

Clothing Practices and Preferences of Visually Impaired Children

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Clothing is a primary need of mankind throughout the world. Clothes help to impress others. Uncomfortable clothes can take away the joy of living. This is equally true for special groups, whose needs are greater because as compared to normal people they need more comfort and convenience to be independent. In India, the broad definition of visual impairment as adopted in The Person with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Right and Full Participation) Act 1995 as well as under the National Programme for Control of Blindness is:

A visually impaired child is an individual, whose vision is of practically no value for the purpose of general business of living. He is person who is unable to perform any work for which eye-sight is essential.

Globally, the leading causes of blindness in order of frequency are:

- Cataract (a clouding of the lens of the eye that impedes the passage of light).
- Uncorrected refractive errors (near-sightedness, far-sightedness or astigmatism).
- Glaucoma (a group of diseases that result in damage of the optic nerve).
- Age-related macular degeneration (which involves the loss of a person's central field of vision).

Other major causes include corneal opacities (eye diseases that scar the cornea), diabetic retinopathy (associated with diabetes), blinding trachoma and eye conditions in children such as cataract, retinopathy of prematurity (an eye disorder of premature infants) and vitamin A deficiency.

The individual requirements of visually impaired children regarding textiles and clothing are much more diverse than those of other people. Clothing for people with disability due to visual impairment should be more functional than fashionable, based upon their needs of protection and comfort. When the outer 'self' looks good, it is easier for the 'inner' self to feel good. The present study on clothing practices is not only concerned with what practices they prefer for selection of garments in terms of functional, constructional aspects and material of garments but it also includes what type of problems they face with present clothing as well as the problems encountered by mothers of visually impaired children while training the child for dressing and undressing.

Materials & Method

The present study was conducted on blind male children from Rajkiya Pragya-Chakshu Blind School in Udaipur city of Rajasthan. This research was based on a

descriptive cum exploratory design to obtain information on clothing practices and present wardrobe and clothing problems faced by them. The sample was selected purposively and children along with their mothers were selected as a respondent for the present study. Personal interview technique as well as observation technique was used for data collection. Self-structured pre-tested personal interview schedule was used to obtain complete and desired information. The collected data was analyzed for statistical treatment in the light of the objectives of the study.

Result and Discussion

As per the objectives of present study all the pertinent information has been categorized and reported under major following sections:

- I. General information of the respondent
- II. Existing clothing practices of visually impaired children
- III. Problems faced by mothers while training the child
- IV. Clothing attributes preferred by visually impaired children.

I. General information about visually impaired children

The visually impaired children were studied in terms of their age, religion, family type and family occupation. For the present research work a total of 30 sample subjects were taken. The absolute and percentage distribution of respondents according to each of the above mentioned factors are given in tables and discussed briefly.

Age : The data reveals that 53.33 per cent of the respondents were in the age group of 6-8 years and 46.67 per cent in the age group of 8-10 years.

Religion: It was surprising to note that all the respondents were Hindu.

Table 1. General information about visually impaired children (n = 30)

S. No.	Aspect	Categories	F	%
1	Age	6-8	16	53.33
		8-10	14	46.67
2	Religion	Hindu	30	100.00
3	Family Type	Joint	12	40.00
		Nuclear	18	60.00
4	Family Occupation	Service	14	46.67
		Business	16	53.33

Family Type

The data reveals that 60 per cent of respondents belonged to nuclear families while remaining 40 per cent belonged to joint families.

Family Occupation

The data reveals that family occupation of 46.67 per cent of the respondent was service. Remaining 53.33 per cent of the respondents were from business class families.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by no. of years they went to school. (n = 30)

S. No.	No. of Years	F	%
1	1 year	7	23.33
2.	2 to 3 years	14	46.67
3	Above 3 years	9	30.00

The data reveals that 23.33 per cent of the respondents go to school only for one year, 46.67 per cent of the respondents go to school for 2 to 3 years and 30 per cent of the respondents go to school for more than 3 years.

Causes of disability

The researcher was curious to know the reasons behind the disability

Table 3. Causes of disability

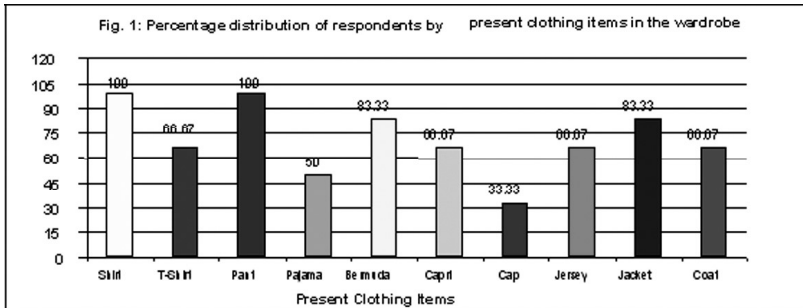
S. No.	Causes of disability	F	%
1	By birth	17	56.67
2.	After birth	11	36.66
3.	Accidental cases	2	6.67

The data reveals that 56.67 per cent of the respondents were born blind and 36.66 per cent of the respondents were totally blind after birth because the children had diseases like glaucoma, eye flue and fever. 6.67 per cent of the respondents were blind due to accident. Anonymous (2009) also reported that globally Glaucoma (a group of diseases that results in damage of the optic nerve) is also one of the causes of blindness.

II. Existing clothing practices of visually impaired children

This part deals with present wardrobe and clothing practices of visually impaired children and type of clothing items present in their wardrobe, and the level of satisfaction with normal clothing.

Distribution of respondents by present clothing items in the wardrobe (n=30)=(m=30)



The data shows that all the respondents had shirts and pants followed by bermudas (83.33 per cent). Equal percentage of the respondents' had jacket, T-shirts, Capri, Jersey and Coat (66.67 per cent). Half of the respondents had Pajamas. One third of the respondents also had Caps. This shows that respondents possess adequate number of dresses.

Table 5. Distribution of the respondents according to the feel comfort in normal clothing (n = 30)

S. No.	Comfortable in normal clothing	F	%
1	Yes	10	33.33
2	No	20	66.67

The data reveals that 66.67 per cent of the respondents' children did not feel comfortable and 33.33 per cent of the respondents' children felt comfortable. Reasons as stated by mothers of the respondents were related to fitting, size, style and non-availability of special garments in local market.

Table 6. Distribution of the respondents by type of garments

S. No.	Type of Garments	F	%
1	Home Made	1	3.33
2	Tailor Made	9	30.00
3	Readymade	20	66.67

It can be observed from the table that 66.67 per cent of the respondents preferred readymade garments whereas tailor made and homemade garments were preferred by 30 per cent and 3.33 per cent of respondents respectively. The reasons for preference of readymade garments as told by respondents' mothers were easy availability, fashion trends and the possibility of alteration. The reasons for preference of tailor made garment were economical prices and non-availability of special garments. The reasons for preference of homemade garments were low cost whether they were according to body measurements

and according to the need of their disability. The result indicated that most of the respondents' mothers used readymade garments for their children and made alteration afterwards as per requirement.

III. Problems faced by mothers while training the child

Dressing independently is every child's dream. It is a difficult task for visually impaired children. Information was collected about the problems faced by mothers of visually impaired children while training them for independent dressing.

Table 7. Problems faced by mothers while training the child (n = 30)

S. No.	Problems faced while training the child	F	%
1	Donning on the garment	27	90.00
2.	Donning off the garment	18	60.00
3.	Problem with fasteners	20	66.67
4.	Bringing garments from the wardrobe	15	50.00
5	Identifying the front and back	10	33.33

The data shows that 90.00 per cent of the respondents' mothers faced problem for donning on the garment and 60.00 per cent for doffing off the garment 66.67 per cent of the respondents had problem with fasteners and 50 per cent of children faced the problem in bringing garments from wardrobe. To perform all these tasks children required assistance.

IV. Clothing attributes preferred by visually impaired children and their mothers

The clothing problems may be minimized by designing suitable garments for the needy to supplement their personality or by using certain techniques so that children with visual impairments can achieve independence in dressing and grooming. That is why researcher collected information from visually impaired children and their mothers about clothing attributes preferred by them.

Table-8 reveals that 46.67 per cent of the respondents preferred blended fabric. 33.33 per cent of respondents preferred cotton fabric and 20 per cent of respondents preferred synthetic fabric. The reason for preference of cotton fabrics were feel cool factor, comfortable, easy availability and according to budget. The reasons for preference of blended fabric were wrinkle free, feel comfortable, give warmth, easy availability, stretchable, easy to care and according to budget. The reasons for preference of synthetic fabrics were easy to care, according to budget and easy availability.

The data shows that equal percentage of the respondents 33.34 preferred soft, smooth and pliable and stretchable material 20 per cent of the respondents preferred medium weight and 13.33 per cent of the respondents preferred light

**Table 8. Distribution of the respondents by attributes preferred in apparels
(n = 30)**

S. no.	Attributes	Categories	F	%
1.	Type of Material	Cotton	10	33.33
		Synthetic	6	20.00
		Blended	14	46.67
2.	Texture of the Material	Soft and Smooth	10	33.34
		Light Weight with adequate warmth	4	13.33
		Medium Weight	6	20.00
		Pliable and stretchable	10	33.33
		Rough texture	0	0
3.	Type of Colour	Light	10	33.33
		Dark	14	46.67
		Bright	6	20.00
		Florescent	0	0
4.	Type of Fitting	Loose fitting	10	33.33
		Tight fitting	5	16.67
		Normal fitting	15	50.00
5.	Type of fasteners preferred	Zipper	28	93.34
		Press Button	10	13.33
		Big button - Button holes	25	83.33
		Velcro	10	33.33
		Funny shaped button	20	66.67
6.	Preference for placket	Center Front full open	20	66.67
		Half Placket	8	26.67
		¼ Placket	2	6.66
7.	Type of sleeve	Half sleeve	10	33.33
		Full sleeve	25	83.34
		Sleeve with cuff	24	80.00
		Sleeve without cuff	10	33.33
8.	Type of neckline	Round shaped	13	43.33
		V-shaped	27	90.00
		U-shaped	5	16.67
9.	Type of collar	Stand	15	50.00
		Shirt	25	83.34
		Convertible	20	66.36
10.	Type of Pockets	Patch Pocket	2	6.67
		Flap Pocket	13	43.33
		In Seam Pocket	15	50.00
11.	Type of lower garments	Full elasticated	27	90.00
		With zipper without elastic	7	23.33
		Zipper with elastic at back	5	16.67

weight with adequate warmth and none of the respondents preferred rough texture. The reasons as reported by respondents for the soft material are: skin friendly fabric and high level of comfort and durability.

With regard to the type of colours preferred, it was found that 46.67 percent of the respondents preferred dark colour. Preference to light colour was given by 33.33 percent respondents and bright colour was preferred by 20 percent respondents and none of the respondents preferred florescent colour.

The data shows that all the respondents preferred normal fitting 50 percent and 33.33 percent preferred loose fitting and 16.67 percent preferred tight fitting. When asked about the reasons for preference for the type of fitting only the respondents preferred normal fitting reported that normal dresses were easy to put on and put off.

The most preferred fasteners was zipper (93.34 per cent) followed by big button-button holes (83.33 per cent) and press button (13.33 per cent) and one third of the respondents' preferred velcro and hook eye (table-8). A good number of respondents also preferred funny shaped button. Warner (1988) conducted a study on the dress requirements of disabled village children and suggested velcro tapes instead of buttons, press buttons were easier to open and close than other types of buttons. In addition, large buttons with big buttons holes were also found to be suitable for the disabled children.

It can be observed from the data that 66.67 per cent of the respondents preferred center front placket, 26.67 per cent of the respondents preferred half placket and only 6.66 percent of the respondents preferred 3/4 placket. Researcher asked the reason for the preference of center front full open placket; the respondents said it is easy to put on dress with center front placket.

The data further reveals that all the respondents preferred full sleeve. 83.34 per cent and 80 per cent preferred sleeve with cuff preferred and equal percent of the respondents 33.33 per cent half sleeve and sleeve without cuff. No reason for preference for a particular type of sleeve was given by the respondents, but all showed their preferences for slightly wider sleeve for ease in wearing.

The data shows that all the respondents preferred V-shaped neckline 90 percent and 43.33 per cent of the respondents preferred round shaped neckline and 16.67 percent preferred U-shaped neckline. The respondents preferred shirt collar 83.33 percent and followed by stand collar 80 percent and 66.67 percent preferred convertible collar.

Fifty per cent of the respondents preferred seam pocket, flap pockets were preferred by 43.33 percent whereas 6.67 percent of the respondents preferred patch pockets. When all the respondents were asked regarding the size of pocket they told that their choice changes according to fashion trends.

Table-8 shows that majority of the respondents preferred 90 per cent full elasticated Pant, Bermuda and Capri while only 23.33 per cent of the respondents preferred with zipper without elastic and only 16.67 per cent preferred zipper with elastic at back. The reasons for the same were elasticated Pants, Bermuda, Capri were easy to put on and off.

It can thus be concluded that respondents were less satisfied with their present wardrobe. Major problems faced by them were related to donning on the garment and doffing off the garment fitting, fasteners related, identify the front and back of the garments and colour of the garments. To perform all these tasks children required assistance. Velcro, zipper, funny shaped button were their preference in clothes. These clothing preferences will encourage the parents to meet the individual needs of independence and comfortable dressing for visually impaired children.

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