

# Why price does not indicate how long clothes will last

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Kate Morris, PhD researcher at the University of Leeds, testing materials for durability. Credit: Leeds Institute of Textile and Colour.

Paying more for clothes does not necessarily mean they will last longer, according to new research carried out by the School of Design.

The research, commissioned as part of a wider project by environmental charity Hubbub and international clothing retailer Primark, is one of the largest studies of its kind.

A range of new [clothes](#) across different high street brands with a variety of price points were extensively tested under controlled lab conditions to help determine the relationship between price and durability.

Durability refers to whether/how long an item of clothing remains functional and wearable, without requiring much maintenance or repair when faced with normal wear and washing.

The project from Hubbub and Primark seeks to raise awareness of the importance of durability and to provide new evidence to drive improvements in durability across the industry.

The research concluded that the retail price of a new garment cannot be used as an indicator to identify good or inferior durability, and that the durability of both high and low-priced garments ranged from excellent to very poor across the different clothing categories and across women's and menswear.

Dr. Mark Sumner, a lecturer in fashion and sustainability in the Leeds' School of Design, and who supervised the research, said, "Action to make the fashion industry more sustainable is critical.

"But objectively measuring how long clothes can last is complex and difficult, because durability is affected by the type of materials and fabrics in the garment, how the clothes are made, and by how we wash and care for our clothes.

"However, this independent research has shown how we can measure durability to identify the most and the least durable garments. And the results show that [retail price](#) can't be used to predict which garments are going to last longer than others. The results also show that value for money varies widely across different garment prices."

The next phase of the project will focus on helping the public to prolong the life of clothes. This will include exploring people's attitudes towards caring for their clothes and identifying the steps we can all easily take to help clothes last longer. The results will help inform the business and wider industry on how best to support their customers to make the most of the clothes they own.

How the research was conducted:

The School of Design was commissioned to independently test the durability of 65 items of clothing, retailing at from under £5 to around £150. Researchers tested denim jeans, hoodies and t-shirts from a range of UK high-street brands in women's and menswear.

All clothes in the study underwent a series of testing for durability under lab conditions, including repeat washing and visual assessments as well as specific technical tests for the different clothing types.

Denim jeans underwent six different tests, including how they stood up to abrasion, their seam strength and their resistance to shrinkage. The tests carried out on hoodies and T-shirts included their resistance to pilling and ripping and their color fastness.

## **Additional findings**

- Women's [t-shirts](#) priced under £10 outperformed one retailing at around £40.
- Women's hoodies priced between £11—£20 were ranked higher on the durability scale than those priced at just under £50 and around £100.
- Only negligible differences in durability were found for a pair of women's jeans priced at around £15 compared to a pair retailing at more than ten times the price.

- A men's t-shirt costing under £5 was ranked as the second most durable out of 17 items tested, outperforming one at ten times the price.
- Of the garments tested, only menswear hoodies showed consistently higher performance than the lower priced.

Aoife Allen, Director at Hubbub and Fashion lead said, "Durability must become central to the debate on sustainability. Durable clothes reduce the need for replacement purchases, increase the chance of a longer second life and offer better value for money—a significant concern in the context of the current cost of living crisis.

"There is limited discussion among retailers about the importance of durability and little hard evidence readily available. The [fashion industry](#) should be designing clothing to last longer, and we can help to make people aware of the simple steps that they can take to help all their clothes last longer.

"This research highlights that the same level of care should be given to all garments, regardless of price, to extend their life as much as possible. Our new collaboration with the School of Design at the University of Leeds and Primark aims to raise awareness of this important issue."

Lynne Walker, Director of Primark Cares, Primark, commented, "We believe you should feel confident the clothes you buy can be loved and worn for a long time, no matter what the price.

"We know there can be a perception that more affordable clothes don't last as long but this research has challenged this and highlighted some of the factors that impact durability.

"To support our ambition to give clothes a longer life, we want to continue to collaborate in this space and push for the introduction of an

industry-wide [durability](#) standard, helping to give consumers confidence that the clothes they buy will last, regardless of what they pay."

To complement the research, Hubbub commissioned market researchers Censuswide to survey 3,000 U.K. adults on attitudes towards clothing care and how those vary according to cost.

The polling revealed that 67% of people expect expensive clothes to last longer with many looking after their clothes differently depending on how much they've paid; 64% more likely to hang them up after wearing, 62% taking the time to remove spills and stains, and 54% willing to carry out repairs on more expensive items.

**More information:** Worn Out: Is price an accurate indicator of clothing durability? [issuu.com/hubbubuk/docs/2023-0 ... ability\\_report\\_issuu](https://issuu.com/hubbubuk/docs/2023-0-ability_report_issuu)

Provided by University of Leeds

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