

A Very Brief Compilation of Self-Defense Evidence

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“Self-defense” education is a complex term which includes physical, verbal, emotional, social and psychological skills which individuals can learn and practice for the prevention of interpersonal violence. This type of personal safety education is considered by experts to be a promising emergent practice in evidence-based violence prevention, and is “supported by a preponderance of the evidence” (Schewe, 2007). Self-defense programming is generally, but not solely, enacted on the individual level of the socio-ecological model of prevention.

A number of studies have found preliminary evidence that self-defense training may decrease a woman’s chances of experiencing future sexual victimization as compared to women without training (Bart & O’Brien, 1993; Brecklin & Ullman, 2005; Orchowski, Gidycz & Raffle, 2008). Additionally, self-defense has been empirically proven to decrease a number of psychological attributes that have been linked to victimization (Brecklin, 2008; Ozer & Bandura 1990; Sochting, Fairbrother & Koch, 2004; Ullman, 2007).

Self-defense programs may increase assertiveness, perceived control, self-efficacy, risk avoidance behaviors, confidence, and self-esteem, and may also lower anxiety and fear (Brecklin, 2008; Hollander, 2004). Importantly, low self-esteem and low assertiveness have been found to be predictive of sexual victimization (Brecklin & Ullman, 2005).

Self-defense education may be considered primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention work. For example: a student may participate in self-defense training which allows her to accurately identify the warning signs of a controlling partner, as well as teaches her the skills needed to end such a relationship before physical intimate partner violence begins (primary prevention). Another student may participate in self-defense training after experiencing a mugging, and find that his new skill set helps to relieve the anxiety and victim blaming he experienced after the attack (secondary prevention). At the societal level, most women in American culture experience a basic level of ongoing, culturally moderated fear of sexual attack. Emerging evidence indicates that self-defense education can empower women by helping them to feel safer, stronger and less marginalized over the long-term (tertiary prevention).

Self-defense education occupies a position along the spectrum of prevention interventions in both the General Safety and Sexual Violence content areas. While self-defense *education* can take place long before, just after, or long after violence occurs, self-defense’s *physical skills* are most obviously utilized just before or after an attempted assault begins.

References

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