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## Self-defence for people with visual impairments

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## THEORY OF SELF-DEFENCE

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#### Abstract

**Aim.** Self-defence is a frequently discussed topic. However, when it comes to persons with some disabilities it is a neglected area by most experts on self-defence. This paper represents an effort to fill this gap. The aim is to assess the mental condition of disabled people before the course as the starting point for the creation of a methodology of self-defence course, which we subsequently evaluate. **Method.** We use the questionnaire to determine the degree of self-confidence in self-defence situations such as prevention, verbal conflict and physical assault. 19 persons were involved in the questionnaire survey, five of them were sightless and four short sighted. They were given some statements in each section of the questionnaire, with which they agree or not in the scale from 1 to 6. **Result.** Most of the tested subjects stay alert during common situations, but they do not feel confident in their reactions to a verbal or physical attack. All of the tested subjects are really scared of given situations. In stressful situations a person usually uses Observe-Orient-Decide-Act loop. Regarding visual disabilities, the person is not able to check visually what he or she can hear. This can produce fear from the unknown. The fear is contra-productive to optimal defence solution.

**Conclusion.** A self-defence course for people with visual disabilities should be focused on the early recognition of danger, verbal defence training and the use of physical contact.

#### Introduction

When it comes to self-defence in general, it is important to consider and judge situations where an attack is present before the defence. This may be considered a solution to situations in which there is a clash of interests. Self-defence is, in this sense, a way of solving conflicts. Self-defence can be both a verbal and psychological conflict as well as resolutions with the use of force and physical contact. Self-defence is therefore often associated with some sort of combat operations. Therefore, if self-defence is considered to be a system, then it also includes combat operations. Self-defence systems are mostly eclectic, which means that they are derived from different sources. At the same time, they must be individually tailored to suit all individuals according to their physical and psychological dispositions. In fact, technique is not as important, but the manner of its application is [Vít, Reguli, Čihounková 2013].

Our approach is adopted from Boyd [1987] Observe-Orient-Decide-Act loop, which is widely used in the context of defensive tactic [Luessen 2003]. For visually impaired phases Observe and Orient are the most decisive. From a psychological point of view, self-defence develops mental endurance, it shapes self-esteem, self-confidence and generally leads to changes in life attitudes towards serenity [Fojtík, Michalov 1996]. Mental toughness can be also enhanced by practising combat sports and martial arts [Kasum, Strašo, Nastasić-Stošković 2011; Gutiérrez-Santiago *et al.* 2013].

When considering conflict situations, it is generally known that people with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence than their non-disabled counterparts [Konarska 2007]. Disabled people fear an attack, they do not feel safe on the streets or even in their houses. This fear is particularly widespread among people with limited mobility or sight impairment. One notable consequence of this fear is a higher risk of isolation, because the people

themselves are afraid to go out without assistance [Kane 2008]. According to figures published by the RNIB charity in 2012, people with sight loss were twice as likely as those with another type of impairment to have experienced discrimination and three times more likely than counterparts with no impairment to have been the victim of a hate crime [BBC 2014].

There is no single form of self-defence for sighted people nor for their blind counterparts. In many countries there are self-defence courses offered for the visually impaired. It is usually part of counselling centres or special courses of martial arts or sports which is adapted to the visually impaired. For example, in the USA there are several self-defence training programmes created for people with visual impairments. One of them is Mega No Makki programme which is rooted in traditional martial arts. It teaches techniques specifically adapted to the needs of blind and visually impaired people, and addresses how to target an attacker and defend oneself, what to do if they cannot make a quick escape, and briefly covers the laws allowing people to protect themselves (and how they differ for the visually impaired) [Loving 2011]. In the UK there is the 1Touch self-defence programme developed by Stephen Nicholls, a martial arts instructor. Nicholls recognized, after working with blind and visually impaired students, that traditional martial arts, which rely heavily on the student's ability to see, could be modified to make it accessible for the

blind. With 1Touch, Nicholls created a set of techniques which makes use of leverage and joint locks that do not require either sight or unusual strength to be effective. All moves and techniques are described verbally and are demonstrated hands-on. Neither age nor gender needs to be a barrier [Pilkington 2012]. The team of specialists from the Department of Gymnastics and Combat Sports at Masaryk University decided to assess and evaluate the mental condition of people with visual impairment to create a methodology for a self-defence course which was subsequently evaluated.

## Methods

The sample consisted of 19 people (men and women aged between 15 and 44 years). Eleven of them were sightless and 8 had other visual impairments. They were current or former students of Masaryk University, those attending a secondary school for visually impaired people and clients of centres for those with visual impairments.

A set of questions using exploratory methods (based on the experience of visually impaired people with risky or violent behaviour towards this specific group and their security concerns) leading to a structured interview was conducted to assess experiences of people with visual disabilities. The interview was divided into 3 sections evaluating the degree of self-confidence in self-defence

**Table 1.** Medians and interquartile ranges (IQR) of the variables assessed collapsed over group

Situation	Median	IQR
1.1 When I walk alone at night I am more alert and I am watching my surroundings	5.0	5.0 – 6.0
1.2 I purposely avoid places, where there could be higher risk of attack	5.0	4.0 – 6.0
1.3 I can behave in order not to provoke a conflict	5.0	3.0 – 6.0
1.4 When somebody starts to attack me (shouting at me, threaten) I know how to react every time	3.0	3.0 – 4.0
1.5 I can avoid physical conflict by verbal communication	4.0	3.0 – 5.0
1.6 It is easy for me to respond to verbal conflict	3.0	2.0 – 5.0
1.7 I feel confident solving verbal conflict	3.0	2.0 – 4.0
1.8 If I were physically attacked I would know what to do	2.0	1.0 – 3.0
1.9 It is easy for me to respond to physical conflict.	1.0	1.0 – 2.0
1.10 I feel confident solving physical conflict	1.0	1.0 – 3.0
1.11 In general, I can avoid conflict as well as solve it	3.0	3.0 - 4.0
2.1 In public transport I feel like someone is trying to get my handbag	3.0	1.0 – 3.0
2.2 I am a witness of a situation in which a group of children is rude to their surroundings	2.0	1.0 - 5.0
2.3 In public transportation somebody starts to touch me	5.0	3.0 – 6.0
2.4 Some stranger asks me for money	4.0	2.0 – 4.0
2.5 A drunken man wants to enter a conflict situation and tells me that I spilled beer on him	5.0	3.0 – 6.0
2.6 In a party somebody hits me to provoke conflict	4.0	2.0 – 5.0
2.7 Somebody grabs my handbag, backpack and starts to pull it from me	5.0	4.0 – 6.0
2.8 Somebody grabs my arm, covers my mouth or aggressively pulls me away	6.0	4.0 – 6.0
2.9 In the street somebody grabs me from the back and pulls my hair or colour	5.0	4.0 – 6.0
2.10 At night in the street somebody gives me an inappropriate proposal	4.0	1.0 – 6.0
3.1 I avoid situations I am most afraid of	6.0	4.0 – 6.0
3.2 I try to face my fear and not to limit myself in life	5.0	3.0 – 6.0
3.3 I think that knowledge of communication strategies can help successfully solve conflict situation	5.5	5.0 – 6.0

situations, such as verbal conflict, physical assault and prevention.

We used 6 – point ranking scale to determine the level of agreement. (1 – I totally disagree, 6 – I totally agree). The scale we used was based on Likert scale which is 5 – pointed. In order to avoid mean we added a point.

## Results

The Mann-Whitney U was used to assess the differences between groups (sightless and other visual impairments). The level of significance was set to an effect size of 0.20.

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the variables assessed. There was a difference between groups in Variable 2.1:  $\theta = 0.233$  (95% CI: 0.089 – 0.503) but the effect was not clear. There also was a difference between groups in Variable 2.7:  $\theta = 0.227$  (95% CI: 0.087 – 0.497). Likewise, the effect size was not clear.

Table 1 is divided into three sections. Section number one consists of 11 statements. The impaired individuals were asked for level of confidence in situations which involve prevention, verbal and physical assault. Overall, visually impaired people feel quite confident in case of prevention. They feel a little less confident in case of verbal conflict. They are not confident in case of physical conflict. They do not know how to respond to physical conflict.

Section number 2 consists of 10 statements. It offers several different situations they can be scared of. A significant difference was found between groups in question number 2.1 and 2.7. The situations include physical conflict. Sightless people feel less confident in these situations compared to those with other visual impairments. Ten people of total 19 mentioned other situations they are afraid of. Six of them are not comfortable in a situation when they draw money from ATM. Five of them are afraid of situations when they go alone at night, they fear abandoned places, empty parks.

Section number 3 consists of 3 questions and deals with strategies of people with visual impairment. They agree on fact that communication strategies can help solve conflict situation successfully.

## Discussion

Although it is quite complicated to evaluate visually impaired and every tool should be used carefully [Gothwal *et al.* 2013], there were no differences found in approaches to blind and visually impaired in organizations providing self-defence education.

However, there was a significant difference found in self-confidence between blind and visually impaired in a specific situation. Blind people feel more at risk when it comes to theft of personal belongings (purse, handbag,

backpack). Other risk situations we thought would occur based on Kane [2008] were confirmed. Visually impaired people feel more threatened when they walk alone at night, they fear of abandoned places and empty parks.

According to Pava [1994] visually impaired persons feel more at risk to experience physical assault because of several aspects (for example high visibility, inability to identify their assailants or to use visual cues) which may all serve to “mark” them as an easy target. He also mentions the task of self-confidence in the risk situations. It is confirmed that self-defence strategies help persons with visual impairment to feel more confident at risk situations, especially verbal self-defence strategies which prevent physical attack.

## Conclusion

A self-defence course for people with visual impairments should be focused on coping with a pre-conflict situation through knowledge of threats and risks they face. Furthermore, in a conflict situation to keep the clash on the verbal level and prevent the transition from verbal to physical conflict. In the field of assistants’ motivation for taking part in the self-defence course we can draw on Gombás [2013] experience.

Because of small sample we cannot generalize our results. On the other hand it is the pilot research to this area and it can be the starting point for other research in the field of self-defence for people with different kind of impairments.

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## Samoobrona dla osób z wadami wzroku

**Słowa kluczowe:** samoświadomość, przemoc, werbalna obrona

### Abstrakt

Tło. Samoobrona jest często omawianym tematem. Jednak jeśli chodzi o osoby niepełnosprawne, jest to zaniedbany obszar badań przez większość ekspertów w samoobronie. Niniejszy artykuł stanowi próbę wypełnienia tej luki.

Cel. Celem badania jest ocena stanu psychicznego osób niepełnosprawnych przed kursem jako punkt wyjścia do stworzenia metodologii kursu samoobrony, który następnie podlegnie ocenie.

Metoda. W badaniu użyto kwestionariusza w celu określenia stopnia pewności siebie w sytuacjach samoobrony, takich jak przewencja, werbalny konflikt i fizyczna napaść. W badaniu ankietowym brało udział N = 19 osób (kobiet i mężczyzn w wieku od 15 do 44 lat), jedenaście z nich było niewidomych a 8 miało inne upośledzenie wzroku. Byli to obecni lub byli studenci Uniwersytetu Masaryka, uczniowie szkoły średniej dla osób niedowidzących oraz pacjenci ośrodka dla osób z wadami wzroku. Uczestnicy otrzymali kilka proponowanych odpowiedzi w kwestionariuszu, z którymi zgadzali się lub nie w skali od 1 do 6.

Większość badanych osób w typowych sytuacjach zachowuje czujność, ale nie czują się oni pewnie, gdy reakcji wymagają werbalne lub fizyczne ataki. Wszystkie z badanych osób wykazują prawdziwy strach w określonych sytuacjach. W sytuacjach stresowych osoba zwykle używa strategii: Obserwuj – Zorientuj się – Zdecyduj – Działaj. Jeśli chodzi o upośledzeniem wzroku, osoba nie jest w stanie sprawdzić wizualnie tego, co słyszy. To może doprowadzić do strachu przed nieznanym. Taki rodzaj strachu jest bezproduktywny w sytuacji wymagającej obrony. Wyniki. W celu oceny różnic pomiędzy grupami (niewidomych i niedowidzących) użyto testu Mann-Whitney'a. Poziom istotności ustawiono na poziomie 0,20. Tabela 1 przedstawia statystyki opisowe dla ocenianych zmiennych. Istniała różnica pomiędzy grupami w zmiennej 2.1:  $\theta = 0,233$  (95% CI: 0,089 – 0,503), ale rezultat nie był jasny. Istniała różnica pomiędzy grupami w zmiennej 2.7:  $\theta = 0,227$  (95% CI: 0,087 – 0,497). Podobnie jak poprzednio rezultat nie był jasny.

Kurs samoobrony dla osób z wadami wzroku powinien być ukierunkowany na radzenie sobie z sytuacjami poprzedzającymi konflikt poprzez wprowadzenie wiedzy na temat zagrożeń i podejmowanego ryzyka. Ponadto w sytuacji konfliktu ważne jest utrzymanie go na poziomie werbalnym, by zapobiec przejściu od słownej agresji do konfliktu fizycznego. Z powodu małej grupy sondażowej autorzy nie podejmują się uogólnienia wyników. Z drugiej strony jest to badanie pilotażowe w tym zakresie i może być punktem wyjścia do innych badań w dziedzinie samoobrony dla osób z różnego rodzaju niepełnosprawnością.