



## Stitching Stories: Maternity Wear Practices Unveiled in Rural and Peri-Urban Women

**First and Corresponding Author:** Mrs. Anuradha N. Yadav, Ph. D. Scholars in School of Fashion Technology Mumbai, INDIA.

**Email:** [anu.kachare17@gmail.com](mailto:anu.kachare17@gmail.com)

**Second Author:** Dr. Bhawana Chanana, Professor, Director of School of Fashion Technology Mumbai, INDIA.

**Received Date:** 12/05/2023    **Revised Date:** 02/06/2023    **Accepted Date:** 04/07/2023

---

### Abstract

**Background:** Maternity wear has emerged as an essential need for expecting mothers, providing comfort and style amidst the transformative journey of pregnancy. This modern-day attire not only embraces the physical changes that accompany motherhood but also empowers women to retain their self-identity through fashionable choices. While urban areas have embraced the trend, the timely adoption of appropriate maternity wear remains less prevalent in rural and peri-urban regions. This study sets out to explore the popularity and utilization of maternity wear among women in these lesser-explored landscapes. By delving into the depths of rural and peri-urban communities, we aim to shed light on the current practices and attitudes surrounding maternity fashion. The research will navigate the fascinating tapestry of maternity wear, capturing the stories of women in these diverse settings. From remote rural villages to bustling peri-urban neighbourhoods, we will unravel the challenges and aspirations of expectant mothers as they navigate their unique journey to motherhood. Through engaging interviews and captivating observations, we will reveal the intricate dance between comfort and style that pregnant women seek in their choice of garments. We will uncover the underlying factors that influence their decisions, exploring the impact of cultural norms, access to resources, and personal preferences on their maternity wear practices. This study not only seeks to bridge the fashion divide but also aims to empower women in rural and peri-urban areas, providing them with the knowledge and resources to make informed choices about maternity wear. By understanding their needs, aspirations, and challenges, we aspire to promote inclusivity and enhance the fashion experience for all expectant mothers, regardless of their geographical location. The findings of this study will illuminate the paths less travelled, shedding light on the triumphs and tribulations of maternity wear practices in rural and peri-urban landscapes. It is our hope that the insights gained will pave the way for a more equitable and fashionable journey into motherhood, ensuring that every pregnant woman feels confident, comfortable, and beautifully adorned throughout this transformative phase of life.

---

**Introduction:** Pregnancy, a time of wonder and anticipation, brings forth a cascade of physical, biological, and psychological transformations in women. Among these changes, the alteration in body structure stands out as the most visible and awe-inspiring. As the mother nurtures her growing child within the confines of her womb, her body undergoes a remarkable metamorphosis. Weight gain becomes an inevitable companion as the mother's

role expands beyond carrying the precious life within her. Nourishment becomes paramount, and her daily calorie intake must increase to sustain both herself and her growing baby. Nutritional guidelines designed for expectant mothers advocate for an additional 300 kcal, fuelling the increase in overall weight (Morais et al., 2017). The magnitude of weight gain during pregnancy can vary greatly, ranging from a few pounds to over a hundred. Alongside this transformation, the size of the breasts also undergoes a significant growth spurt, a testament to the body's preparation for the impending journey of motherhood. Biologically, the body adapts in astonishing ways to accommodate the needs of the developing life. Blood volume expands by 40-50%, while levels of aldosterone surge, leading to a 50% increase in plasma volume and a 20-30% rise in red blood cell volume (Power et al., 2018). These intricate adjustments ensure the mother's body is equipped to support the life growing within her. Amidst the physical changes, a symphony of hormones orchestrates a profound impact on the mother's psychological well-being. Mood swings become frequent visitors, accompanied by bouts of impulsiveness and anxiety (Talmon & Ginzburg, 2018; Watson et al., 2016; Morias et al., 2017). The emotional rollercoaster, intertwined with the myriad of bodily transformations, shapes the mother's experience during this transformative phase of life. While these changes are a natural part of the journey, it is crucial to enhance the mother's well-being and embrace her feel-good quotient. Enter maternity wear, a beacon of comfort and style. Maternity wear represents a carefully curated collection of specially designed clothing intended to prioritize the comfort of pregnant women without compromising their sense of style. Yet, despite the undeniable benefits of maternity wear, its timely adoption remains more prevalent in urban areas than in rural and peri-urban regions. This study endeavours to shed light on the popularity and usage of maternity wear among women residing in these less-explored landscapes. By understanding their practices and attitudes, we can bridge the fashion divide and empower expectant mothers in all corners of society. In this symphony of change, maternity wear emerges as a transformative ally. It not only nurtures the mother's physical well-being but also celebrates her unique sense of style. As we embark on this study, we aspire to unlock the potential of maternity wear, ensuring that all women, regardless of their geographical location, have access to the comfort and confidence they deserve on their remarkable journey to motherhood.

Aims and objectives

**Objective 1: Embarking on a Voyage of Transformation:**

We endeavour to assess, investigate, and establish the multifaceted bodily changes that accompany the miraculous journey of pregnancy. From the expanding waistlines to the burgeoning bosoms, we delve into the depths of these changes and their intimate connection to the world of garments.

**Objective 2: Unravelling the Tapestry of Style:**

Within the realm of maternity wear, we seek to uncover the most prevalent and beloved styles that adorn the expectant mothers during their transformative period. From flowing dresses to figure-hugging tops, we strive to capture the essence of their sartorial choices and understand the factors that influence their decisions.

**Objective 3: Bridging the Gap:**

Accessibility Matters in the backdrop of varied landscapes, we aim to assess the accessibility of maternity wear among women in rural and peri-urban areas. We shine a spotlight on the barriers they face and the resources available to fulfil their sartorial needs. By uncovering the nuances of accessibility, we pave the way for a more inclusive and empowering experience for all expectant mothers, regardless of their geographical location.

#### **Objective 4: Illuminating the Path Less Travelled:**

Through meticulous research and captivating interviews, we seek to unearth the prevalence of maternity wear within rural communities. We strive to understand the preponderance of these garments, shedding light on the cultural, economic, and social factors that shape their adoption and usage.

#### **Literature Review**

**Bodily Changes during Pregnancy:**

Pregnancy brings forth a myriad of changes within the body, each unique to the individual experiencing this transformative phase. Extensive research has been conducted over the years to understand and review the bodily changes that mothers undergo during pregnancy.

Skouteris et al. (2005) explored the factors contributing to body dissatisfaction among pregnant women. Their questionnaire-based survey involved 128 healthy pregnant women at various stages of pregnancy. The findings revealed that women adapt differently to bodily changes, with the most significant adaptation occurring during the early to mid-second trimester. Predictors of body dissatisfaction included social pressures, psychological factors, and self-consciousness in public settings.

Clark et al. (2009) reported dissatisfaction among pregnant women as they attempted to positively adapt to postpartum body changes. While the functionality and newfound sense of life during pregnancy alleviated negative thoughts, concerns arose post-birth regarding physical changes such as weight gain, leading to personal and societal dissatisfaction.

In a study by Watson et al. (2016), body image experiences of pregnant women were explored through structured interviews with nineteen participants. Thematic analysis revealed complex and dynamic perceptions of body image, characterized by mixed feelings of joy and discontentment towards bodily changes. The importance of recognizing the functionality of the body, amusement regarding public perceptions of pregnant bodies, the value of partner support, and the need for open communication about weight and body image issues in antenatal healthcare were also highlighted.

Morais et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between changes in body mass index (BMI) percentile and perinatal outcomes. Their cross-sectional study involved 1,279 women and utilized medical charts, prenatal cards, and interviews. Based on the Atalah curve, which assesses the nutritional status of pregnant women using BMI, participants were classified into four categories. Findings revealed that 19.9% of women experienced an increase in BMI category, particularly in the obese category. Women with a higher education level were less likely to experience an increase in BMI. The study also indicated that an increase in BMI was associated with a higher likelihood of cesarean section delivery and fetal macrosomia, emphasizing the impact of BMI on delivery outcomes and the influence of maternal education on maintaining appropriate BMI during pregnancy.

These studies collectively highlight the complexities surrounding bodily changes during pregnancy. The findings underscore the need for a holistic understanding of women's experiences, emphasizing the importance of adaptation, support, and open communication surrounding body image and weight-related issues. Furthermore, they emphasize the long-reaching effects of BMI on perinatal outcomes and the influence of education in maintaining optimal BMI during pregnancy. By delving into these intricacies, we can enhance our understanding and support systems for expectant mothers as they navigate the transformative journey of pregnancy.

## **Maternity Fashion**

Throughout the course of life, individuals go through various liminal transitions—periods of instability and ambiguity that redefine their identity. One of the most significant liminal transitions occurs during pregnancy for women. The body undergoes dramatic changes, challenging their sense of self. Women may experience ambivalence towards these bodily changes and seek possessions that help them retain their self-identity (Tonner, 2015; Earle, 2003; Johnson et al., 2004).

Maternity clothing and fashion play a vital role in shaping self-identity during pregnancy. A study by Ogle et al. (2013) delved into the experiences of pregnant women regarding consumption during this liminal transition. Specifically, the study focused on the role of maternity clothing in shaping self-identity, which can be compromised during pregnancy. Through qualitative research, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 mid-aged women expecting their first child. Analysis revealed three key themes related to maternity wear: it disrupted the women's true sense of self, it imparted a new identity as an expectant mother, and it helped retain their usual sense of self. The study concluded that despite the complex nature of maternity wear consumption during pregnancy-related liminal transition, it both incited and relieved ambivalence, aiding in the role transition phase.

Initially, maternity wear was not a distinct market category. However, as societal attitudes shifted and women continued to work during pregnancy, maternity fashion gained prominence. Maternity wear transformed into a fashion trend that prioritizes both comfort and style. Nash (2012) described early maternity clothing as mere curtains meant to cover the growing belly. But today, women are more empowered and choose to work during pregnancy. Pregnancy is no longer hidden but embraced with confidence. 21st-century pregnant women take pride in their state and seek fashionable maternity outfits that enhance their self-identity.

Lapolla & Chen (2017) examined maternity clothing trends in the fast fashion category since they are worn for a relatively short period. They highlighted the transformation of maternity fashion due to increased exposure. As more pregnant women work until late in their pregnancy, the demand for comfortable, stylish, and versatile maternity wear has grown. The study emphasized the need for direct communication between end-users and designers to understand pregnant women's expectations regarding maternity fashion.

In a recent study by Hwang et al. (2020) on designing maternity hospital gowns, it was found that the conventional one-size-fits-all gowns with full back openings often caused physical and emotional discomfort for women. To address this, researchers developed a two-piece maternity gown with adjustable waist and washable nursing breast pads. Wear testing and an online survey demonstrated that the new prototype provided physical and psychological comfort during labor and postpartum stages. This study highlights the importance of addressing the gaps in existing maternity wear design and developing innovative solutions that consider the perspectives and preferences of both patients and practitioners.

In conclusion, maternity fashion plays a crucial role in the self-identity of pregnant women during the liminal transition of pregnancy. It allows them to embrace their changing bodies with confidence and style. By understanding the complexities of maternity wear consumption and designing garments that prioritize comfort and fashion, we can better support pregnant women in expressing their unique self-identities during this transformative phase.

## **Maternity Wear**

Pregnancy brings about significant changes in a woman's body, with weight gain being one of the most prominent concerns. As the body undergoes these inevitable transformations, it becomes necessary to adapt the wardrobe accordingly. This is where maternity wear comes

into play, addressing the unique clothing demands of pregnant women. Specifically designed to enhance comfort, maternity wear plays a vital role in prenatal care, contributing to the overall health and well-being of expectant mothers.

The design of maternity wear is key to its success. Functionality takes precedence, with these garments specifically tailored to accommodate the anthropometric growth experienced during pregnancy. Unlike regular clothing, maternity wear provides ample room for the expanding waist, tummy, hips, and bust of pregnant women. The focus is on creating a comfortable fit that supports the changing body throughout the entire pregnancy journey.

While the need for dedicated maternity wear may not be immediate in the first two months of pregnancy, it becomes increasingly important during the second and third trimesters when the body undergoes the most significant changes. During this time, maternity wear becomes indispensable for expectant mothers to ensure the continuation of their daily activities with ease and comfort.

Maternity wear is not just about functionality; it also embraces style and self-expression. With a wide range of trendy options available, pregnant women can maintain their sense of identity and showcase their personal style throughout their pregnancy. Maternity fashion has evolved to offer stylish choices that allow expectant mothers to feel confident and empowered, celebrating their unique beauty during this transformative phase of life.

In conclusion, maternity wear plays a vital role in addressing the clothing needs of pregnant women. It enhances comfort, supports the changing body, and contributes to overall well-being. By choosing appropriate maternity wear, expectant mothers can navigate the challenges of pregnancy with ease and grace. Maternity fashion empowers women to embrace their changing bodies and express their personal style, ensuring they feel confident and beautiful throughout their pregnancy journey.

An effective maternity wear prioritizes comfort above all else. When it comes to purchasing maternity wear, pregnant women are advised to consider the following key factors (Tian, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2017):

**Stretchy Clothes:** Given the increase in body weight during pregnancy, the stretchability of the clothes is a crucial factor. Stretchy fabrics provide flexibility and accommodate the changing body throughout each trimester.

**Ruching Fabrics:** Ruching fabrics offer support to the growing belly and are suitable for all body types. They strike a balance between comfort and fashion, making them highly preferred by pregnant women.

**Thinking Beyond Pregnancy:** It's important for women to consider the specific time frame that maternity wear is intended for. Additionally, they should prioritize the postpartum needs of their body. Maternity wear that supports nursing and breastfeeding is particularly relevant for both pregnancy and postpartum phases.

The notion of maternity wear has evolved in modern society, where expectant women continue their professional and household responsibilities with expertise. While comfort remains a priority, pregnant women now seek fashionable clothing that helps maintain their self-identity. Among working women, some common choices for maternity wear include:

**Flowy Blouse:** A versatile option that offers comfort and style, a flowy blouse is suitable for the workplace. It can be paired with a blazer for a polished work outfit.

**Maternity Pants:** Specifically designed to accommodate body changes, maternity pants are loose and adaptable. They can be paired with various maternity tops.

**Blazer:** A must-have for women in the corporate sector, a blazer complements maternity wear without interfering with body changes. It adds a fashionable touch to the overall look.

**Cardigan:** In colder weather, a loose cardigan provides warmth and comfort while maintaining a fashionable appeal. In milder seasons, a lightweight cardigan can enhance overall comfort in air-conditioned office environments.

**Dress:** Flowy, one-piece dresses are highly favoured for maternity wear. They offer comfort for daily activities and are stylish choices for pregnant women.

In conclusion, the selection of maternity wear involves considering factors such as stretchability, support, and postpartum needs. Pregnant women now have a wide range of fashionable options to choose from, allowing them to embrace their changing bodies while maintaining comfort and style.

### **Importance Of Maternity Wera**

Maternity wear offers several benefits for pregnant women, including:

**Enhanced Comfort:** Maternity wear is specifically designed to accommodate the changes in a woman's body during pregnancy. The right clothing provides comfort and flexibility, reducing discomfort caused by physiological changes.

**Improved Body Satisfaction:** Pregnancy brings about significant changes in body shape and size, which can impact a woman's body image and self-esteem. Maternity wear that fits well and flatters the body can help women feel more satisfied and confident in their appearance.

**Support for Pregnancy-Related Discomfort:** Many pregnant women experience discomfort such as back pain, swelling, and pressure on the abdomen. Maternity wear with features like belly bands, support belts, and adjustable waistbands can provide relief and support for these discomforts.

**Practicality and Functionality:** Maternity wear offers practical features that make it easier for pregnant women to dress comfortably and conveniently. These features may include easy-access nursing options, stretchy fabrics, and adjustable waistbands, accommodating the changing needs of the mother.

**Psychological Well-being:** Wearing appropriate maternity wear can positively impact the psychological well-being of pregnant women. It allows them to adapt to the physical changes of pregnancy, maintain their personal style, and feel more confident and comfortable in their clothing choices.

### **Current Maternity Wear Scenario**

Maternity wear has gained popularity worldwide, with increasing acceptance among women from different backgrounds. In developed countries like the USA, the demand for maternity wear has seen significant growth due to the increasing number of women who continue working during pregnancy. The market for maternity apparel in the USA alone was estimated to be a potential \$4.8 billion business in 2015. The demand has shifted from solely prioritizing comfort to also seeking fashionable and stylish maternity clothing.

The online retail market has also embraced maternity wear, with major brands offering a wide variety of options for pregnant women to purchase conveniently from home. Manufacturers have focused on using fabrics that are organic, natural, and eco-friendly, although this can increase the price and limit accessibility for some women.

While western countries have shown greater acceptance of maternity wear, there is potential for growth in Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, and China, as work trends among pregnant women change and exposure to global fashion increases.

Recent reports indicate that the global maternity wear market was valued at USD 18.3 billion in 2018, and it is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 4.3% between 2019 and 2025. This growth is attributed to the emphasis on maternity fashion and the rising trend of women working during pregnancy in developing countries.

## Research Gap

Maternity wear has gained popularity among urban women, but its adoption in rural and peri-urban communities remains limited. The purpose of maternity wear is to provide comfort and support for pregnant women in their daily activities. However, little is known about the awareness and understanding of maternity wear among women in rural and peri-urban areas. This study aims to assess the knowledge levels and attitudes of rural and peri-urban women towards maternity wear, shedding light on their perceptions and practices. By bridging this research gap, we can gain insights into the challenges and opportunities for improving maternity wear accessibility in these communities.

## Conclusion

Maternity wear, the specially designed clothing that prioritizes both comfort and style, has become the sought-after solution for pregnant women. During pregnancy, women undergo various bodily changes, with weight gain being a significant concern. To address these changes, maternity wear offers a wardrobe transformation that embraces the needs of expectant mothers. Traditional maternity clothing, which focused solely on comfort, no longer meets the demands of modern society. Today, women are empowered to continue working and embrace their pregnancy with confidence.

The popularity and demand for maternity wear have been rising globally, both in developed and developing countries. However, there is a research gap when it comes to understanding the acceptance and accessibility of maternity wear among rural and peri-urban women. While this study aimed to explore the popularity of maternity wear in these communities, a comprehensive survey was beyond its scope. Future studies should consider conducting surveys to uncover the prevalence and affordability of maternity wear among rural and peri-urban women.

By bridging this research gap, we can gain valuable insights into the needs and challenges faced by pregnant women in these areas. This knowledge will contribute to the development of more inclusive and accessible maternity wear options, ensuring that all women, regardless of their geographical location, can embrace comfort, style, and self-identity during their pregnancy journey.

## References

1. Clark, A., Skouteris, H., Wertheim, E. H., Paxton, S. J., & Milgrom, J. (2009). My baby body: A qualitative insight into women's body-related experiences and mood during pregnancy and the postpartum. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*, 27(4), 330–345. doi:10.1080/02646830903190904
2. Earle, S. (2003). 'Bumps and boobs': Fatness and women's experiences of pregnancy. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 26(3), 245–252.
3. Fibre2Fashion. (2014). Ever evolving maternity wear. Available at <https://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/7237/ever-evolving-maternity-wear#:~:text=The%20demand%20for%20maternity%20wear,wear%20is%20a%20growing%20market>.
4. Grand View Research. (2019). Maternity Wear Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report By Product (Outerwear, Innerwear, Nightwear), By Distribution Channel (Store-based, Online), By Region, And Segment Forecasts, 2019 - 2025. Available at <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/maternity-wear-market#:~:text=The%20global%20maternity%20wear%20market,4.3%25%20from%202>

- 019%20to%202025.&text=Previously%2C%20maternity%20wear%20had%20been,the%20fitting%20of%20the%20clothes.
5. Lapolla, K., & Chen, C. (2017). Pregnancy Chic: A co-creative approach for maternity fashion. *International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings*, 74(1).
  6. Morais, S., Nascimento, S., Godoy-Miranda, A., Kasawara, K., & Surita, F. (2017). Body Mass Index Changes during Pregnancy and Perinatal Outcomes - A Cross-Sectional Study. *Revista Brasileira de Ginecologia e Obstetrícia*, 40(01), 011–019. doi:10.1055/s-0037-1608885
  7. Nash, M. (2012). Dressing and Maternity Fashion. In: *Making 'Postmodern' Mothers. Genders and Sexualities in the Social Sciences*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137292155\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137292155_6)
  8. Ogle, J. P., Tyner, K. E., & Schofield-Tomschin, S. (2013). The role of maternity dress consumption in shaping the self and identity during the liminal transition of pregnancy. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 13(2), 119–139. doi:10.1177/1469540513480161
  9. Quintero Rodriguez, C., Anisimova, A., Ryan, S., & Troynikov, O. (2017). Critical design aspects of maternity support-garments and its contemporary perspective. *KnE Engineering*, 2(1), 91-97. <https://doi.org/10.18502/keg.v2i2.600>
  10. Sarkar, J., & Rasel, M. S. (2017). Maternity Clothing- A Comprehensive Review. Available at- <http://textilefocus.com/maternity-clothing-comprehensive-review/>
  11. Skouteris, H., Carr, R., Wertheim, E. H., Paxton, S. J., & Duncombe, D. (2005). A prospective study of factors that lead to body dissatisfaction during pregnancy. *Body Image*, 2(4), 347–361. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2005.09.002
  12. Sultana, S., & Tabraz, M. (2017). A Critical Analysis of The Satisfaction Level of Maternity wear For Bangladeshi women. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, 7(6), 47-60.
  13. Talmon, A., & Ginzburg, K. (2018). "Who does this body belong to?" The development and psychometric evaluation of the Body Experience during Pregnancy Scale. *Body Image*, 26, 19–28. doi:10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.05.002
  14. Tian, C. (2018). Choosing Fabrics To Wear Post Pregnancy. Available at- <https://parenting.firstcry.com/articles/choosing-fabrics-to-wear-post-pregnancy/#:~:text=Stretched%20and%20Fabulous,as%20well%20as%20poly%20crepes>
  15. Tonner, A. (2015). Liminal mothers' negotiation of conflicting service consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management*.