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## **ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCES OF FLEMISH CHILDREN IN MARTIAL ARTS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

## **ANALIZA IZKUŠENJ FLAMSKIH OTROK Z BORILNIMI VEŠČINAMI: PREISKOVALNA ŠTUDIJA**

### **ABSTRACT**

To date, conclusive evidence regarding the effect of martial arts on young participants remains scarce as not all research findings point in the same direction. While some studies reported an increase of antisocial behaviour among young martial artists, others described positive social-psychological effects. It is often too difficult to make general statements with regard to the social-psychological effects of sports participation without taking into consideration the structural qualities of the sport, the participants' characteristics, the social context and the type of guidance. Therefore, an exploratory study was set up to analyse the experiences of young martial artists. This study, which is part of a larger research on children's martial arts involvement, made use of a qualitative methodology. Ninety-eight children between the age of 8 and 13 years, as well as their parents and teachers, were interviewed in-depth regarding their experiences and perceived effects of martial arts. In general, our findings seem to support the relationship between martial arts practice and positive social-psychological responses. It is concluded that analysing the experiences of children in martial arts should not only make a distinction between the wide variety of martial arts styles, but should also take into account the different approaches of various martial arts practices.

*Key words:* martial arts, children, experiences, exploratory study

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### **POVZETEK**

Do danes je le malo dokončnih dokazov o vplivu borilnih veščin na otroke, vsi raziskovalni rezultati pa tudi ne kažejo v isto smer. Medtem, ko nekatere študije govorijo o povečevanju antisocialnega vedenja med mladimi, ki se ukvarjajo z borilnimi veščinami, druge govorijo o pozitivnih socio-psiholoških učinkih. Pogosto je težko dati neke splošne izjave o socio-psiholoških učinkih športne vadbe, ne da bi pri tem vzeli v obzir strukturne lastnosti določenega športa, lastnosti udeležencev, družbeni kontekst in tipe vodenja. Zaradi tega smo izvedli preiskovalno študijo, s katero smo skušali analizirati izkušnje mladih, i se ukvarjajo z borilnimi veščinami. Študija je del širše študije vključenosti otrok v vadbo borilnih veščin, ki temelji na kvalitativni metodologiji. Izvedli smo poglobljene intervjuje o izkušnjah in zaznanih vplivih z 98 otroci v starosti med 8 in 13 let ter z njihovimi starši in učitelji. Na splošno naše ugotovitve podpirajo povezanost borilnih veščin s pozitivnimi socio-psihološkimi odzivi. Menimo, da v analizi izkušenj otrok z borilnimi veščinami ni dovolj upoštevati le razliko med različnimi tipi in stili borilnih veščin ampak tudi različne pristope pri vadbi različnih borilnih veščin.

*Ključne besede:* borilne veščine, otroci, izkušnje, preiskovalna študija

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In many European countries martial arts (e.g., judo, karate, boxing, taekwondo) have become popular. Several participation studies from France, the Netherlands, Finland and Belgium have revealed that martial arts are on the list of the ten most practised sports among children and adolescents (Ministère de la jeunesse des sports et de la vie associative, 2005; Nederlandse Hartstichting & NOC\*NSF, 2007; Tammelin, Näyhä, Hills & Järvelin, 2003; Wolt, Bosveld & Slot, 2007). Martial arts have also been ranked among the ten most practiced sports in a club context (Ministère de la jeunesse des sports et de la vie associative, 2002; van Bottenburg, Rijnen & van Sterkenburg, 2005; Warren, 2008). In addition, a study among member countries of the European Physical Education Association (EUPEA) indicated that in the majority of countries martial arts are introduced during physical education classes in secondary schools (Theeboom & De Knop, 1999).

As there is a great diversity of disciplines and styles of martial arts, several authors have attempted to establish a classification system in which a number of criteria have been used (e.g., physical, functional, cultural, historical, philosophical). For example, classification based on technical differences, such as ‘kicking and punching’ in karate versus ‘grappling’ in judo. However, by far the most popular classification system is dividing martial arts according to cultural differences, such as ‘Eastern’ versus ‘Western’ (Donohue & Taylor, 1994). While some authors (e.g., Cynarski & Litwiniuk, 2006; Förster, 1986; Hsu, 1986) revealed that Eastern martial arts (e.g., aikido, judo, etc.) have a highly developed teaching tradition and philosophy which vary fundamentally from Western martial arts such as boxing and wrestling, Dohouue and Taylor (1994) indicated that there are no real differences between Eastern and Western martial arts.

Another way which is used to classify martial arts is to look at the basic philosophies, aims and methods that are used, such as ‘Traditional’ versus ‘Modern’ martial arts. While this can be found between two different styles, it can also be different within the same style. Theeboom, De Knop and Wylleman (1995) extended this classification and categorized martial arts into three approaches. The traditional martial arts were placed under the traditional approach, while the modern martial arts were classified under the sporting and the efficiency approach. The traditional approach emphasises unity and coordination between internal (e.g., spiritual and mental) and external (e.g., physical) elements. In the sporting approach, martial arts are primarily regarded as sports with positive effects on the physical, mental and social state of its participants and with technical restrictions according to specific competition rules. Finally, the efficiency approach emphasizes the efficient application of techniques in a real fight. Martial arts in this approach are mainly practiced for self-defence reasons.

This last approach entails an evolution towards more efficient fighting styles in which a variety of potentially dangerous techniques from different martial arts styles are combined in the so-called mixed martial arts competitions. This trend is also described as ‘desportization’ (van Bottenburg & Heilbron, 2006), ‘brutalization’ and ‘decivilization’ (Förster, 1986) of martial arts. This evolution not only entailed more medical concerns (e.g., Buse, 2006), it also led to a moral debate about the social acceptability of such competitions (Sheard, 1997; Carr, 1998; Parry, 1998; Steenbergen, 2004).

It is in this context that reference is often made to the influence of martial arts on young participants. Some studies reported that martial arts practice would lead to an increase of antisocial

behaviour (e.g., Delva-Tauiilili, 1995; Reynes & Lorant, 2002) and to an increase in aggressiveness among the participating youngsters (e.g., Endresen & Olweus, 2005). On the other hand, martial arts practice has been associated with possible social-psychological benefits (e.g., Cox, 1993). For example, some authors described that young participants experienced increased self-care and self-awareness (Wall, 2005), a higher level of self-regulation (Lakes & Hoyt, 2004), an increased psychological well-being (Kuramoto, 2006) and a decreased violence level (Smith, Twemlow & Hoover, 1999, Zivin et al., 2001). In general, the abovementioned studies do not provide an opportunity to make a general statement, since not all research findings are pointing in the same direction. Hence, conclusive evidence regarding the effect of martial arts on young participants remains scarce.

However, as Patricksson (1995) indicated, sport is not good or bad, but it has the potential to generate both positive and negative outcomes. It is important to know the circumstances and the conditions in which sports are practiced. In this context, Shields and Bredemeier (1995) indicated that it is often too difficult to make general statements about the social-psychological outcomes of sport participation, without considering the structural qualities of the sport itself, the participants' characteristics, the social context and the type of guidance that is used.

For example, with regard to the structural qualities of the sport itself, it is important to mention that there are many kinds of martial arts styles which have a great variety in their technical characteristics (e.g., 'grappling' in judo, 'kicking and punching' in karate, ...).

As mentioned before, a number of studies investigating the effect of martial arts on children mostly took only one martial arts style into account (e.g., taekwondo: Bell & Chang, 2002; judo: Lamarre & Nosanchuk, 1999; aikido: Delva-Tauiilili, 1995). Some authors made use of participants of different martial arts, but pooled them together into one group and compared them with a non-participation group (students who did not participate in a martial art at any moment) (e.g., Endresen et al., 2005; Nosanchuk & MacNeil, 1989). In these cases no account was taken of the structural qualities of the sports. Each martial art has its own qualities which can lead to different effects. For example, Reynes and Lorant (2001) found that young judokas scored higher on the Anger scale, whilst they did not find any evidence of increased anger for karatekas.

Other studies in which the effects of martial arts training has been studied, have used a classification in which modern training (e.g., boxing, wrestling) is compared with traditional training (e.g., aikido, wushu) (e.g., Najafi 2003, Nosanchuk et al., 1989; Trulson, 1986). In the literature, the latter is defined as that which concentrates on meditative aspects, stressing self-control, conflict avoidance, respect for others, kata training, and the study of philosophy (Nosanchuk et al., 1989 & Trulson, 1986). Modern training is seen as stressing the sport and competitive aspects, limiting the teaching to the physical aspects only (Donohue et al., 1994). In general, these studies suggest that the traditional training has a profound psychological effect on the students, while the modern training has little effect or may increase aggressiveness. As mentioned before, this classification system is partly based on the method that is used during training. However, it does not only take the structural qualities into account, but rather the type of guidance since the teacher determines the method that will be used. Shields and Bredemeier (1995) indicated that the teaching style is also expected to play an important role with regard to possible social-psychological outcomes in sports participants. The way in which martial arts can be learned and practised can be categorized into three different approaches: traditional, sporting, and efficiency approach (see above) (Theeboom et al., 1995). However, these three approaches are not only

determined by the type of guidance, the aim of the teacher, the kind of exercises and the structural qualities of the martial arts also have an important role.

Furthermore, several authors have indicated that a teacher in martial arts could have a distinct influence. For example, Jones, MacKay and Peters (2006) claimed that the 'style' of the instructor is of paramount importance for enhancing student motivation to participate. They indicated that the importance of the instructors' teaching and communication style implies that even for the same style of martial art, practitioner responses will alter dependant on the attributes of the instructor. Lantz (2002) stated that the character and integrity of the martial arts instructor is of 'primary' importance in how martial arts can enhance family development. Finally, Cox (1993) reported that a variation in the quality of instruction (on a philosophical as well as on a technical level) could strongly influence the outcome of martial arts practice.

Next to the structural qualities of the sport itself and the type of guidance, Shields and Bredemeier (1995) also referred to a third influential factor, namely the social context. This comprises two different aspects. Firstly, there are the influences of the direct environment which can be taken to refer to different groups involved in the sport participation of children. Coaches, teammates parents, officials, and spectators all affect the nature of the sport experience and to a large extent determine whether this experience is a positive one (Guivernau & Duda, 2002; Lee, 1993). However, the family environment may be the most influential and the most important (Horn & Horn, 2007). In this context, a reference could be made to the simplified version of the expectancy-value model developed by Eccles and her colleagues. This model begins with parents' belief and values (e.g., attitudes regarding sport ethics, expectancies for child's performance, etc.), which determine the type of behaviours that parents exhibit toward their child. The parents' behaviours, in turn, affect the child's development of certain beliefs and value systems (attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, etc.) that ultimately determine the child's performance and behaviour in sport contexts (Horn & Horn, 2007). Although the involvement of parents in their children's sporting career falls on a continuum ranging from under-involvement through moderate involvement to over-involvement, only the moderate involvement has a positive outcome for the child (Lee, 1993).

The second aspect is the social context as seen in a wider perspective. As mentioned above, parents have an important influence on the sport behaviour of their children. However, it is not only the beliefs and values of the parents, but also the different social variables, such as the socio-economic status, that are important when examining the effects of sport on participants. This is in line with Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Bourdieu (1984) referred to a link between someone's social class position and their orientation to their body. The dominant classes would have a tendency towards an intrinsic orientation to the body, while the working classes are believed to have a more instrumental orientation to the body. This could indicate that social class position could have an influence on the specific choices of sports. For example, Mennesson (2000) referred to a link between a working class orientation and boxing. Interestingly, the analysis showed that two types of identities were found. A key factor in explaining these differences related to the contrasting atmospheres of the clubs in which they fight. In other words, rather than focussing on the differences between sports, emphasis could be put on the variation in the way participants experience their sport.

This could be linked with the next influential factor that has to be taken into account when investigating outcomes in participants, namely the characteristics of the participants.

Wacquant (1995), one of Bourdieu's students, conducted research amongst boxers and stated that it is important to take into account how boxers experience their own sport. Anthonissen and Dortants (2006) came to similar conclusions in their research. They examined the way in which talented boxers experience and identify themselves with their sport. On the basis of these identification processes and experiences, they classified boxers into three groups: inquisitives, warriors and comrades. Although, all three groups focus their attention on respect and self-discipline, they do so in ways and to a degree which can lead to very different identification with boxing. In line with this, Wisse (2007) indicated in her study that it is important to know the participation motive that leads to starting a martial art when someone examines the effects of martial arts training on participants. She argued that these motives could be different for each martial artist and could have an influence on the meaning they give to their martial arts.

In conclusion, to make general statements about the social-psychological outcomes of sport participation, several influential factors have to be taken into account. It is the lack of insight into this topic in martial arts that leads to an exploratory study being conducted. In the present study the views and experiences of young martial artists will be analysed, along with information gathered from their parents and trainers. On the basis of the results, some hypotheses will be postulated in which the four influential factors of Shields and Bredemeier (1995) will be taken into account. Young martial artists are interviewed about a wide range of themes. Giving consideration to the social context and the type of guidance, the parents and teachers of the children are also interviewed. Finally, to take the structural qualities of the sports into account, three types of martial arts (judo, aikido and kick-/thaiboxing) are chosen.

## 2. METHOD

A pilot study was set up as part of a larger research on children's martial arts involvement. The study was set up to analyse experiences of young martial artists through qualitative research methodology. The subjects of this study came from 10 sports clubs in Flanders, Belgium. Ninety-eight children between the age of 8 and 13 years were interviewed in-depth regarding their participation motives, their experiences and (perceived) effects in martial arts. Also 68 parents were asked to fill in a questionnaire to find out more about the (possible) effect that they may have noticed on their children, the children's social background and their views on the training sessions and teacher. Finally, the teachers (15) of the children were interviewed to determine the characteristics of the specific martial art, the aim and the approach used by the teacher.

The interviews with the children, which ranged in duration from 25' to 30', took place before, after or during practice in a quiet and separate room. Self-administered questionnaires were provided to parents via their children and were handed out personally to teachers.

Three different martial arts were included. These three types of martial arts were compared to determine whether they would have other influences on the participants and whether the characteristics of the children who choose for a specific martial art would be different. To provide the best opportunity of observing differences, two extremes were selected. On the one hand a 'hard' martial art was chosen, namely kick-/thaiboxing. These martial arts are full-contact sports and are characterized by kicking and punching. No distinction is made between kick-/thaiboxing since they bear many resemblances. This also allows a larger number of children to be interviewed. Although, there is a distinct variation in the applied competition rules, in

general the difference between kick-/thaiboxing is that the latter allows kicks below the belt and strikes with knees and elbows (Delp, 2005). At the other extreme a 'soft' martial art was selected, namely aikido. This martial art finds its origin in jiu-jitsu and strives for a harmonious development between mind and body (Weinmann, 1997). Aikido is characterized by throws, unarmed, pinning and joint locking techniques (Theeboom & Van Stiphout, 1993). Finally, judo is the most well-known oriental martial art in the West. The competitive aspect in this sport is very important. Judo is a derived form of jiu-jitsu and is characterized by unarmed, grappling and throwing techniques (Theeboom et al., 1993). The collected data in the exploratory study were statistically analysed using chi-square and Mann-Whitney tests.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 1.3 Children

##### 1.3.1 Participation motives

In general, a majority of the children (80.2%) in this study indicated that they practise a martial art because they want to be able to defend themselves on the street. Looking at differences between the three martial arts, it is noteworthy that kick-/thaiboxing are more occupied with their physical appearance. Data showed that they were significantly more concerned with becoming more muscular compared to judokas and aikidokas ( $\chi^2 = 18.84$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

##### 1.3.2 Teacher

Results indicated that there is a positive attitude of the children with regard to the general opinion they have of their teacher. All the children described their teacher as 'good' (17.7%) or 'very good' (82.3%).

However, findings seem to indicate that the contact between the teacher and the young martial artists is different between the three martial arts. The most remarkable differences were noticed between kick-/thaiboxing and aikidokas. The latter were more positive about their teacher than the former. They found their teacher funny and sympathetic, while kick-/thaiboxing indicated significantly more that their teacher often punishes when they break the rules ( $U = 283.0$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $r = -0.37$ ) and that he is very strict ( $U = 277.0$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $r = -0.42$ ).

Finally, kick-/thaiboxing indicated significantly more than aikidokas, that their teacher often points out that they are not allowed to apply the techniques outside the martial arts school (e.g., on the street or at school) ( $U = 324.5$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $r = -0.26$ ).

##### 1.3.3 Effects

It is interesting to note that several positive changes as a result of practicing martial arts were reported by the children. Significantly more kick-/thaiboxing (90.0%) than aikidokas (51.7%) indicated that they have more muscles than before ( $U = 322.0$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $r = -0.33$ ). As mentioned earlier, this can be explained by the fact that kick-/thaiboxing seem to focus more on an external effect.

A majority of the young martial artists of this study (77.1%) felt safer on the street since they started practising a martial art. However a difference in response is observed between the martial

arts studied. Significantly more kick-and thaiboxers (90.0%) than aikidokas (68.5%) indicated they feel safer on the street through martial art practice ( $U = 380.5$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $r = -0.25$ ).

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that 64.6% of all children in this study indicated that they let defy themselves less rapidly and 75.0% indicated that they have more control over themselves than before. However, no significant differences were detected between the three martial arts groups studied.

#### *1.3.4 Social contact*

There is an indication that kick-/thaiboxing are more extrovert than judokas and aikidokas. Children were asked how many children of the martial arts school they talk with outside the school. Results showed that kick-/thaiboxing have significantly more contact with children outside than judokas and aikidokas ( $\chi^2 = 19.24$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). One fifth of the kick-/thaiboxing in this study (20.0%) indicated they talk with more than 5 children, while only 9.7% of the judokas and 2.9% of the aikidokas said they have an occasional conversation with more than 5 children.

#### *1.3.5 Self-defence*

In order to see how children react in certain circumstances, children in this study were asked what they would do if someone insults them. Findings seem to indicate that kick-/thaiboxing react faster than judokas and aikidokas. A significant difference was found between the three martial arts ( $\chi^2 = 13.20$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Most remarkable was that 43.3% of the kick-/thaiboxing would answer back, whereas only 16.1% of the judokas and 14.3% of the aikidokas indicated this. More than half of the judokas (54.8%) and two fifth of the aikidokas (42.9%) would do nothing, whereas only one third of the kick-/thaiboxing (33.3%) indicated they would do nothing.

### **1.4 Parents**

#### *1.4.1 Origin*

With regard to the origin of parents, differences were noticed between both sexes. Significantly more mothers of kick-/thaiboxing (35.0%) originated from another country (outside Belgium), compared to mothers of judokas (9.1%) and aikidokas (3.8%) ( $\chi^2 = 12.54$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Interestingly, no such significant differences were found between the fathers.

#### *1.4.2 Education and profession*

While no significant differences were noticed with regard to the parents' education and profession, some interesting remarks for the mothers can be made. Mothers of aikidokas and judokas showed a positive skew towards both a higher education and a more professional background than mothers of kick- /thaiboxers.

No difference in education, or profession was found for the fathers of the children in the three martial arts groups studied.

#### *1.4.3 Training/teacher*

The parents that were interviewed during this study were very positive about the teachers. In total, 20.6% referred to them as 'good' and 77.9% even as 'very good'. They also described training practices as 'good' (36.8%) or 'very good' (63.2%).

Findings also reported differences in views among parents regarding the most important aim the teachers strived for. A significant difference was found between the three martial arts. More than half of the parents of aikidokas (53.8%) indicated that the teacher strives especially for pedagogical oriented aims. Fewer parents of kick-/thaiboxers and judokas mentioned this (respectively 35.0% and 13.6%). Almost two thirds of the parents of judokas (63.6%) indicated that learning and controlling the techniques was the most important aim of the teacher. Only 34.6% of the parents of aikidokas and 20.0% of kick-/thaiboxing indicated this.

#### *1.4.4 Effects*

It is interesting to note that two thirds of the parents (67.6%) said that their child has changed through the practice of a martial art. Amongst other things, these changes related to increased confidence (38.3%), being less afraid (18.3%), having more discipline (10.0%) or a better physical condition, more muscles (10.0%). No significant differences were found between judo, aikido and kick-/thaiboxing.

### **1.5 Teachers**

Next, we consider the opinions of the teachers who participated in this study. The results cannot be generalized, as only a limited number of teachers were interviewed. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, only the most striking findings will be reported.

#### *1.5.1 Involvement with the children*

Similar to findings for the children, the data from the questionnaire of the teachers also revealed that the contact between teacher and children appears to vary according to the type of martial art. Results showed that aikido teachers consider themselves more as educators than judo and kick-/thaiboxing teachers. They appear also to be more involved with the children outside the martial arts school, while judo and kick-/thaiboxing teachers seem to be more achievement-oriented than aikido teachers.

Data also showed that kick-/thaiboxing teachers are more severe, give more punishments when someone breaks the rules and are less tolerant than teachers of judo and aikido.

Aikido teachers as well as kick-/thaiboxing teachers indicated that their lessons are aimed at a spiritual and mental development, while less judo teachers reported this.

All teachers indicated that they consider it as very important that children have fun during the training, that they learn how to work together and that they have respect for others.

#### *1.5.2 Effects*

Similar to findings from the children and parents, most of the teachers reported experiencing positive changes through the practice of martial arts. They indicated that children become calmer, more self-confident, show more respect for others and learnt how to deal with other children. However, no significant differences were found between the three martial arts.

## **4. Discussion**

Martial arts are often regarded as a mystery. While antagonists emphasise medical and ethical problems, advocates mostly point to positive social-psychological outcomes of martial arts



involvement. To date, only a few studies have been conducted in which views and experiences of those directly involved in martial arts (e.g., participants and teachers) have been analysed (e.g., Burke, 1998; Theeboom, 2001; Theeboom, De Knop & Vertonghen, in print). It is important to learn more about participants' own experiences. Steenbergen (2004) for example, pointed out that in the discussion on the social acceptability of boxing, the actual participants are rarely heard about their own sport.

The aim of the present study was to analyse the views and experiences among children involved in martial arts, by interviewing the children themselves, their parents and teachers and compare the results between three different martial arts (judo, aikido and kick-/thaiboxing). As mentioned before, this is an exploratory study, which is part of a larger research. On the basis of the results some hypotheses can be postulated that will be investigated in further research. Also four influential factors as identified by Shields and Bredemeier (1995), as described in the introduction, will be taken into account.

With regard to the structural qualities of the sport and the social context a reference could be made to Bourdieu's habitus theory, which indicated that social class position could have an influence on the specific choices of sports. Findings of the present study revealed little differences between judo, aikido and kick-/thaiboxing with regard to the social background of the mothers. It can be expected that a relation would exist between the social background of young participants and the type of martial art they practice. In view of this, the first hypothesis can be formulated: "Lower social class youth more often choose harder martial arts, while higher social class youth more often choose softer martial arts."

In further research, the origin of the participants should be taken into account. Immigrant families have a lower social status (Van Robaey, Vranken, Perrin & Martiniello, 2007) and it could be that they participate more in certain martial arts. Furthermore, in view of the fact that immigrants live predominately in cities (Timmerman, Van der Heyden, Ben Abdeljelil & Geets, 2000), it is important to consider the location (e.g., within a city or municipality) of the sports club. If possible, the locality of the clubs for the three martial arts should be divided up proportionally.

Based on the first hypothesis, the structural qualities of the sport can also be linked with the characteristics of the participants. It can be expected that the vision that young martial artists have on their corporality differs according to the kind of martial art that they practice. Moreover, the findings of this pilot study showed that the most remarkable differences were noticed between aikidokas and kick-/thaiboxing (the latter will react faster when someone insults them, they are more concerned about their appearance, etc.). Bourdieu (1984) also indicated that the dominant classes would be more intrinsically orientated towards the body, while the working class would be more instrumentally orientated towards the body. Building on the first hypothesis and on Bourdieu's theory, the second hypothesis can be formulated: "Children participating in a harder martial art will be more inclined to an instrumental (external) orientation to the body, while children practising a softer martial art will be more inclined to an intrinsic (internal) orientation to their body."

In further research it would be interesting to combine qualitative methodology with data collection through the use of a number of standardized psycho-metric instruments. For example, the aggressiveness and the self-confidence of the participants can be measured, enabling the characteristics of the children to be better determined.

The results of this study have shown that not only a distinction should be made between the kind of martial arts, but that the different 'approaches' of martial arts practice should also be taken into account (e.g., sporting, traditional, efficiency). This is in line with the concept of Shields and Bredemeier (1995) which indicates that consideration of the type of guidance is important when investigating the social-psychological effects of martial arts practice. This leads to the third hypothesis, namely: "The traditional and sporting approach of martial arts practice will have more positive social-psychological effects than the efficiency approach."

In further research, martial arts teachers will be observed during a training session and a checklist will be developed which can be used to determine the approach used by the teacher. The checklist will focus on questions such as: Is kata a part of the training?; How important is competition?; Is the emphasize of the training on mental and spiritual development, self-defence or competition?; How is the relationship between the teacher and the participant?; ...

In the light of the approach used by the teacher, it is noteworthy that results of this study revealed that the spiritual and mental development of children was very important for aikido as well as for kick-/thaiboxing teachers. This was unexpected, because kick-/thaiboxing is a hard martial art where competition is very important, whereas aikido is a soft martial art and strives for a harmonious development between mind and body. A possible explanation could be that aikido teachers could interpret 'spiritual and mental development' as paying attention to the eastern tradition, while kick-/thaiboxing teachers could consider it as a form of concentration, having control, etc. Again, more research is needed regarding this matter.

The present exploratory study already seems to provide some first impressions possibly indicating that several factors need to be taken into consideration when trying to determine the social-psychological effects of martial arts practice among children.

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