

**PREVENTING RAPE AMONG ADOLESCENTS GIRLS THROUGH SELF DEFENSE
TRAINING**

BY

Adeogun, J. O. Williams, J. Adeyeye, A. E.

Department of Human Kinetics, Sports and Health Education,

Faculty of Education, Lagos State University, Ojo.

coachdestiny@yahoo.com

+2348036893179

And

Adefuye, Michael Ayodele and Adesanya, Adebisi Joseph.

Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Noforija, Epe, Lagos State.

Abstract

Sexual violence against women and girls is a worldwide phenomenon yet still a hidden problem. Freedom from the threat of harassment and sexual assault is a concept that most people have a hard time imagining because violence has become the order of the day, especially against women. Bystander intervention, healthy relationship education, and community-level strategies and other strategies have been adopted to prevent sexual violence. However, if we continue to rely only on long-term solutions millions of additional women/female adolescents would be sexually assaulted before we could make inroads into preventing perpetration of rape. Women's self-defense training has been excluded from sexual violence prevention efforts for a variety of reasons, including concerns that it is ineffective, encourages victim blaming, neglects acquaintance assault, and does not target the underlying factors that facilitate sexual violence. This paper reviewed how self defense have been used effectively to prevent sexual assault including rape. The paper also discussed the benefits, types of available combat classes and why it should be part of rape and sexual prevention strategies. It was therefore recommended that self-defense training should be incorporated into sexual assault prevention programmes of adolescent girls.

Keywords: Sexual violence, rape, self-defense, adolescent girls, prevention

Introduction

Violence against women and girls is a worldwide phenomenon and yet a still hidden problem. Freedom from the threat of harassment and sexual assault is a concept that most people have a hard time imagining because violence has become the order of the day, especially against women. Violence against women/girls is woven into the fabric of the society to such an extent that victim who are assaulted feel that they are at fault. Many of those who perpetrate violence feel justified by strong societal messages that say that rape, battering, sexual harassment, child abuse, and other forms of violence are acceptable. Every day we see images of male violence against women in the news, on TV shows, in the movies, in advertising, and in our homes and places of work. It is a fact of life for women of all ages, races, and classes (Boston Women's Health, 1998).

Gender-based violence is a serious problem transcending racial, economic, social, and regional lines, threatening the growth, development, and health of adolescent girls worldwide. Gender-based violence and sexual assault rates are especially high in sub-Saharan Africa. In a national survey of nearly 10,000

secondary school girls in Kenya, approximately 40% of sexually active girls reported that their first encounter was either forced or they were “cheated into having sex” (Mensch, Clark & Lloyd, 2001).

Sexual assault is a major cause of injury, unplanned pregnancy, HIV infection, and mental health problems worldwide. In parts of sub-Saharan Africa, sexual assault has reached epidemic proportions (Sarnquist, Omondi, Sinclair, Gitau, Paiva, Mulinge, Cornfield & Maldonado, 2014). In Africa the burden of Gender Based Violence is profound: 16% to 59% of women report having been sexually assaulted during their lifetime, and many of these assaults occur during childhood (World Health Organisation, 2005). In parts of sub-Saharan Africa, sexual assault incidence among adolescents is as high as 24%, resulting in serious physical and mental health problems (Sarnquist, Omondi, Sinclair, Gitau, Paiva, Mulinge, David & Maldonado, 2014).

Imagine if someone found a simple, quick, and cost-effective method of preventing car accidents that could cut the rate of highway deaths by half. Would it be reasonable for the Federal Road Safety Corps to refuse to endorse this solution because they thought that it was car manufacturers', not drivers', responsibility to make cars safer? This is, essentially, what the Centre for Disease Control have done when they continue to dismiss the growing body of research that finds that empowerment-based women's self-defense training reduces the risk of sexual assault. Hollander, (2015) study reports that a 12-hour, empowerment-based self-defense class (one that focuses not only on physical defensive skills but also on awareness, social norms, and assertiveness) cut college women's risk of rape by nearly half. Participants' risks of other forms of sexual assault were also significantly lowered. The study reported that when women learn to defend themselves, both verbally and physically, they are much less likely to suffer sexual assault.

What is useful is assessing risk in men's behaviours, recognising coercive situations, and coming up with ways to resist their behaviour quickly and effectively. The focus here is on empowerment and justified anger, not fear. The strategy is not just effective in North America. A San Francisco- and Kenya-based non-profit organisation called “No Means No Worldwide” is already successfully teaching empowerment self-defense to girls and women in the slums of Nairobi (where three in ten women report being sexually assaulted before the age of 18) (Sarnquist, et.al 2014).

In Nigeria, individual- and relationship-level behavioural change strategies designed to increase awareness of sexual assault among students, as well as community-level social marketing campaigns, have had minimal demonstrable impact on sexual assault incidence. At the societal level, there are policies in place to prosecute sexual assault perpetrators, yet the crime remains under-reported and under prosecuted, largely because of the blame and stigma attached to victims. The ongoing high incidence of sexual assault suggests that novel prevention strategies are needed. Therefore, teaching female students self defense is a welcome development so that female adolescents can prevent/defend themselves from being raped.

Why self defense training?

Self-defense is a counter-measure that involves defending the health and well-being of oneself, or of another, from harm. Physical and mental self-defense is the use of physical force and mental ability to counter an immediate threat of violence. Such force can be either armed or unarmed. In either case, the chances of success depend on a large number of parameters, related to the severity of the threat on one hand, but also on the mental and physical preparedness of the defender (Dictionary Reference, 2012).

Many styles of martial arts are practiced for self-defense or include self-defense techniques. Some styles train primarily for self-defense, while other martial or combat sports can be effectively applied for self-defense. Some martial arts train how to escape from a knife or gun situation, or how to break away from a punch, while others train how to attack. To provide more practical self-defense, many modern-day martial arts now use a combination of martial arts styles and techniques, and will often customise self-defense training to suit the participants' lifestyles, occupations, age groups and gender, and physical and mental capabilities. A wide variety of weapons can be used for self-defense. The most suitable depends on the threat presented, the victim or victims, and the experience of the defender (Hollander, 2015).

Rape would no longer be a problem if men stopped raping. The likeness of this occurring, however, is unrealistic. Programmes that re-educate and socialise masses of men to stop rape could take decades or longer to show successful outcomes. In the meantime, women's self defense might serve as a legitimate way to minimise rape culture, preparing women physically and mentally to defend themselves and avoid situations that increase the risk of rape. Self – defense is a set of awareness, assertiveness, verbal confrontation skills, safety strategies and physical techniques that enable people to successfully escape, resist and survive violent attacks (Hollander, 2005).

Women's self –defense is another possible preventive action to discourage rape culture. Weitlauf, Smith and Cervone, (2000) study on women's self–defense found that physical self defense training can be a highly successful method of empowering women. It gives greater personal control over their own physical safety and well-being. Participants of self defense training view themselves as far more able to discern danger, control their emotions in the event of an attack, discourage an assault and physically defend themselves by escaping from or disabling an assailant. Self–defense will not directly stop perpetrators from targeting women, but it emphasises prevention by enabling women to thwart an attack, preparing women physically and mentally to effectively respond to violent situations, to immobilize their attackers and then run to safety.

Empowerment self-defense is not new, In 1974, two black belts in karate, Nadia Telsey and Annie Ellman, began experimenting with their defense training in an apartment in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Central to their approach was the belief that women needed to train women. By 1975, Telsey was teaching her first self-defense course with a female empowerment

message at Barnard College. That was before people were talking about rape openly (Straus, 2015). Self-defense training does focus on what women can do to reduce their risk of assault. But no one is claiming that this should be the only strategy for stopping violence. Rather, University of Windsor Professor Charlene Senn published the results of a \$1.3 million randomised control trial assessing 893 first-year female students from three Canadian universities who completed a 12-hour empowerment self-defense programme. He and other self-defense advocates suggest only that self-defense training should be part of a multipronged approach. Bystander intervention, healthy relationship education, and community-level strategies should also be important parts of our approach to preventing violence. However, it seems all these strategies are not yielding positive outcomes, therefore waiting for long term solutions will add to the problems (Hollander, 2017). It is therefore imperative to empower the female adolescent's so that they can prevent rape or assault.

According to Hollander (2014), empowerment through self-defense deserves attention and funding, especially because it is a strategy that can be effective almost immediately. It should be considered “primary prevention” against rape, because it has been proven to work. Primary prevention is the term used by public health professionals to describe the primary methods to avoid occurrence of a disease or any kind of physical trauma. Data from the United States indicate that women and children who are trained in empowerment and self-defense are more likely to report having confidence and control over their lives and less likely to experience sexual assault (Hollander, 2014; Brecklin & Ullman, 2005; Cummings, 1992).

Empowerment self-defense teaches assertive verbal and physical skills, a stance of self-reliance that cuts away from traditional norms. There are at least three possible reasons why the society even women are skeptical about self defense as empowerment. The first has to do with socialisation-girls are often raised to please others, to be nurturing, and to expect protection from males. Males are stronger than females; the thinking goes, so concentrating on resistance is a futile endeavour. But there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. A 2005 report commissioned by the National Institute of Justice, on the Impact of Victim Self-Protections on Rape, found that personal safety education skills reduce the risk of rape by more than 80 percent (compared with non-resistance) and that self-defense did not significantly increase the risk of serious injury to the defender. The third reason has to do with prevention trends that assign responsibility to males (Straus, 2015).

Female adolescents who underwent training in assault prevention strategies were more able to protect themselves from sexual assault and harassment, and more likely to disclose assaults that did take place, than those who did not receive training. Specifically, the rate of sexual assault decreased from 17.9 to 11.1 per 100 person-years in the intervention ($P < .001$), as opposed to no significant change in the control group. Additional proof of efficacy derives from the observation that the incidence of sexual assault decreased in all but one of the neighbourhoods where the intervention took place (Sarnquist, et.al. 2014).

Several preventive efforts have been introduced and tested but they are not effective nor having any impact on rape or assault on women. Self-defense training has been excluded from various interventions due to misconception about self-defense. Some people felt it does not target the underlying factors that facilitate sexual violence. These critiques are misguided, founded on (1) misunderstandings of self-defense training, (2) stereotypes about gender, and (3) individualistic assumptions about the impact of self-defense. Empowerment-based self-defense training helps to change the root conditions that allow violence against women to flourish. For all these reasons, and because recent research has built a case for its effectiveness, we support that female's empowerment-based self-defense training should be part of any sexual violence prevention effort (Hollander, 2016).

At this point little is known about the value of self-defense for battered women. Street techniques, which depend upon surprise and causing damage, don't work as well against repeated assault by men we live with. Yet, other skills developed in the practice of self-defense may be useful, such as learning to work through the inner obstacles that come up when we are faced with a violent situation. As we begin to feel more self-confident, we will be able to consider how we might resist the battering or how we might eventually leave the batterer and the violence behind them (Hollander, 2004). Therefore, female adolescents should be taught self-defense training so as to develop physical and mental skills to deal with rape or any sexual assault.

Research has found that physical resistance (fighting or fleeing) and forceful verbal resistance (e.g., yelling) are associated with avoiding rape (Ullman, 2007; 1997). The existing research on women's self-defense training finds that it has a host of positive consequences, including improvements in self-esteem, self-efficacy, assertiveness, and fighting skills, as well as reduced fear (Brecklin, 2008; Orchowski, Gidycz, & Raffle, 2008; Brecklin & Ullman, 2005; Hollander, 2004). Brecklin and Ullman, (2005) found that college women with self-defense or assertiveness training were more likely to report experiencing attempted rather than completed rape and were more likely to say that their resistance stopped or lessened the assault.

Three prospective studies have assessed the influence of self-defense training on subsequent sexual victimisation. Gidycz, Rich, Orchowski, King, and Miller (2006) evaluated a 7-hour sexual assault "risk reduction" program for college women with a 2½ hour self-defense component, finding that participants increased their use of self-protective behaviours over the 6-month follow-up period but with no significant differences in rates of sexual victimisation. Orchowski, Gidycz and Raffle, (2008) evaluated a later version of the same program with a 2-hour feminist self-defense component and found increased self-protective behaviors, self-defense self-efficacy, and assertive sexual communication over a 4-month follow-up period, with some decrease in the quantity and severity of sexual victimisation.

Senn, Gee and Thake, (2011) developed and evaluated a 12-hour sexual assault resistance programme

with 3 hours of physical self-defense training. Participants reported higher levels of self-efficacy and an increased use of effective self-defense strategies in hypothetical situations, but no change in victimization rates over the 6-month follow-up period. The self-defense class had been taught by the same female instructor for more than 20 years; it included training and practice in both physical and verbal self-defense, as well as academic study of issues related to violence against women.

Available combat Classes

In order to arrive at the best method for building a self-defense course for female adolescents, it is useful to look at some of the existing/available programmes. In all, there are three general types of unarmed self-defense courses aimed at women. They are padded attacker classes, martial arts programmes and fitness-oriented classes. They also teach women how to identify sexually coercive and predatory behaviour, and how to deflect that behaviour. The class also teaches women physical maneuvers designed to incapacitate a man (i.e., targeting men's weak spots-the groin, eyes, neck, and kneecaps). The course advises that women be cognizant of their surroundings and avoid becoming incapacitated through drugs or alcohol, but underscores the fact that rape is never the fault of the victim, whether she is able to fight back or not (Straus, 2015).

Padded Attacker Classes

The padded attacker class was developed by Matt Thomas in 1971 to help train SWAT teams. Some of the more well-known padded-attacker classes include: IMPACT/Model Mugging, Rape Aggression Defense (RAD) and Rocky Mountain Combat Applications Training (RMCAT). All of these courses are characterised by students learning striking and verbal boundary setting skills in an established progression. Eventually students graduate to fight with a mock attacker dressed in multiple layers of padding designed to protect her from full contact strikes. Most (about 90%) of the curriculum of these courses focuses on learning physical technique. Like all women's self-defense courses, they vary in time and financial commitment as well as philosophy and approach (Tschirhart & Fetter, 1997). Kamienski, n.d).

Traditional Martial Arts

Matt Thomas founded the concept of teaching women to defend them with full contact fighting against a male instructor wearing protective padding. In the summer of 1971, Matt was a student studying Karate in Southern California martial art dojo. One of his classmates was a female student and second-degree black belt who had won martial art tournaments for sparring and Kata. Kata is a specific set of continuous beautiful martial art movements that help develop balance and coordination. Many women interested in self-defense enter some sort of martial arts programme. These programmes vary widely in style, philosophy and approach. Exclusively female educational institutions have a long and proud tradition (Model Mugging, 2019).

One of the responses to female exclusion and sexism in martial arts is the emergence of all-female schools and a general discussion among female martial artists about how to deal with sexism in co-educational schools. Organisations like the National Women's Martial Arts Federation and schools like Brooklyn Women's Martial Arts and Valley Women's Martial Arts offer women the opportunity to train in an all female environment devoted exclusively to women's self-defense issues and physical attributes. It's really great to not have to deal with that dynamic. Having a women's training experience also facilitates dealing with survivor issues that come up on and off the floor (Kamienski, n.d).

Fitness Kickboxing

The martial arts fitness craze, spearheaded by Billy Blanks' Tae Bo programme, has created a new fad in women's self-defense classes. One of the most important features of a cardio type class is that it draws a lot of women who would otherwise never enter a martial arts school or self-defense class. Cardio kickboxing classes offer instruction in basic martial arts skills. Many women feel empowered by these classes. Typically, aerobic kickboxing classes are run by either aerobics instructors with no martial arts training, or by martial artists with no aerobics or fitness backgrounds. The National Association of Professional Martial Artists and other martial arts organisations have started their own group fitness kickboxing programmes. An instructor who possesses both martial arts and group fitness instructor skills is ideal for a cardio kickboxing type class (Kamienski, n.d).

Conclusion

Since other rape prevention intervention programmes are not really producing the desired result, there is the need to incorporate other intervention like self-defense into rape prevention programmes so as to enable female adolescents to resist rape or assault.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

1. Female adolescents should also participate in regular physical fitness activities to enhance their physical and mental abilities.
2. Combat sports coaches should be involved in the training of adolescent girls in self-defense.
3. Self-defense should be incorporated into the school's curriculum as elective sports where coaches can come to teach the students.
4. Self-defense should be part of rape prevention programmes and should be handled by qualified coaches.

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