

SOCIOLOGY

CEZARY KUSNIERZ^{1(ABCDEFG)}, WOJCIECH J. CYNARSKI^{2(ADEF)}, KAROL GORNER^{3(ADEF)}

¹ Opole University of Technology Faculty of Physical Education and Physiotherapy (Poland)

² Faculty of Physical Education, University of Rzeszow, Rzeszow (Poland)

³ Matej Bel University Philosophical Faculty, Banska Bystrica (Slovakia)

Corresponding author: Cezary Kusnierz, e-mail: ckusnierz@op.pl

Social reception and understanding of combat sports and martial arts by both school students and adults

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Key words: martial arts, combat sports, social reception, values

Abstract

Background/Scientific Framework: Martial arts with their many centuries of history are perceived by public opinion as a carrier of many desirable values. Apart from the health benefits they are used for moral education, and the reduction of social brutality, as well as bringing positive models of behaviour, while complacency also being a source of well-being.

Problem and Aim: The paper aims to learn what both school students and adults think about combat sports and martial arts. The questions this gives rise to are: what is the public reception of martial arts and combat sports and what are the values of the training recognised by people who are not involved in Martial Arts training.

Material and Methods. The research uses the diagnostic survey method of with a questionnaire. As a research tool, a modified survey questionnaire on martial arts and combat sports was used for surveying N=192 people in total (Opole, Poland, 2015).

Results. The results obtained show that people not involved in the training have a favourable perception of combat sports and martial arts, while showing they also show discrepancies in opinions on the effect of training on spiritual growth and aggression, which is often perceived as a trait of people in training.

Conclusions. Untrained people rank at number 1 the possibility of achieving a high level of physical fitness, then secondly, self-discipline and a healthy and clean-living lifestyle when describing the benefits of close combat training. Different opinions were found on the effect the training on children and young people, which proves the need for more attention to be paid to the educational aspects of martial arts training activities.

Introduction

The growth of combat sports and martial arts in Poland started in the early 1980s, with the exception of judo which had been practised for some time before. This was mainly due to mass media which awakened interest in the Eastern martial arts by showing the incredible physical fitness and hand combat skills of the people trained in such arts. The increasing interest in combat-related disciplines has led to their rapid growth in subsequent years.

Martial arts with their many centuries of history, are perceived by public opinion to carry many of the desirable values of Eastern societies into the youth educational system. Apart from health benefits they are used for moral education, and a reduction in social brutality, as well as bringing positive models of behaviour, while being also a

source of well-being [Kusnierz 2011; Vertonghen, Theeboom 2010; Chunlei Lu 2008; Twemlow *et al.* 2008]. The ideology assumes that people training in the basics of warrior culture are seeking psychophysical improvement and self-fulfilment through combat techniques [Theeboom, Dong Zhu, Vertonghen 2012]. The positive asceticism combines physical exercise with conscious self-discipline and is aimed at moral and spiritual progress [Jagiello, Dornowski 2011]. Herrigel [1989] in his description of the benefits of such exercise, lists: the ability to prevent aggression, the ability to control their own emotions, and the ability to respond calmly in an emergency situation. Due to these numerous values, martial arts have been also introduced to school physical education programmes. It has been concluded by researchers from the European Physical Education Association (EUPEA) that

this specific form of physical activity gives many benefits [Theeboom, DeKnop, Wylleman 2008].

The specific nature of adolescence and the many educational problems which arise in this period, make teachers, tutors and social workers search for effective methods of working with difficult and deprived youth. One of the resocialisation methods turns out to be hand-combat training as a means reducing aggression [Abrahams 2008; Bosch 2008].

Apart from the many advocates of exercise related to martial arts and combat sports, there are also numerous opinions about them. Researchers working in this field believe that a negative image of the disciplines being analysed is spread by the media, which tend to brutalise martial arts and combat sports for their own commercial purposes by separating them from their philosophical, religious and ethical assumptions, thus producing misleading clichés. Strength and violence are still promoted in mass culture, aggressive behaviour is admired by the public and often becomes a behavioural model for children and young people [Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2006]. Chunlei Lu [2008] claims that the brutalisation of martial arts is, to a large extent the result of ignorance and a misunderstanding of the fundamental assumptions behind these disciplines. The author considers that popularisation connected with show-business is very harmful as it leads to the identification of martial arts with only combat and brutality.

It should also be noted that studies conducted in Central Europe show various there is a variety of perceptions relating to martial arts and combat sports, which may be a result of different cultural traditions, mindsets and ideologies [Theeboom, DeKnop, Wylleman 2008; Abrahams 2008].

This paper aims to learn what both school students and adults think about combat sports and martial arts. The paper set the following research question:

1. What is the current public reception of martial arts and combat sports after over 30 years of dynamic development in Poland?
2. What values do untrained people perceive in combat sports and martial arts?
3. Do respondents think that practising combat sports and martial arts have a positive effect on children and school students and should they be spread in this age group?

The humanistic theory of martial arts and the sociology of martial arts were adopted as the main theoretical perspective [Cynarski 2004, 2006, 2012; Cynarski, Skowron 2014; cf. Ben Messaoud 2015].

Material and Methods

The research was conducted using the method of a diagnostic survey with a questionnaire. As a research tool, modified survey questionnaire of martial arts and combat

sports was used [Cynarski 2006]. The five-point Likert scale was adopted. In addition, two qualitative methods were used – participant observation and a content analysis of the literature. In order to learn the opinion of outsiders, the survey involved untrained respondents with no prior experience in hand combat. The survey involved students at two randomly chosen schools in Opole (Poland): the middle school N1 = 65 (30 boys and 35 girls), and the secondary school N2 = 67 (30 boys and 37 girls), and a group of adults N3 = 60 (30 women and 30 men) participating in general development courses at a fitness club. In total there were $N = N1 + N2 + N3 = 192$ respondents. The average age in each group was respectively: $N1 = 14.5$; $N2 = 17.4$; $N3 = 34.2$. Percentage indicators were used to describe the answers to the questions carried between September and October 2015.

Results

1. Philosophy of life

Czajkowski and Piwowski [2010] characterise martial arts as a realm of culture related to combat system, and described using detailed codification resulting from Far Eastern inspiration regarding techniques, methods and customs, and based on philosophical and religious premises. They are also used to achieve higher levels of safety for individuals and groups. In his description of the axiological values of martial arts and combat sports Cynarski [2004] points to the development of physico-physiological, psychological, and personality traits with tendencies towards perfectionism. People who enter the way of Far Eastern martial arts and sports are therefore perceived as people with a defined life model executed by the body, speech and mind – with a life philosophy [Czajkowski, Piwowski 2010]. This issue becomes the starting point in the analysis of the material which was gathered, and thus forms the background for further consideration. The analysis of the surveys leads us to the conclusion that some of the respondents perceive people trained in martial arts as people with a shaped life philosophy, which is one of the motivators for training in hand combat. Affirmative answers (“yes” and “definitely yes”) were given in total by 33.8% of respondents. However, a large number of the answers focused on an average rating – partial (Fig. 1).

2. Self-discipline

Self-discipline is the ability to make yourself do things that must be done irrespective of external conditions and mood. It is the focus on long-term gains from small, but daily steps towards a goal, and is the road to the mastery of martial arts by long-term training [Cynarski, Sieber 2006]. It is a symptom of maturity, so the learning and achieving of it is usually a long process. The objectives

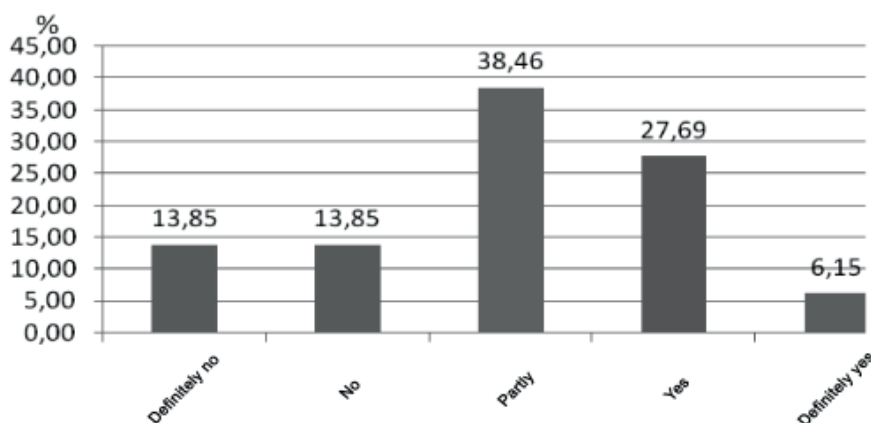


Fig. 1. Life philosophy of people training in combat sports and martial arts. [Source: own research]

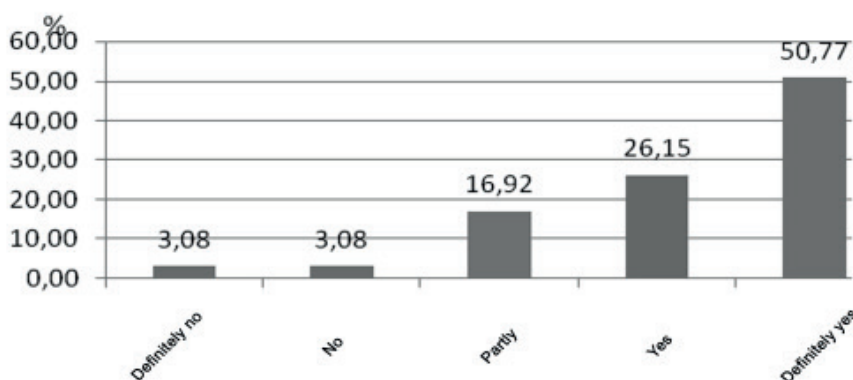


Fig. 2. Self-discipline as a trait of people training in combat sports and martial arts. [Source: own research]

of self-discipline are moderation and the development of one's own potential. Moderation is the capacity to impose restriction on oneself, to set boundaries, while the development of one's own potential is the road to self-improvement. An important component of self-discipline is persistence. It is persistence, not talent which is the most important feature of successful people.

People with internal discipline are “strong characters”, self-confident and consistent. This subject was raised in the survey by the question “is this a typical trait for people training in hand combat?”

Based on the results we obtained, there was a clear bias to the “definitely yes” and “yes”. While self-discipline therefore, seems to be fundamental trait of people training in combat sports and martial arts, it can be also the result of long-term training which has a beneficial effect on other spheres of an individual's personal and professional life (Fig. 2).

3. Healthy lifestyle

Lifestyle is an increasingly popular category, mainly due to the developing technical civilisation, which has led to the development of a mass “culture of free time”. It is

divided into two basic categories: healthy and unhealthy lifestyles. A healthy lifestyle is a valuable instrument, which determines such values as “activity” (which is widely understood to include both physical and intellectual activity), “quality of life” and “health potential”. A healthy lifestyle is undoubtedly, an active lifestyle, characterised in expending a specific amount of energy. Values which are important for humans, such as health, active lifestyle and quality of life, are interrelated [Nowak 2012]. In the case of competitive, professional sport it is hard to speak about health as it is not its primary purpose, but rather a necessary condition of the activity which is, of course a professional job [Nowak 2010]. However, it must be noted that practising combat sports and martial arts may also be a form of physical recreation, which has an undoubtedly beneficial effect on health. Systematic training helps students to develop a clean-living lifestyle, to avoid stimulants, to maintain a proper diet and a good balance between work, training and leisure. A person who lacks interests may well lack possibilities for self-fulfilment in their spare time. Negative feelings of boredom and emptiness are factors which contribute to anti-healthy and destructive behaviour. It is therefore very important to find talents (e.g. sports talents)

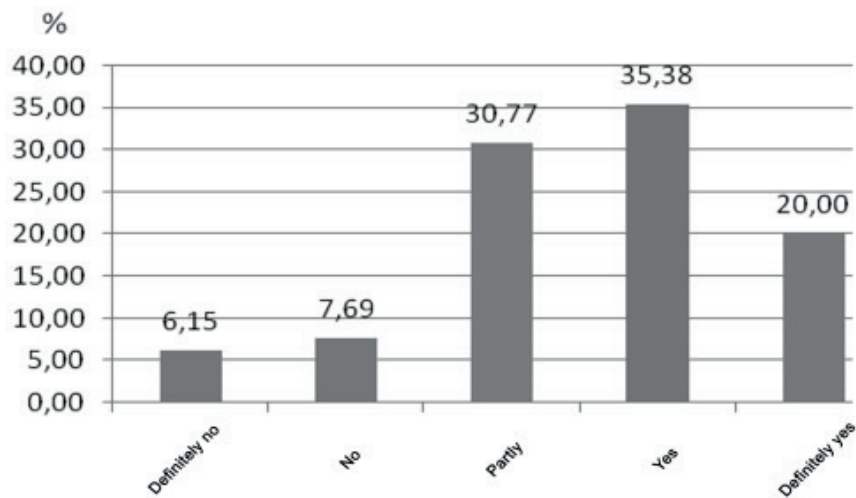


Fig. 3. Healthy and clean-living lifestyle as a trait of people training in combat sports and martial arts [Source: own research]

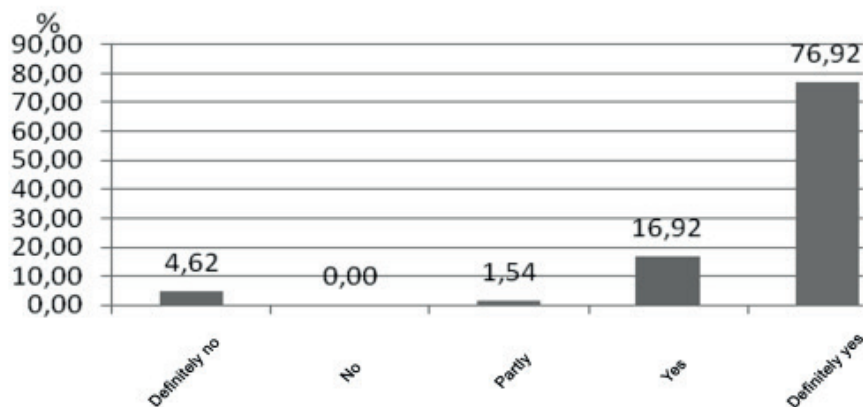


Fig. 4. Physical fitness as a trait of people training in combat sports and martial arts [Source: own research]

in students in the school environment, that should then be developed in a programmed manner, and this environment should also foster students' interests and allow them to engage in various hobbies, thus providing them with the possibility of personal growth [Nowak 2013].

The results we obtained in respect of the above question prove that the subjects perceive people being trained in martial arts as people leading a healthy and clean-living lifestyle. Over 50% respondents answered affirmatively – “yes” and “definitely yes”. Over 30% said that people practising hand combat only partially observe the principles of a healthy lifestyle (Fig. 3).

4. Physical fitness

Physical fitness is understood as the ability to solve motor tasks or the ability to perform muscle work efficiently and economically. The term “physical fitness” is defined differently by different theoreticians. For some it may mean practising given motor activities, while for others it means a muscular body or concerns for one's own health. It is expressed as the readiness of the human body to take and solve in various life situations difficult motor

tasks, requiring strength, speed, nimbleness, agility and endurance. Physical fitness is also related to acquiring motor skills and habits based on a certain level of motor aptitude and health [Barankiewicz 1998].

The analysis of the results allows us to positively conclude that physical fitness is the most characteristic trait of people training in combat sports with over 90% of respondents expressing this opinion (Fig. 4).

5. Spiritual growth

Training in combat sports and martial arts is a process of comprehensive growth in the student, by way of both body and spirit exercises. *Budo* is a way of ethics and the honour code of the warrior, but it is also a form of education, which is perceived to aim mainly at the positive shaping of a trainee's character and their personal growth [Pietrzak, Cynarski 2000]. The Far Eastern martial arts born in the atmosphere of Buddhist temples are imbued with a spiritual element, however the focus on this differs between the various different forms of martial arts. The most important goal is to achieve spiritual mastery – complete psychophysical integration. The

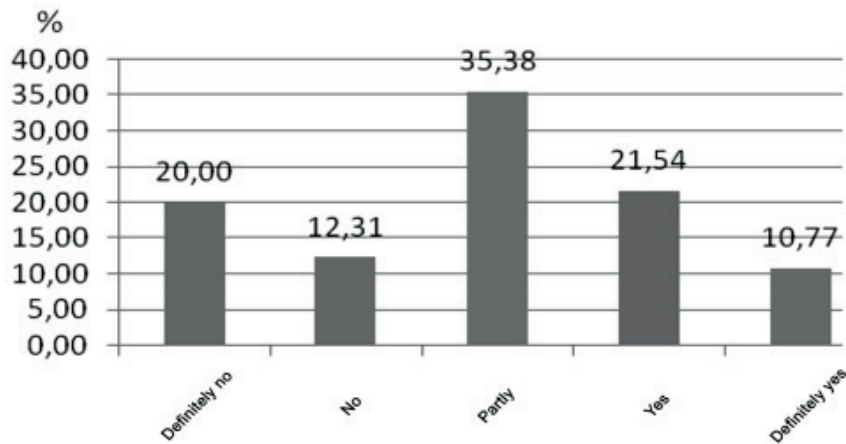


Fig. 5. Spiritual development as a trait of people training in combat sports and martial arts [Source: own research]

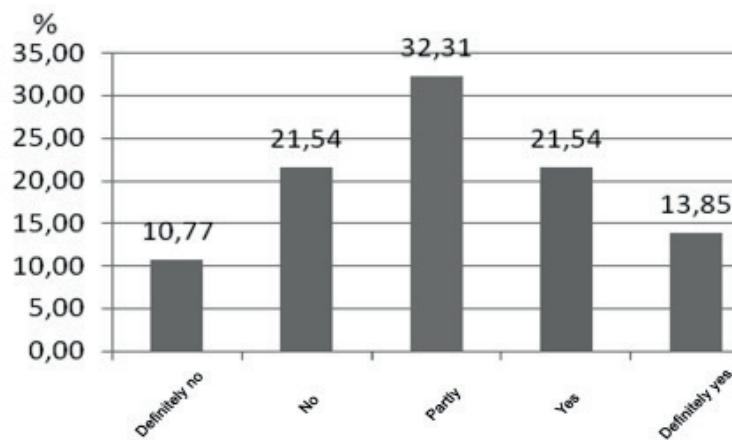


Fig. 6. Aggression as a trait of people training in combat sports and martial arts [Source: own research]

question of spiritual development was also mentioned in the survey as one of the biggest differences between individual disciplines and is usually attributed to people practising martial arts. Respondent answers indicate differing public reception. 31.5% of respondents perceive martial arts and combat sports competitors as spiritually developed people having not only skills and knowledge, but also an ethical and moral foundation. A large number of respondents (32.3%) disagree and gave negative answers (Fig. 5).

6. Aggression

Aggression is defined as any physical or verbal action aiming at harming a person physically or mentally [Wolinska 2000: 14-15]. Gable [1993: 225], however, defines aggression as “an action aiming to harm a person or an object, or causing such harm”. In today’s society, there is a common view that training in hand combat increases aggression. Practitioners who train intensively for a long time stand out with their heavy bodies and above average strength, which often frightens people.

Despite the fact that research shows there are varying levels of aggression in individual fighting styles and shows higher levels of aggression in non-training peers, the public has adopted this unfavourable view [Kusnierz, Cynarski, Litwiniuk 2014]. This is confirmed by the results of our research. Over 35% of the respondents state that brutality and aggression are traits of people connected with combat sports and martial arts. A total of 32% gave different answers, which show a similar number of positive and negative answers (Fig. 6).

Educational aspect

These days the practise of combat sports and martial arts, has a humanised form. This is in part due to social and cultural transformation, but is also a result of educational and schooling needs. The way of today’s warrior can be a path of noble quests for truth and higher values and has a universal character as a message to achieve broader perfection. A universal sense of obligation, and care about honour dignity and integrity are consistent with the humanistic

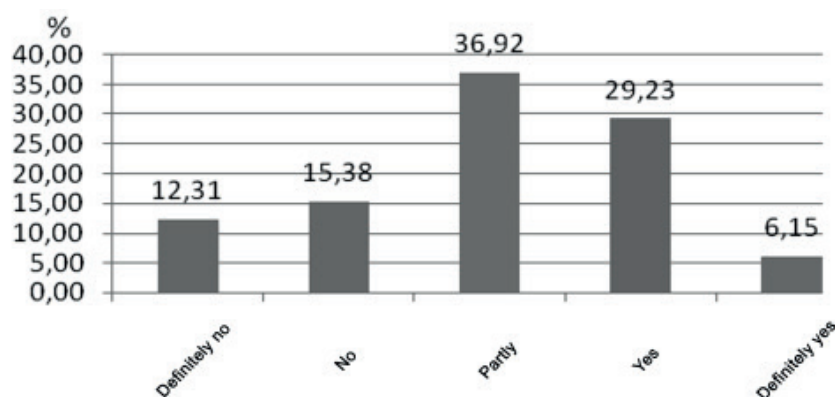


Fig. 7. Educational impact of combat sports and martial arts on children and young people [Source: own research]

concept of the theory of martial arts [Cynarski 2004]. Hand combat training may also be treated as an educational system for children and young people. However it requires the right message, as well as competently-executed education and teaching [Hoff 1993].

The results we obtained show discrepancies in respondents' opinions, the largest group (36.9%) states that it is only partially possible to achieve an educational impact as a result of training. 35.3% of respondents see a positive educational impact by combat sports and martial arts, while 27.6% of subjects have a different opinion (Fig. 7).

Discussion

The life led by the fabled samurais was defined by the clear rules of the *Bushido* code. It may seem unrealistic to transfer them to today's society. Studies show that karate and other martial arts are often practised as a sports activity [Jakhel, Pieter 2013], but also in many cases because of a fascination with the culture of the ancient warriors [Rosa 2012, 2015] or the desire to learn self-defence [Cynarski 2014; Llopis-Goig 2015]. The fascination with the culture is sometimes accompanied by entertainment [Ben Messaoud 2015].

The values inherent in combat sports and martial arts still can have, and in many cases should have, an impact on the education of children and young people. The majority of people, mainly adults, start to train in hand combat due to its usefulness. Trainees want to learn as many different techniques as possible which may be used not only for sports competition, but also for self-defence. They also train to improve their general fitness or health. The health-related aspects of martial arts and combat sports are conditioned by the fact they are not only a means to defend the body, but also to toughen it and provide wellness and prophylactic and therapeutic measures [cf. Litwiniuk, Cynarski 2001; Zeng, Cynarski, Xie 2013; Zeng *et al.* 2015]. They improve overall body fitness, as well as positive health potential [Cynarski

2012]. The results obtained by our own research show that respondents see a possibility for improving their health by training in combat sports and martial arts.

Another very important feature of martial arts and combat sports is their educational value. Even Prof. Jigoro Kano has pointed out that bodiliness should be one of the means of education [Shimizu 2008]. It should, of course be combined with moral aspects, cultural study and tradition. This has been very extensively described for *judo*, which is at the same time both a sport and a martial art [Jaskolski 2000]. The studies conducted by Sterkowicz-Przybycien and Lech [2006] have shown the positive impact of *judo* training on children. They found positive changes in the emotional, socio-moral, volitional and intellectual spheres. If the possibility of teaching such classes in schools is considered, the style which would most-favourably shape the personality of the children being trained also needs to be considered. Which style would provide discipline and companionship, as well as provide a way of relieving negative emotions that may in many cases be present (e.g. in dysfunctional families). In the culture of the Far East, meditation is an everyday activity allowing to people to "listen" completely to their body and mind. Such skills may give advantages in sports competitions, but also in everyday life, as a way of dealing with stress or unnecessary emotions. During the thirty years of the development of combat sports and martial arts in Poland large increases in the age range of club members have been seen. In the past, there was no enrolment of children aged 6-7, due to the training loads and methods. Children currently constitute a large number of the people enrolled for training and a small group stays with the training until they reach adolescence. This is a very important issue as it relates to the period of education and the shaping of pupils' personality. For them, combat sports or martial arts should be important carrier of schooling, and social and educational values. This therefore appears to be a special opportunity to promote specific forms of physical activity as factors in shaping lifestyle.

In view of the above attention should be paid to the social perception of combat sport practitioners, as this will have a fundamental impact on the choice of forms

of physical activity chosen by children and young people. In the public education system, team sports are the most widespread, due to their popularity, as well as their hedonistic values, and they can be also a result of programme/curriculum requirements. The results we have presented prove that there are variations in respondents' opinions regarding the educational values of hand combat, but most of the answers were close to the mid-point. However, one should be careful not to draw far-reaching conclusions as the study included only 192 subjects, which is only a small segment of society. This result may prove that not all types of combat sports are positively perceived.

Conclusions

Studies in this field provide extremely important feedback on the public reception of combat sports and martial arts. The information contained in non-practitioners' answers provides a picture showing how differently trainees are perceived, how individual combat styles are prioritised, and also establishes preferences in younger school children. Based on our experience, we may conclude that parents do not often have extensive knowledge of individual forms of hand combat and the choice of style to be trained in is usually random. Even more important is a choice of a proper teacher. When observing marketing actions it can be seen that the titles and sport achievements of the trainers often play the most important role. It begs the question whether a successful contestant will be an equally good trainer and educator?

Based on the analysis of seven selected aspects it was found that public reception of martial arts and combat sports after over 30 years of dynamic development in Poland is positive, however the enthusiasm typically seen in the 1980s has diminished. Non-participants, in describing the benefits of training in close combat rank the possibility of achieving high levels of physical fitness at number one, followed by self-discipline and a healthy and clean-living lifestyle. Different opinions were found on the effects of training on children and young people which proves the need for more attention to be paid to the educational aspects of the training activities. This way they could become seen in the same way by practitioners, their parents and their environment. Perhaps the majority of the trainers focus on teaching the techniques and improving motor skills and not enough on shaping attitudes towards specific forms of physical culture.

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Odbiór społeczny i rozumienie sportów i sztuk walki w opiniach młodzieży szkolnej i osób dorosłych

Słowa kluczowe: sztuki walki, sporty walki, recepcja społeczna, wartości

Abstrakt

Perspektywa teoretyczna. Sztuki walki z wielowiekową tradycją w opiniach społecznych uznawane są za nośnik wielu pożądanych wartości. Oprócz walorów zdrowotnych służyły edukacji moralnej, obniżaniu brutalności społecznej, dostarczały pozytywnych wzorców zachowań, będąc jednocześnie źródłem samozadowolenia.

Problem i cel. Celem pracy jest poznanie opinii zarówno młodzieży szkolnej, jak i osób dorosłych na temat sportów walki i sztuk walki. Nasuwa się pytanie, jaki jest odbiór społeczny sportów i sztuk walki oraz jakie wartości w treningu walki wręcz dostrzegają osoby nietreningujące?

Materiał i metoda. W badaniu zastosowano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego z techniką ankiety. Narzędziem badawczym był zmodyfikowany kwestionariusz ankiety dotyczący badań sportów walki i sztuk walki, przebadano łącznie N=192 osoby (Opole, 2015).

Wyniki. Uzyskane wyniki badań wskazują na korzystne postrzeganie sportów i sztuk walki przez osoby nietreningujące, jednocześnie stwierdzono rozbieżności w zakresie opinii dotyczących wpływu treningu na rozwój duchowy oraz agresji, która często postrzegana jest, jako cecha osób trenujących.

Wnioski. Osoby nietreningujące opisując walory treningu walki wręcz na plan pierwszy wysuwają możliwość uzyskania bardzo wysokiego poziomu sprawności fizycznej, następnie samodyscypliny oraz zdrowego i higienicznego stylu życia. Zróżnicowane opinie stwierdzono na temat wpływu treningu na dzieci i młodzież, co świadczy o potrzebie zwrócenia większej uwagi na aspekty wychowawcze w zajęciach treningowych.