

**AN INVESTIGATION OF
CLOTHING RELATED BARRIERS
FACED BY WOMEN WITH
DISABILITIES**

BACKGROUND

- 15% of the world's population (one billion) has been experiencing some form of disability (World Bank reports, 2018).
- 80% of them live in developing countries where it is more common among women than men (United Nations, 2018).
- UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework- promotes reduced inequality and full integration of individuals with disabilities in societies across the world.

BACKGROUND

- **CLOTHING AND DISABLED WOMAN**

➤ Out of the total number of persons living with disabilities, half are women and girls (World Bank Group, 2018). In addition, the proportion of women with disabilities is higher in the lower income countries than higher income countries.

➤ Contrary to the popular beliefs/ myths associated with disabled women, they perceive fashion as a source of self-expression, yet the clothing options available to them are highly limited.

➤ From the time they were affected, they have been purchasing regular clothing and customizing same to meet their special needs. Therefore, they feel they are not acknowledged by the fashion industry, which is perceived to be operating with a singular ideal of beauty (Ahmed, 2017).

BACKGROUND

- **RESEARCH GAP**

- In the past, a few studies tried to address the requirements of women with disabilities by presenting clothing solutions/ special clothing such as garments with seamless knitting (Radvan, 2013), business clothing (Carroll, 2001), adaptive bra (Imran, Drean & Adolphe, 2017) and occasional wear (Kidd, 2006).
- However, to date no manufacturer has adopted a holistic approach towards disability rehabilitation or implementation of the social model in disability care, leaving unaddressed the clothing related barriers faced by women living with disabilities.
- Hence, a need has arisen to address and fulfill these unmet demands in a timely manner.

OBJECTIVE

➤ The main objective of the study was to identify the clothing related barriers faced by the women living with disabilities in Sri Lanka and to make recommendations for further research.

➤ Research questions:

- ✓ What are the physical limitations associated with a particular type of disability and how it affects their activities of daily living (ADL)?
- ✓ What are the clothing related barriers encountered in their daily routine?
- ✓ What are the clothing related barriers in respect of other special activities?

METHODOLOGY

- **DATA COLLECTION**

- Semi- structured interviews based on two interview guides,
 - Interview guide 1: For the females with disabilities
 - Interview guide 2: For the caregivers of females with disabilities
- The interview questions mainly focused on identifying the disabled person's background, the details about their disability, daily living activities of the individual, and the barriers relating to the clothing.
- A purposive sample of 10 women with diverse physical limitations from rehabilitation centers and hospital clinics from the Western province.

METHODOLOGY

• DATA ANALYSIS

- Content analysis (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017) were adopted to identify the emerging themes/ ideas.
- Accordingly, key barriers and special needs for adaptive clothing were categorized based on their activities and daily routine.

RESULTS

RQ1 : Physical limitations

Int. no:	Age (years)	Type of disability	Associated physical limitations
01	32	Congenital, Developmental- Upper body (brain) and lower body (legs)	Unsteady walk, difficulty in eating food as she cannot hold food in her fingers properly, cannot write.
02	26	Congenital, Developmental- Upper body (brain, right arm) and lower body (right leg)	Difficulty in eating food as she cannot hold food in her fingers, cannot hold a mug or other physical objects, cannot write as she cannot hold a pencil/ pen, difficulty in walking.
03	41	Congenital, Acquired- Lower body (legs)	Cannot walk, cannot sit, cannot turn, cannot cross her legs, cannot bend her knees, and cannot bend her backbone; can only lie on bed.
04	34	Congenital, Developmental- Upper body (arms and trunk) and lower body (legs)	Cannot walk, cannot lift her hands and needs help in dressing herself. Can move from wheelchair to bed but needs help when moving from the bed to the wheelchair. Needs help in washing/ bathing herself.
05	43	Congenital- Lower limb (below hip)	Cannot walk properly, cannot sit on the floor, cannot bend her knee, cannot do any hard work at home, and cannot even do grocery shopping.
06	59	Acquired- Lower limb (below hip, spinal cord)	Cannot walk, numbness in legs, stiffness in muscles when maintaining the same position.
07	63	Acquired- Spinal cord	Cannot walk, falls forward when the back is not supported, bedridden at home.
08	45	Acquired- Upper limb (between elbow and wrist of right hand)	Cannot lift the arm and do any work. Cannot perform household chores. Difficulty in dressing herself alone. Needs support of another.
09	59	Acquired- Lower limb (below knee)	Cannot perform household chores, bathe or dress herself.
10	24	Acquired- Lower limb (between hip and knee)	Can walk with the walker. Bedridden much of the time. Cannot sit upright. Cannot dress herself or use the washroom alone. She cannot do any household chores.

RESULTS

RQ2 : Clothing related barriers-Daily Routine

Activity	Sub activity	Barrier identified
Day-to-day dressing		Donning and doffing (Put on/ take off) Difficulty in handling fastening
Using the bathroom	Accessing the toilet facilities	Difficulty in donning and doffing (put on and take off) undergarments/ outer wear Difficulty in handling fastening
	Handling periods clothing	Difficulty in donning and doffing (put on and take off)
	Dressing	Lack of comfort Difficulty in donning and doffing (put on and take off) Difficulty in handling fastening
Sleeping/ lying on bed		Discomfort due to hard seams
Changing posture (standing to sitting)		Restricted mobility due to tight clothing
Moving from one place to another		Restricted mobility due to tight clothing Difficulty in moving around due to long and bulky clothing that might get entangled with physical objects
Difficulties caused by supportive equipment (Wheelchair/ Cane/ Crutches/ Walker/ Other)		Difficulty in moving around due to tight clothing Restricted mobility due to long and bulky clothing that may get entangled with physical objects Discomfort due to hard seams Lack of comfort (bad fit, style, material) Suitable clothing not available Difficulty in handling fastening

RESULTS

RQ3 : Clothing related barriers-Special activities

Activity for which clothes are required	Barrier identified
Fitness routine/ recreational activities	Lack of comfort (bad fit, style, material) Discomfort due to hard seams Suitable clothing not available Difficulty of movement when wearing the clothing
Special medical procedures (e.g. Exercise/ Massage/ Physiotherapy)	Difficulties due to fastening, sometimes have to remove the garment fully for the medical procedure Lack of comfort (bad fit, material) Suitable clothing not available
Parties/ social events/ dining out	Inconvenient to remove, put on and adjust when visiting the ladies' toilet Free movement of legs and arms constrained when dancing Suitable clothing not available
Religious activities	Inconvenient and awkward when sitting on the floor/ kneeling/ praying
During work	Difficulty due to fastening Lack of comfort (bad style, material) Restricted mobility due to too tight and sometimes too loose clothing

CONCLUSION

- The research findings highlighted the fact that the specified segment of customers (i.e. women with disabilities) were looking for custom made clothing that would fit their diverse body types while providing ease of movement.
- Findings will be beneficial to the apparel designers and product developers for them to gain an understanding of the special factors that need to be considered when designing garments for women with disabilities in Sri Lanka.
- Further studies be conducted on designing and developing adaptive clothing to meet future needs.