

Health as the most important indicator of the „Do” conception in Taekwon-Do

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Abstract

Care about health should determine the proceedings in both spheres of the development: physical and mental. All actions undertaken by the national associations and Taekwon-Do instructors should be directed to the widely understood improvement of the health conditions and physical fitness. That activity should be demonstrated among others through the undertaking of actions with the aim to promulgate the attitudes directed to the physical activity, pro-community and health-promoting attitudes as well as reduction of pathological behaviours.

In the part referring to the physical activity the actions should be directed among others to the health aspects such as: properly adjusted training burdens, functional training, diet (nutrition), increasing of the body's immunity against the illnesses through the immunization against outer conditions so called: “hardening of the body”. On the other hand in the mental part the activity should be directed among others to the health-promoting behaviours, counteractions of passive forms of spending free time, health nutrition, rest, fight against addictions (drugs, cigarettes and alcohol), proceeding according to the pro-ecological model of life and others.

If health will be the determinant characteristic of our martial art, it will become its best advertisement. Taekwon-Do will become much more utilitarian while dominating the other advantages of practicing such as versatile development, effectiveness and implementation of the high ethic standards etc.

Keywords: health, quality of life, conception of the „Do” in Taekwon-Do

Introduction

Gen. Choi Hong Hi – the Founder of Taekwon-Do, while explaining the name of his martial art, always underlined the inseparability of teaching in the mental and physical sphere [2, 3, 4]. Two elements of Taekwon-Do name, „Taekwon” and „Do”, should have equivalent meaning in education and practice of it. However, he related the teaching of the “Do” to the general effective moral values described in five tenets [3, p. 13-14] and partly in the section about the moral culture in which he mentions building of the tenacity and vigour through the cold showers and baths or exercising on the snow-covered ground in bare feet [2,3]. Next to the Taekwon-Do tenets he advises also implementation of patriotism education by travelling to historical places or contributing labour to the community. In the section on *Taekwon-Do and Physical Fitness* Gen. Choi writes also about its influence on health and physical fitness [3, p. 37-38].

During the 1st ITF Convention which was held on 6th – 12th September 2011 in Benidorm, Spain, the participants received a training script entitled: *”Teaching the Do focus on the Tenets of Taekwon-Do Level I”* laid down by Prof. Janel Gautier and Ms. Joliette Tran. Authors focus themselves solely on Taekwon-Do tenets and do not refer to the practitioners' health [5]. They cite the guidelines concluded in the publications of the Taekwon-Do Founder Gen. Choi Hong Hi and to the columns written by Master Tran Trieu Quan.

The problems of the “Do” conception were the subjects of Master Tran’s deliberations [9, 10, 11, 12]. His conception complemented the information and recommendation contained in publications of Gen. Choi. For the first time he referred to the definition of happiness through the practice of Taekwon-Do. He related this definition directly to the quality of life and underlined four aspects of Taekwon-Do development as:

a sport – for physical conditioning (healthy body),

a martial art – for self-defense and good spirit (safety and healthy mind),

a way of life – for a well-balanced life (happiness),

a tool for social development – to build a better world (compassion and devotion). [11, p. 5]

This conception significantly extends the range of the „Do” by not limiting it only to the moral aspects. Author used the motto: “The Taekwon-Do way of life = a well-balanced life” or “The Taekwon-Do way of life = a healthy mind in a healthy body”.

That fits to the currently observed three areas of Taekwon-Do practice, in which it is practiced for self-defense, health and upbringing purposes [16]. These areas are in concordance with the factors determining martial arts identity [17], where a model of pragmatic, educational and utilitarian training singles out.

Pragmatic training model comprises exercises under the notation of “I practice because I want to be fit”. In other words this particular model follows the mission of physical education which aim, in its broad sense, is a need of a cyclical physical activity. Especially important element in the physical activity is the ability to prevent injuries. Contemporary studies research the issue of martial art not only in terms of self-defense, sport or spare-time activity, but also in relation to therapy [18]. Martial art therapy may aid treatment of numerous medical disorders, for instance it proved to be helpful when monitoring behavior of children with ADHD.

The example of Taekwon-Do educational influence was proven by the experiment carried out by Trulson [18]. He showed that the traditional martial art training significantly reduces “juvenile delinquency attitude”. He contended that as a result of following such a training model the practitioners in terms of statistics, displayed reduced aggressiveness and anxiety levels whereas they showed more self-confidence, responsibility, tolerance and proved respect to traditional values to a greater extent.

Practising strikes during training sessions is a mean of developing self-discipline which consists in respecting the etiquette of the training hall, the rules of respectful fighting and the rival himself. Moreover, it makes it possible to recognise strong and weak points of one’s character and personality such as bravery against cowardice, prowess against aggressiveness, pride versus vanity, etc. [17]

As the result of Taekwon-Do development, increasingly higher level of practitioners’ technical skills and regularly enhanced training burdens, it is significant that the implementation of pro-healthy attitudes have to be done in both spheres of practice: physical and mental, and care about health should become the most important indicator of the „Do” conception.

Quality of life index

In the literature there are many definitions of the quality of life, what as a consequence leads to the multi-faceted perspective of the problem. Plurality of the definitions results from the fact, that the quality of life is an interdisciplinary conception, which is being investigated by many researchers from various fields such as medicine, psychology, sociology, philosophy or social economy.

In 2005 the British magazine “The Economist” has developed a methodology of indicating the *Quality of life index* reflecting the level of life-satisfaction survey across individual countries with the use of higher number of factors than in the traditional method where only the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) indicator and the level of the GDP indicator for one inhabitant was considered. [15]

To this day it was not possible to determine a homogeneous definition of the quality of life [1,5,7,8,13,14] due to his pluralistic character. Nevertheless, almost in all publications referring to that subject, the health and physical fitness take a high position on the listing as one of the most significant indicators. Taekwon-Do, if practised according to the “Do” conception, where the health is the paramount factor, through its virtues will contribute to improvement of practitioners’ health and physical fitness and at the same time to the enhancement of their quality of life.

While referring to the quality of life index, the hierarchy of needs defined by the American psychologist A.H. Maslow [19] should be mentioned. It assumes that the need lower in the hierarchy (and at the same time more important) is the one, that must be met completely or partly, before the individual will strongly desire (or focus motivation upon) the secondary need on higher level and with relatively less important meaning. Maslow singles out few groups of needs, which can build a pyramid. According to his opinion the human’s behaviour results from the desire to meet the needs and not only the momentary emotional states. The needs, understood as lack of something, causing at the same time the striving to meet this deficit, are the mechanism controlling human behaviours. Those needs build a hierarchic system. The physical needs (food, drinking, heating, shelter, rest) belong to the most basic ones. In the system on the next level is the need of security which covers also the health protection. Following that there are the social needs (associated to the relationships with other humans). The higher level covers the need of recognition, self-confidence, self-realization and optimistic look into the future, thanks to what we perceive our potential and we are just happy. It is worth mentioning, that all other than physiological needs may be realized through the appropriate Taekwon-Do training.

General postulates of introducing training sessions that take account of health as the most important indicator of “Do” conception in Taekwon-Do

Strategic task of International Taekwon-Do Federation is to put efforts and make instructors aware of the importance of practising this martial art through training sessions that improve health and physical fitness of practitioners. Since it concerns two aspects of Taekwon-Do, both physical and mental, an appropriate process of training course must be prepared for every group that takes into account:

- a. in physical training:
 - every training sessions must be preceded by a warm-up, which prepares the body to physical exercise; relaxation exercises and stretching are a must at the end of classes in order to reduce the risk of injuries,
 - dangerous exercises that are not part of functional training, like those aggravating defects of body posture or straining joints and back must be eliminated,
 - instructors must influence their practitioners so that they do not undertake challenges, if they are not ready or prepared yet, like too early sparring, too complicated techniques in terms of coordination, breaking objects like boards, bricks or tiles,

- a proper rest and regeneration after physical effort must be considered,
- training burdens and equipment must be adjusted to practitioners’ age, sex, abilities and experience,
- instructors must prevent a fatigue, that leads to new injuries,
- practitioners should toughen the body on regular basis (sauna, cold showers, outdoor training sessions);

b. in mental training:

- behaviour according to pro-healthy values like: good nutrition, proper clothes, hygienic lifestyle should be promoted,
- training should be responsible, without exposing practitioners and others to injuries,
- taking care of own safety, as well as safety of others,
- not indulging in addictions,
- preventing forms of passive pastimes and civilization diseases (sedentary lifestyle, addiction to technologies etc.),
- developing interest through tourism trips, exploring historical and social knowledge,
- strengthening social relations, getting to know new people and their cultures,
- participating in charities and social work, taking part in club’s activities.

Summary

The growing number of my friends from Taekwon-Do community faces health problems. Many of them underwent different kinds of medical treatments (on joints or heart) or complain about chronic pains, e.g. back pains. Moreover, many practitioners admit that they have some contusions or injuries. We cannot state clearly without further studies, whether it is a result of an inappropriate training or rather the process of aging is responsible. However, we can be sure that some injuries are consequences of training sessions, e.g. bruising sustained during sport competitions or so called fierce sparring on training sessions. The pilot research carried out for the purposes of this thesis has shown, that the silliness of others as well as individual irresponsible behaviour account for a large percentage of injuries sustained during training sessions (Figure 1).

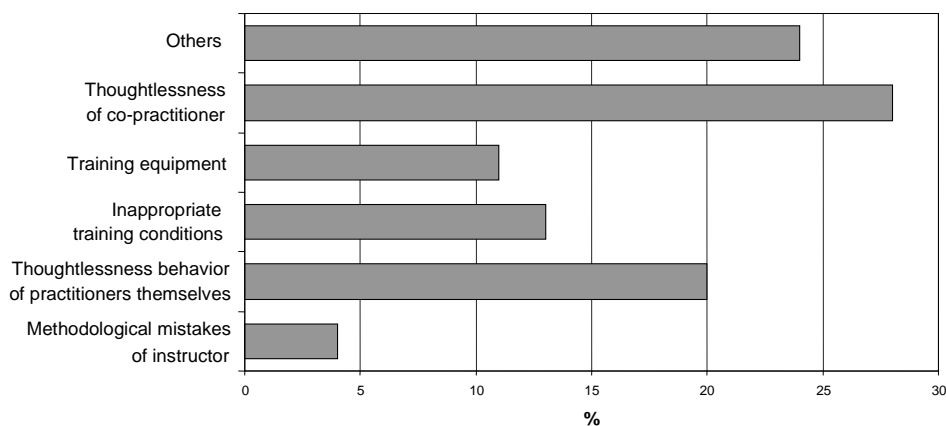


Figure 1. Causes of injuries sustained during Taekwon-Do training sessions

During training sessions, bruising and abrasions (Figure 2), i.e. minor injuries, that may still cause health discomfort, occur more often.

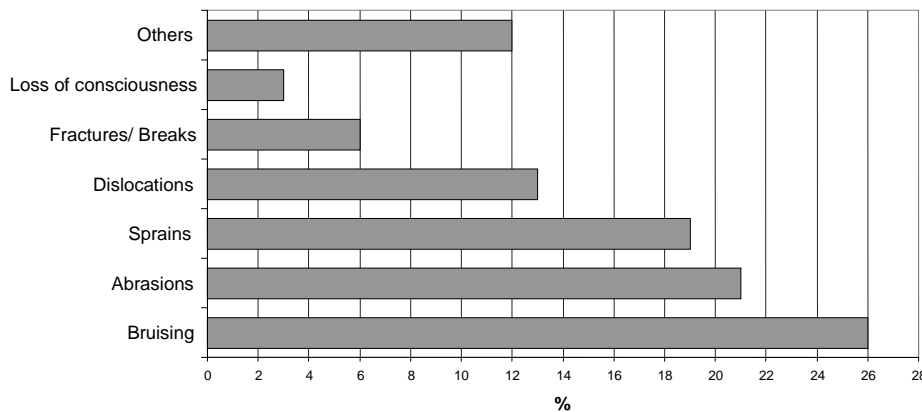


Figure 2. Types of injuries registered during Taekwon-Do training sessions.

The comparison between the incidences of injuries sustained during Taekwon-Do competitions with other martial arts (Table 1) indicates that we should pay more attention to appropriate education in this regard.

Table 1. Incidence of injuries in different martial arts (1000 athlete-exposures, 95%CI)

Sport	Men	Women
Taekwondo (WTF)	79.9 (53.4–106.4)	25.3 (3.2–82.4)
Judo	115.1 (90.9–139.3)	--
Judo	51.3 (1.0–101.6)	125.0 (107.7–142.3)
Karate	168.9 (144.1–193.6)	158.5 (120.0–197.1)
Karate	65.5 (43.1–87.8)	--
Karate	135.6 (105.9–165.3)	--
Karate	157.7 (123.6–191.8)	80.4 (27.9–132.9)
Taekwon-Do (ITF)	98.4 (67.4 – 128,1)	

Therefore it should be assumed, that practising Taekwon-Do inappropriately may lead to health damage or loss. We should make every effort to minimise the risk of sustaining injuries during training sessions through the applications of the above mentioned recommendations. The advantages of practicing must considerably exceed the potential of injury.

Simultaneously with ameliorating Taekwon-Do training sessions towards improving health, we should also improve the safety during sport competitions. The objective is to make health notion in Taekwon-Do not only an empty advertising slogan but a fact, which is very real to achieve.

Reasonable practicing will lead to better health and physical fitness. We cannot throw away the legacy of Taekwon-Do by limiting its practicing only for the sport competitions, which aims at achieving the best result in the shortest period, regardless of the costs, including health consequences.

Taekwon-Do has a chance to become an exclusive martial art, if we add the health factor to the “Do” conception. If we keep on promoting Taekwon-Do through health, it will become even better product, which may lead to bigger attention and demand, thus to further development and increased reach. The current trends of being healthy and fit enable us to promote Taekwon-Do as one of the tools for getting or staying healthier, so we should develop in this direction as well.

As a conclusion, I would like to cite the recommendations that are directed to teachers in Canada [20] and are applicable also in Taekwon-Do.

Professional Practice

1. Teachers use their professional knowledge and understanding of pupils, curriculum, legislation, teaching practices, and classroom management strategies to promote the learning and achievement of their pupils;
2. Teachers communicate effectively with pupils, parents, and colleagues;
3. Teachers conduct ongoing assessment of pupils' progress, evaluate their achievement, and report results to pupils;
4. Teachers adapt and refine their teaching practices through continuous learning and reflection, using a variety of sources and resources;
5. Teachers use appropriate technology in their teaching practices and related professional responsibilities.

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