

PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS ON COLLEGE SELF-DEFENSE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This research was designed to study perceptions of students on their self-defense education in university self-defense classes. Serial surveys were conducted in one university's self-defense class to examine student perceptions on (a) mental self-defense from nine perspectives, (b) physical self-defense from nine perspectives, (c) overall experience of learning self-defense after one semester from eight perspectives, and (d) changes in self-confidence on personal self-defense ability and benefits of taking self-defense classes. The results indicated that college self-defense education benefits college students in terms of mental self-defense, physical self-defense, self-confidence, and safe lifestyle. The results of the study provided feedback from students on class content and effectiveness of teaching and learning based on hands-on experience at the conclusion of the course. Student perceptions can help self-defense instructors better understand the needs of students in self-defense education and improve self-defense curriculum and teaching effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Self-defense education has become an important subject in universities. Teaching a self-defense class has more serious responsibilities than many classes since the quality of self-defense class concerns the safety of millions of students. Teaching and learning self-defense involve both students and the instructor. To improve the quality of a self-defense class, it is critical to know how students feel about the class, from contents to teaching and learning. No literature was located on this topic.

The purpose of the research was to investigate perceptions of students on their self-defense education via a university self-defense class. It was expected that the results of the study would provide feedback from students on class contents and effectiveness of teaching and learning based on their hands-on experience during the class. It was also expected that these perceptions would help self-defense instructors better understand the needs of students in self-defense education, and improve self-defense curriculum and the teaching effectiveness.

METHODS

Surveys were used in the study to collect perceptions on self-defense education of students in self-defense classes at a university located in the western United States. The self-defense system used in the study was SmarTough Self-defense introduced in Chen's (2004) textbook. The study conducted several surveys on different contents. Feedback was collected on class content after each class, and overall feedback was collected

on the last day of the class. Surveys were conducted anonymously to assure the expression of opinions. Due to varying class attendance each semester, the numbers of subjects ranged from 35 to 231 students per a reporting period

The content found in the serial surveys included mental self-defense, physical self-defense, overall self-defense, (changes on self-confidence and potential benefits of self-defense education, and benefits of taking self-defense class. The results were reported based on a percentage of subjects in each category, and t-test was also used to analyze data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perception on Mental Self-Defense

The mental self-defense contents in self-defense classes included 21 topics (Table 1). Each topic was evaluated from the following nine perspectives: (a) academic, (b) lifetime education, (c) new knowledge, (d) valuable and useful, (e) critical to my life and safety, (f) like and supporting, (g) worth of time, effort, and tuition, (h) willing to apply in my life, and (i) willing to recommend to others. The majority of students (95.7%-100% females and 88.2%-100% males) felt that the mental self-defense learned in classes were academic in nature, educational as a college experience, valuable and useful for their life protection, critical to their safety, and worth of their time/tuition/effort. Students also indicated that they gained new knowledge, liked mental self-defense strategies, showed intention to apply mental self-defense strategies in real life, and would recommend these mental strategies to others.

Perception of Physical Self-Defense Skills

The physical self-defense contents in self-defense classes included eight patterns (Table 2). Each type of physical self-defense skills was evaluated from the following nine perspectives: (a) useful for self-defense, (b) gained confidence and feeling stronger on defense, (c) confidence applying in real life, (d) had fun in this unit, (e) got good exercise in this unit, (f) academic, (g) educational and good learning experience, (h) enjoyable/exciting, and (i) worth of time, tuition, and effort. Most students (78.3-100% females and 77.8-100% males) felt that the physical self-defense skills learned in classes were useful on increasing their self-defense ability, were educational and academic, provided good learning experiences, were enjoyable or exciting, and was worth their time, effort, and tuition. Students felt stronger, had more self-confidence with respect to applications in real situations, had fun while learning skills, and received good exercise during practice.

Table 1. Perception on mental self-defense from nine aspects on each topic.

	Women (n=231) Range of percentages	Men (n=127) Range of percentages
1. Role of self-defense	97.4% - 100%	97.6% - 100%
2. Three risk factors in life	98.3% - 100%	99.2% - 100%
3. Rationale of self-defense	99.1% - 100%	97.6% - 100%
4. Rationale of self-defense education	99.1% - 100%	98.4% - 100%
5. Legal right in self-defense	99.1% - 100%	98.4% - 100%
6. Crime chain and factors	99.1% - 100%	97.6% - 100%
7. Main prevention principles	97.4% - 100%	96.1% - 100%
8. Prevention strategies on murder	97.4% - 100%	96.1% - 100%
9. Prevention strategies on rape	96.5% - 100%	88.2% - 100%
10. Prevention strategies on aggravated assault	96.5% - 100%	96.1% - 100%
11. Prevention strategies on robbery	96.5% - 100%	96.1% - 100%
12. Prevention strategies on burglary	96.5% - 100%	92.1% - 100%
13. Prevention strategies on driving	99.1% - 100%	98.4% - 100%
14. Prevention strategies on campus	95.7% - 100%	95.3% - 100%
15. Prevention strategies in family	98.3% - 100%	97.6% - 100%
16. Prevention strategies at work	98.7% - 100%	98.4% - 100%
17. Prevention strategies on tour	98.3%-100%	98.4%-100%
18. Prevention strategies on terrorism	98.3%- 100%	98.4%- 100%
19. On-site responses	97.8%- 100%	98.4%-100%
20. Lifetime learning and applications	100%-100%	98.4%- 100%
21. Fitness and self-defense combo	97.4%-100%	98.4%- 100%

Table 2. Perceptions on physical self-defense from nine aspects on each pattern.

	Women (n=46 - 94) Range of percentages	Women (n=46 - 94) Range of percentages
1. Distance defense	78.3 - 100%	77.8 - 100%
2. Close defense	89.4 - 100%	88.6 - 100%
3. Throw defense	82.1 - 96.8%	80.6 - 97.2%
4. Hold/choke/hug/pull defense	93.8 - 100%	97.4 - 100%
5. Floor defense	79.4 - 100%	86.8 - 100%
6. Stick-attack defense	97.4 - 100%	89.3 - 100%
7. Knife-attack defense	96.2 - 100%	100 - 100%
8. Handgun-attack defense	88.2 - 100%	87.5 - 100%

Perceptions of the Whole Self-Defense Class at the End of Semester

Concerning the overall self-defense class, the majority of students (92.4-100% females and 96.0-100% males) felt that they achieved their goals for the class, learned systematic mental self-defense for safety, learned comprehensive physical self-defense skills, had hands-on experience, had fun while practicing skills, and

obtained moderate to vigorous exercise during skill practice. Students also indicated that they were comfortable applying self-defense in real life, and that self-defense education changed their life (Table 3).

Table 3. Overall perception on the whole semester self-defense class – Sample 1.

Survey questions	Women (n= 224) n (%)	Men (n= 101) n (%)
1. Achieved your goal(s) for this class	221 (98.7%)	101 (100%)
2. Learned systematic mental self-defense to save your life	219 (97.8%)	101 (100%)
3. Learned systematic physical self-defense to save your life	224 (100%)	101 (100%)
4. Had good exercise in the class for this semester	217 (96.9%)	100 (100%)
5. Had minor injury in the class	17 (7.6%)	4 (4.0%)
6. Had fun in class while learning	224 (100%)	101 (100%)
7. Comfortable using self-defense as your lifetime protection	211 (94.2%)	97 (96.0%)
8. Self-defense class has changed my life	214 (95.5%)	98 (97.0%)

Most students felt the self-defense class was important and useful to their life, a worthwhile academic education in university life, and worth of their tuition and time. Most students also enjoyed the process of learning self-defense. They had good exercise and had fun while learning important self-defense skills. It seemed that self-defense education not only helped students become smart and tough on self-defense, but also help them enjoy the process of learning (Table 4).

Most students also indicated that self-defense class had exercise functions (Table 5). They felt that self-defense class helped them reduce stress, get good exercise for mental and physical health, and provide one way to be physically active.

Perception on Changes of Self-Confidence

Students showed very low self-confidence on preventing crimes before the class (Table 6). The mean self-confidence scores on prevention of all 12 crimes ranged from 0.73 to 3.14 on a 1 to 10 scale (1 means no confident and 10 means most confident). The mean scores increased at a range of 6.48 to 8.66 at the end of the semester. The improvement on different crime prevention ranged 5.32 to 6.16. Students developed their self-confidence through learning and training on mental strategies in classes. It seemed that college female students established a good understanding on the nature and causes of different crimes, and developed the mental ability to carry on prevention strategies.

Table 4. Overall perception on the whole semester self-defense class – Sample 2.

	Women (n=98) n (%)	Men (n=34) n (%)	Z-test
1. The class is important to your life	98 (100%)	34 (100%)	>.05
2. The class was fun while learning	95 (96.9%)	34 (100%)	>.05
3. You had good exercise during the class practice	98 (100%)	34 (100%)	>.05
4. The class was worth your tuition	98 (100%)	32 (94.1%)	>.05
5. The class was worth your time of 15 weeks	97 (99.0%)	32 (94.1%)	>.05
6. The class is useful for your life	98 (100%)	34 (100%)	>.05
7. Participation in self-defense served as a worthwhile educational purpose relevant to your overall university experience	95 (96.9%)	34 (100%)	>.05
8. You would recommend self-defense class to your family and friends	92 (93.9%)	33 (97.1%)	>.05
9. The class was academic	47/49 (95.9%)	20/20 (100%)	>.05
10. The class was educational	49/49 (100%)	20/20 (100%)	>.05

Table 5. After class feedback on physical activity aspect of self-defense classes.

	Women (n=47) n (%)	Men (n=15) n (%)
1. Self-defense is good for mental health	47 (100%)	15 (100%)
2. Self-defense practice is a good exercise	47 (100%)	14 (93.3%)
3. Self-defense helps me establish active lifestyle	46 (97%)	14 (93.3%)
4. Participation in self-defense helps reduce stress and anxiety	44 (93%)	15 (100%)
5. Participation in self-defense helps me to be a more effective student in the other courses	41 (87%)	13 (86.7%)
6. Self-defense is fun while getting exercise and learning a lifetime activity	47 (100%)	15 (100%)

College women showed low self-confidence on handling crimes at the beginning of the class (Table 7). The mean self-confidence scores on handling all 12 crimes ranged from 0.70 to 2.61 on a 1 to 10 scale. The mean scores increased at a range of 6.11 to 8.34 at the end of the semester. The improvement on different crime preventions ranged from 5.41 to 6.02. College female students improved their self-confidence on handling different crimes on-site through learning mental strategies and physical skills in classes. It seemed that these female students established a better understanding on these crimes, and developed the ability to apply their mental strategies and physical skills when facing these crimes on-site. However, the self-confidence level was not equal to their actual ability of handling on-site crimes.

Table 6. Changes on women's self-confidence on preventing different types of crimes.

Item	n	Before learning Mean / SD		After learning Mean / SD		Change Mean
1. Murder	44	1.80	2.58	7.14	2.28	+5.34*
2. Street robbery	44	2.05	2.49	7.86	1.94	+5.81*
3. Resident robbery	44	2.70	2.51	8.14	1.88	+5.44*
4. Stranger rape	44	1.91	2.55	7.68	2.30	+5.77*
5. Acquaintance rape	44	2.86	3.11	8.18	1.90	+5.32*
6. Aggravated assault	44	1.64	2.18	7.80	1.94	+6.16*
7. Burglary	44	1.75	2.16	7.64	2.06	+5.89*
8. Carjacking	44	1.77	2.21	7.57	2.29	+5.80*
9. Gang crimes	44	0.89	1.62	6.91	2.34	+6.02*
10. Workplace crime	44	2.18	2.55	7.98	2.14	+5.80*
11. Family violence	44	3.14	2.67	8.66	1.93	+5.52*
12. Terrorism attacks	44	0.73	1.48	6.48	2.73	+5.75*
Overall	44	1.95		7.67		+5.72*

*t-test <.01

Table 7. Changes on women's self-confidence on handling different crimes.

Item	n=	Before learning Mean / SD		After learning Mean / SD		Change Mean
1. Murder	44	0.98	1.82	6.91	2.09	+5.93*
2. Street robbery	44	1.34	1.95	7.36	2.13	+6.02*
3. Resident robbery	44	2.07	2.27	7.64	1.95	+5.57*
4. Stranger rape	44	1.68	2.55	7.34	2.32	+5.66*
5. Acquaintance rape	44	2.32	3.09	7.93	2.15	+5.61*
6. Aggravated assault	44	1.50	1.92	7.34	1.98	+5.84*
7. Burglary	44	1.39	1.90	7.34	2.00	+5.95*
8. Carjacking	44	1.48	2.38	7.34	2.37	+5.86*
9. Gang crimes	44	0.70	1.30	6.61	2.21	+5.91*
10. Workplace crime	44	1.89	2.32	7.77	2.12	+5.88*
11. Family violence	44	2.61	2.54	8.34	2.15	+5.73*
12. Terrorism attacks	44	0.70	1.39	6.11	2.54	+5.41*
Overall	44	1.56		7.34		+5.78*

*t-test <.01

Female students demonstrated very low self-confidence on physical skills at the beginning of the class (Table 8). The mean scores on all 12 physical attacks ranged from 0.33 to 2.17 on a 1 to 10 scale before the class, but increased to a range of 6.46 to 8.54 at the last class. The improvement on different crime prevention ranged from 5.93 to 6.81. Students improved their self-confidence on countering different physical attacks through learning physical skills and mental strategies from lectures, reading, experiments, and practice that imitated

attacks in the real life situation. However, the self-confidence level was not equal to their actual ability to defend themselves from different types of physical attacks in real life situations.

Table 8. Changes on Women's Self-confidence on Dealing with Different Physical Attacks.

Item	n	Before learning		After learning		Change Mean
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. Kicks and punches	114	1.78	1.79	7.71	1.37	+5.93*
2. Knee/elbow strikes	114	1.36	1.42	7.60	1.55	+6.24*
3. Grabs and throws	113	1.47	1.69	7.73	1.64	+6.26*
4. Floor chokes/ holds	113	1.36	1.79	7.67	1.62	+6.31*
5. Arm-holds	114	1.57	1.55	8.38	1.31	+6.81*
6. Hair-pulls	114	2.17	1.83	8.54	1.31	+6.37*
7. Chokes	114	1.46	1.60	8.16	1.34	+6.70*
8. Bear-hugs	109	1.42	1.62	7.95	1.50	+6.53*
9. Handgun attacks	109	0.33	0.82	6.46	2.10	+6.13*
10. Knife attacks	109	0.42	0.79	6.77	1.94	+6.35*
11. Stick attacks	109	0.84	1.23	7.12	2.00	+6.28*
12. Two-on-one attacks	107	0.42	0.95	6.77	1.89	+6.35*

*t-test <.01

The results found in Table 9 indicate that the percentage of college women who have learned prevention and handling of these dangerous crimes before they took self-defense classes ranged from zero to 5.5%, and the average percent was 2.9%. After one semester of learning self-defense, the average percent of college women who learned and felt confident of preventing and handling crimes was 89.7%. The range also increased from 0-55% to 45.5%-100%.

Although there was a significant increase on perceived self-defense ability, the average rate was 90% and about 10% of college women still did not feel confident on prevention and handling of these crimes after classes. It may be because some students missed classes, and some students needed more practice to learn and practice in order to increase their confidence and ability in intermediate self-defense. Students had lowest confidence level on prevention and handling of terrorism attacks. It is understandable since terrorism is far beyond what self-defense can handle.

Table 9. Percentage of college women who felt that they can prevent and handle crimes.

Types of crime	Before class (n=73)		After class (n=77)	
	n	%	n	%
1. Street robberies	4	5.5%	76	98.7%*
2. Bank robberies	0		59	76.6%*
3. Residential robberies and burglaries	2	2.7%	75	97.4%*
4. Aggravated assaults	1	1.4%	77	100.0%*
5. Murder and attempted murders	3	4.1%	74	96.1%*
6. Forcible rapes	3	4.1%	75	97.4%*
7. Car-jacking	3	4.1%	74	96.1%*
8. Family violence	4	5.5%	75	97.4%*
9. Gang related crimes	2	2.7%	72	93.5%*
10. Kidnapping	2	2.7%	66	85.7%*
11. Terrorism attacks	0		35	45.5%*
12. Workplace violence	4	5.5%	71	92.2%*
Average		2.9%		89.7%

z-test <.05

Table 10. Percentage of College Men Who Felt they could Prevent and Handle Crimes.

Types of crime	Before class (n=82)		After class (n=42)	
	n	%	n	%
1. Street robberies	6	7.3%	42	100.0%
2. Bank robberies	3	3.7%	38	90.5%*
3. Residential robberies and burglaries	7	8.6%	41	97.6% *
4. Aggravated assaults	5	6.1%	42	100.0%*
5. Murder and attempted murders	2	2.4%	42	100.0%*
6. Forcible rapes	7	8.6%	42	100.0%*
7. Car-jacking	4	4.9%	40	95.2% *
8. Family violence	11	13.4%	41	97.6% *
9. Gang related crimes	3	3.7%	40	95.2% *
10. Kidnapping	3	3.7%	40	95.2%*
11. Terrorism attacks	3	3.7%	32	76.2% *
12. Workplace violence	9	11.0%	40	95.2% *
Average		6.3%		95.2% *

z-test <.05

The results in Table 10 indicate that the percentages of college men who have learned prevention and handling of these dangerous crimes before they took self-defense classes ranged from 2.4%-13.4%, and the average percent was 6.3%. After one semester of learning, the average percentage of college men who have learned and felt confident of preventing and handling crimes was 95.2%. The range also increased from 2.4-13.4% to 76.2%-100%. In 11 out of 12 crimes, college men showed high than 90% confidence. It seemed that college men had higher confidence in prevention and handling most crimes. About 26% more college men showed higher confidence than their female counterparts.

Perception on Benefits of Self-Defense Classes

Most students felt that self-defense education benefited their life in many different ways (Table 11). These benefits included understanding and developing mental self-defense strategies, physical self-defense skills, self-confidence, hands-on experience, and self-defense skill practice as a lifetime activity. Among 36 topics, the prevention of murder and terrorism attacks showed low scores. More research is needed to improve the teaching and learning on these two topics.

CONCLUSION

The majority of students felt that the mental self-defense learned in class was academic in nature, educational for life, valuable and useful, critical to safety, and worth of their time/tuition/effort. The majority of students also felt that the physical self-defense skills learned in classes were useful on increasing their self-defense ability, educational, enjoyable and exciting, and worth their time/effort/tuition. They also had good learning experiences, felt stronger and more confident to prevent and handle different types of violent crimes and physical attacks mentally and physically, and had fun while learning skills and got good exercise during practice. After learning self-defense for one semester, the majority of students felt that they achieved their goals for the class and that self-defense education significantly changed and benefited their life in many different ways.

Table 11. Perceptions of Students on Benefits of Taking One-semester Self-defense Class.

Subjects	Women (n=81)		Men (n=41)	
	n	%	n	%
1. Understood the role of self-defense in daily life.	66	81.5%	38	92.7%
2. Understood my own self-protection responsibility.	76	93.8%	35	83.4%
3. Understood values and rationales of self-defense.	54	66.7%	24	58.5%
4. Understood motives of crimes and triggering factors.	65	80.2%	31	75.6%
5. Learned common tricks used by attackers.	63	77.8%	33	80.5%
6. Learned prevention principles in self-defense.	75	92.6%	37	90.2%
7. Learned how to prevent and handle murders.	45	55.6%	21	51.2%
8. Learned how to prevent and handle robberies.	60	74.1%	30	73.2%
9. Learned how to prevent and handle aggravated assaults.	62	76.5%	27	65.9%
10. Learned how to prevent and handle rapes.	64	79.0%	25	61.0%
11. Learned how to prevent and handle burglaries.	64	79.0%	32	78.0%
12. Learned how to prevent and handle terrorism attacks.	32	39.5%	17	41.5%
13. Learned how to prevent and handle gang crimes.	51	63.0%	29	70.7%
14. Learned how to prevent and handle workplace crimes.	53	65.4%	24	58.5%
15. Learned how to prevent and handle family violence.	54	66.7%	28	68.3%
16. Learned how to prevent and handle conflicts.	57	70.4%	28	68.3%
17. Learned distance defense	75	92.6%	37	90.2%
18. Learned close defense	70	86.4%	37	90.2%
19. Learned grab and throw defense	68	84.0%	34	82.9%
20. Learned floor defense	67	82.7%	36	87.8%
21. Learned bearhug/hairpull/chokes/armhold defense	67	82.7%	38	92.7%
22. Learned defense on gun, knife, and stick attacks	69	85.2%	38	92.7%
23. Understood common chances of survival when facing different attacks	62	76.5%	35	85.4%
24. Understood my own chances of survival when facing different attacks	65	80.2%	33	80.5%
25. Developed hands-on experience for all attacks.	72	88.9%	37	90.2%
26. Developed overall fighting-back skills and strategies.	69	85.2%	39	95.1%
27. Developed fighting-back ability in lab situation.	72	88.9%	37	90.2%
28. Developed self-confidence in physical self-defense.	71	87.7%	37	90.2%
29. Had good exercise in self-defense training.	69	85.2%	32	78.0%
30. Developed overall knowledge in self-defense.	73	90.1%	36	87.8%
31. Helped me to be smart and tough in self-defense.	63	77.8%	32	78.0%
32. Increased awareness of self-defense in daily life.	70	86.4%	34	82.9%
33. Applied self-defense strategies and skills in daily life.	68	84.0%	35	85.4%
34. Learned self-defense strategies and skills in lifetime.	58	71.6%	25	61.0%
35. Understood martial arts to improve self-defense skills.	51	63.0%	30	73.2%
36. Understood using modern technology in self-defense.	56	69.1%	31	75.6%

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