic conditions the differences reduced. It is affected by teenage child birth, wealth differences, caste affections and educational attainment. The median height of women aged 20 to 40 years across India is 151.8 cm and majority of status was below median height of 4 feet 11 inches in north-east. Among women rural heights were predominantly lower than urban heights except for those between 40 to 45 years of age.

Based on a recent European study conducted on women by Thiry (2009), it was confirmed that 56 per cent ladies from 40 to 54 years of age belonged to size over 46 for Europe and over 16 for US. Post-menopausal women grew by two sizes on an average

especially in the waist. Shapes of older people were different. Clothing designed for younger consumers was unlikely to fit even if the size was larger whereas, mature consumers wanted style. Each group had differing style needs. Consumer in these ages ranged between 40 and 60 years old were still concerned about looking young. Now a day, people work hard to keep fit as they got older. The fitness movement was very important to more mature people. At fitness clubs, people over 40 were seen because they kept their bodies fit. Style needs of consumers aged 40 to 60 year old were still very different than those desired by 60-80 year old. The 40 to 60 age groups wanted to wear clothes in a style that's modern but not trendy.

They concluded that changes in metabolism, muscle tone, ligaments and tendons and skin texture occurred as people grew older. Body shape and posture changes as women aged. Weight generally increased and the location of fat deposits on the body shifted. Expanded waist lines and increased abdominal extension was common with reduction and lowering of buttocks. Following body changes were observed by this study:

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- A photograph of a woman from the waist down, wearing a white crop top and blue jeans. She is holding a white measuring tape around her waist, with the tape crossing in front of her. The background is a plain, light color.
- ☞ Weight gain
 - ☞ Less toned arms and legs
 - ☞ Buttocks and breasts positioned lower on the body
 - ☞ Larger abdomen
 - ☞ Larger thighs
 - ☞ Thicker necks and altered chin lines

Polotsky et al. (2010) concluded that metabolic changes during peri-menopause and early menopausal period lead to significant weight gain (2 to 2.5 Kg over 3 years on average). This resulted in increase in abdominal adiposity and a progressive decrease in energy expenditure. The results showed that metabolic changes are associated with menopausal transition, specifically changes in weight, waist circumference, body fat distribution and energy expenditure.

All these studies show that as women age and approach peri-menopause phase certain changes occurred in their body. The deposition and distribution of fat changed during aging. Age caused most predictable physical changes like the expansion of waist and abdominal girth and posture changes. These studies showed that the weight and abdominal increase in women of the age group of 35-55 were there in other countries too and many studies have been conducted in those countries to study these changes for apparel fitting problems. None such studies have been conducted in India. As the apparel sector is set to grow in India it is necessary to know the body changes happening in Indian women to provide them the garments of right shape, size and fit.

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