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(IJHSS) **Influence of Taekwondo Training as a Martial Art  
Sport on Enhancing Mental Wellness of Security Officers  
in Kenya**



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## Influence of Taekwondo Training as a Martial Art Sport on Enhancing Mental Wellness of Security Officers in Kenya

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research was to investigate whether or not training in taekwondo as a martial art sport has a positive impact on the mental health of Kenyan security officers.

**Methodology:** The study used a desk top approach where literature was sought from different sources. The research was carried out with consideration given to previous theoretical literature, both published and unpublished.

**Findings:** Problems with mental wellness is a serious societal and work related issue that has numerous ramifications, including far-reaching social and economic impact in Kenyan security officers. However, a significant number of security officers do not seek help when they are experiencing issues with their mental wellness. Research in this area is scant, but there are suggestions that training in Taekwondo as martial arts sport may be an effective sports-based intervention for mental wellness, and that it may provide an affordable alternative to psychological therapy to security officers both public and private.

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** Uncertainty regarding the validity and trustworthiness of previous research is unfortunately caused by the limited number of studies that are relevant to the topic at hand, in addition to other methodological issues.

**Keywords:** *Taekwondo training, martial art sport, mental wellness*

## Introduction

Taekwondo is one of the most popular martial arts sport in the world, with millions of individuals practicing it in more than 200 countries Kenya included. Taekwondo has been traced back to an unarmed military training, albeit various disagreements about its exact origins and development. Even though Taekwondo was originally developed as a means of self-defence, it is now widely regarded as a kind of exercise that is beneficial to both physical and mental wellness. Additionally, physical and mental training in the sport has many advantages, but it also has been widely used as a means of promoting personal development. (HONG, 2021).

According to WHO (2017), the globally estimated cost of poor mental wellness is approximately \$ 2.5 trillion annually. This is forecasted to grow to \$ 6 trillion by 2030. In Kenya, the cost of mental illness is approximately 42 billion USD annually. The issue of mental health is only now fully permeating the public awareness, in terms of its relevance to physical health. In 2012, for example, the British Government declared, ‘No Health without Mental wellness,’ an intervention that set out to establish mental wellness. As a priority issue and recognizing the need for parity in terms of the financing and resources required for both mental and physical well-being. In doing so, it underlined the devastating consequence of mental ill health in areas such as relationships, education and job (Bae et.al, 2021) and, by implication, the ramifications for economic output and public expenditure.

Moreover, In Kenya, according the Ministry Health (2020) the total prevalence of mental disorders is 10, 823 for every 100,000 people. According to WHO report (2017) one out of four people seeking health care in Kenya have mental health problem and is ranked fifth among African countries with elevated depression cases. In addition, a task force established by National Police Service in 2020 exposed that Kenya has a high burden of mental illness due to ill health and psychosocial disability (Memiah, et, al. 2022). Benson et, al. (2021) stated that mental health is a national issue in Kenya not only for security officers but also for university students.

Problems with mental wellness is a serious occupational and societal issue for Kenyan and more specifically for Kenyan security officers. It is estimated that 12,000 police officers in Kenya have mental issues this can have a variety of repercussions, including but not limited to: depression, insomnia, obesity, substance abuse and relationship breakup, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts personal incapacity that may affect adequate participation in the place of work. All these may have severe economic effects to the security officers (Kim, et al., 2022)

Majority of security officers in Kenya, however, do not seek help when they are experiencing issues with their mental health for a variety of reasons, including the stigmatization of mental health and wellness’, the expense and limited of mental wellness treatment. Numerous have factors been identified to contribute to the severe physical and mental wellness’ apprehensions experienced by Kenyan security officers. These factors include and not limited to work shift and unexpected work schedule, negative public criticism, political interferences, and high rate of on

job related injuries. (Jetelina, et. al, 2020). As a result of this, it is essential to take into consideration the application of alternative and complementary therapies when it comes to the treatment of mental health conditions. The practice of Taekwondo as a martial art sport has a number of distinctive qualities that set it apart from other leisure and recreation activities. These qualities include an emphasis on respect, self-regulation and the promotion of healthy living (Kim et.al, 2022). As a result of this, training in martial arts could be considered an intervention for mental health that is based on sports and could potentially provide a less expensive alternative to psychological therapy. However, there hasn't been much research done to determine whether or not this strategy is effective.

Studies also, shows that, one in four people working in the security industry in Kenya has struggled with a mental ailment such as stress, depression, or anxiety (Mongo, Fwaya, & Sewe, (2020). The number of Kenyan Police officers who are suffering from mental health issues is steadily growing despite the fact that the situation has become increasingly critical in recent years. This can be dealt with if every morning or rather evening the security officers in their respective stations of work can spare one or two hours of taekwondo martial art sport work out. These aspects are necessary to take into consideration because the mental and physiological shifts that take place while employment are essential variables in determining overall security officers' health. (Mongo, Fwaya, & Sewe, 2020; Odoyo, Mamuli, & Washika, 2022)

A few studies conducted and published have demonstrate the effectiveness of different forms of martial arts in lowering levels of stress (Park, et.al 2022). For instance, research has shown a beneficial correlation between practicing Taekwondo and experiencing reduced levels of stress which affect mental health (Malette, 2021). A number of studies (Park, et.al.,2022; Mahmoud et.al., 2019)), have shown that participating in martial arts, particularly Aikido, can have positive effects on a person's memory, ability to control their emotions and stress levels.

Weiss and Miller (2019) indicated that the elevated levels of stress and depression that have been observed among security officers have been linked to a number of different variables. When keeping in mind that security officers come from families, it is important to refresh ourselves on the same in the spirit and effort of seeking to highlight, recommend, generate opinion, and seek solutions towards a problem that touches on life at either an individual, institutional, or national level (Gharayagh et.al, 2020). It stands to reason that it is worthwhile to refresh ourselves on the same.

Pretty and Barton (2020) specified that martial arts have been practiced for millennia as a technique of controlling one's physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Most accomplished Taekwondo practitioners seek serenity for themselves as well as for the greater community in their practice of Taekwondo. Fights and self-defence should only be employed if absolutely required; the body, mind, and soul are considered as interrelated (Ouergui et.al). Learning to maintain a healthy internal balance is essential for good health. It's ironic that achieving calm is more difficult than

staying agitated, yet Taekwondo training as a martial art sport can help you gain more serenity and wisdom in your day-to-day life. (Oh, et, al. 2021)

Additionally, just like other forms of martial arts, Taekwondo is an excellent activity to study for a variety of reasons. To begin, the martial art of Taekwondo may be traced back to Asia and the civilization of the Far East. The study of Taekwondo, much like the study of other Eastern martial arts, has the potential to teach students important principles that can be applied to everyday life (Youngtaek, 2021).

Throughout history, these lessons have centred on the importance of treating one another with dignity and showing compassion and support for other humans who may be less capable physically, mentally, or spiritually. Even in modern times, these tenets continue to hold true, along with the concepts of using one's Taekwondo training only for the greater good, and with peace as the ultimate aim. Throughout the years, the influence of Eastern martial arts such as Taekwondo has grown globally (Tarver, 2021). As a result, many populations of people all over the world have been shown how to use their training in martial arts to foster personal growth and well-being. For instance, Universities in Kenya, especially Dedan Kimathi University, have rebranded their Bachelor of Science (criminology and Security management) programme to include practical instruction and taekwondo unit training. The training focuses on public and private sector job security officers. The instructors have also been updated by the university. After receiving thorough training from KUKKIWON the world headquarter for taekwondo the personnel and the Korean Police University between 2018 and 2019, which included Kenyan police personnel, Dedan Kimathi University personnel and students. The security officers who have undertaken the undergraduate degree have asserted that the programme has assisted in handling work and personal related mental health.

As a result, this research attempts to answer the following question: Is Taekwondo a good way to improve one's mental health for those who work in the security sector in Kenya? Taekwondo is said to contribute to better mental health. Following a discussion on the physical activity and mindfulness-based tactics that are incorporated into martial arts training, an examination of the various martial arts styles is conducted in order to identify any benefits that are particular to a given style.

### **Literature Review**

There have been a lot of research done on how beneficial Taekwondo can be for your mental training Cite some of these studies. To begin, it has been shown that regular practice of taekwondo lessens the amount of stress experienced by individuals while simultaneously increasing their physical confidence, self-esteem and respect for other people. In addition, the practice of Taekwondo has been shown in a number of studies to have a beneficial influence on a person's personality and etiquette education, as well as the development of qualities such as bravery, willpower, leadership and drive (Youngtaek, 2021). Although some studies have shown that those

who practice Taekwondo had lower rates of aggressive behaviour and higher levels of stress than those who do not. However, the vast majority of the earlier research on the spiritual value of Taekwondo utilized a quantitative approach and as a result, it was limited in its ability to show the more profound levels of value that are inherently present in Taekwondo training (Gil, 2021). Because of this, a qualitative investigation, such as a phenomenology study, is required in order to comprehend the connection between Taekwondo training and the enhancement of one's mental health.

Whether or if martial arts like Taekwondo are beneficial to one's mental health has been the subject of investigation in a number of studies. According to the findings of Gharayagh et.al (2020), highlighted the beneficial effects of training in martial arts as; decreased in anxiety, improvements in depression, increased in pro-social behaviour and reduction in aggressive behavior (Malette, 2021).

On the hand, according HONG, (2021) Taekwondo participants have been shown in studies to experience lower levels of anxiety, improvements in mood, and increased coping with and stress management skills. Despite this, Taekwondo continues to be a poorly researched sport, with the majority of research on martial arts techniques being on Karate (HONG, 2021). It's possible that the outcomes linked with other forms of martial arts won't necessarily apply to those who practice Taekwondo. Each style of martial arts is unique, having developed separately within its own cultural setting and emphasizing a unique set of technical abilities and training methods. In addition, while looking at a variety of fields, it is occasionally possible to obtain results that contradict each other. According to the findings of one study, participating in Karate was associated with lower levels of state anxiety, whereas participating in Aikido was unrelated to any changes in levels of anxiety (Tarver, 2021).

In addition, studies have shown that participation in a number of physical activities, including martial arts, is typically connected with increases in one's level of self-esteem. Particularly noteworthy is the positive association that has been shown between training in Taekwondo and general self-concept as well as physical self-concept in female college students (McQuillin et.al, 2019).

The problem of poor mental health is pervasive in today's society. Up to 27 percent of the adult population were found to have had one form of mental disorder within the past year, and approximately 83 million of those individuals were under the age of 65, according to the findings of a comprehensive review of data and statistics from countries within the European Union including- Iceland, Norway and Switzerland (Oh, 2021). According to estimates provided by the National Institute of Mental Health (2015), a federal agency in the United States, approximately one in five Americans, or 43 million people, had diagnosable symptoms of mental illness in 2015. This fact brings to light and demonstrates an essential worry, which is that mental "well-being" is

very much tied to mental health, and as a result, it is arguable that mental health should be a big focus for government, business, and individuals (Mahmoud et.al, 2019).

According to Youngtaek (2021) security officers are at an increased risk of feeling distress that has a negative effect on their everyday functioning if they do not make intentional attempts to manage the stress that is caused by their employment. "Occupational burnout" is a term that is widely used to describe the negative effects of stress associated to one's place of employment. This word refers to a wide range of symptoms, every one of which has the ability to produce a great amount of anguish. Burnout in the workplace can lead to mental health problems such as sadness and anxiety, as well as compassion fatigue, distraction, and a decreased sense of self-awareness (Youngtaek, 2021). The likelihood of such repercussions may increase when social support is lacking.

Mental well-being pertains to an ability to manage the stressors of everyday life so that one can live a meaningful and productive life (as opposed to mental ill health, which can lead to major disruption in a person's thinking and subsequently ability to achieve these things). Rousseau et.al (2018), drawing on numerous indicators, highlights how stress in the British workplace increased to 25 percent from 1992 to 2006. Yet, mental well-being is not solely the domain of security officers managing busy employment life. Increasingly, stress is an issue for children and young people too (Pretty et.al, 2020).

### **Methodology**

The study used a desk top approach where literature was sought from different sources. The research was carried out with consideration given to previous theoretical literature, both published and unpublished. This study focused most on conducting a literature review, specifically one that examines previous research on Taekwondo. The search through the body of literature was carried beginning in January 2019 and ending in January 2023. This conclusion was reached after doing an in-depth search using a mix of keywords in different databases. The authors conducted basic and advanced searches, respectively, on Google and the other database engines. The phrase "Taekwondo and mental wellness" was what was utilized as the search term when looking through the data. The phrase "influence of Taekwondo training in enhancing mental wellness" was the subject of the initial search and the Google search that followed. These publications were used for this study in its entirety. The criteria for including the article or report were as follows: the article or report needed to be peer-reviewed; it needed to be written in English; it needed to indicate the purpose of the study and the need to describe the method; as well as needed to report the results of the study as addition to draw a conclusion. To establish the influence of Taekwondo on mental wellness in the security officers, the articles were read several times to obtain a sense of the content.

## Findings

When evaluated in conjunction with the qualitative findings of this study and the Exercise Self-Esteem Model, this conclusion is interesting because it reveals a correlation between the two. According to a number of security officers, they started training in Taekwondo so that they could push themselves mentally or physically, expand their skill set, or make progress toward accomplishing a goal. According to the findings of the study, participating in Taekwondo helped participants lose weight, increase their strength, improve their flexibility, get more energy and learn self-defence. Many of these reactions can be categorized under the physical self-worth sub-domains of strength, conditioning, bodily attractiveness, and sports ability (Tarver, 2021). It is believed that increases in these areas will ultimately generalize to increases in overall self-esteem.

There was only a slight correlation between expertise in taekwondo and overall judgments of mental health, but it went in the expected direction. The qualitative findings, on the other hand, offer a plausible justification for the absence of a significant correlation between mental health and the amount of time spent practicing Taekwondo. In their open-ended responses, security personnel did, in fact, report experiencing psychological benefits as a result of training (Malette, 2021). These benefits were described as being both fleeting and long-lasting in nature. It's possible that there's a more nuanced connection between Taekwondo and mental health than previously thought. To put it another way, at various stages of their training, security personnel in Kenya may be more susceptible to varying types of mental health benefits.

When security personnel begin training, it is possible that they will instantly experience a reduction in tension and anxiety, along with a rise in their psychological welfare, feelings of happiness, and an overall improvement in their state of mind. These factors may, in some people, serve as the first impetus for beginning Taekwondo training of security officers in Kenya at their respective working stations. On the other side, participants frequently referred to more permanent qualities when discussing the long-term psychological motives that were important to them and that they believed Taekwondo had assisted them in developing. It will probably take more time before you see progress in areas such as self-assurance, concentration, and discipline (HONG, 2021).

We looked at a few of the hypothesized mental health benefits of practicing martial arts, such as improved focus and concentration. It is essential to emphasize once more the significance of the fact that the data that were presented shed light on the connections between practice and outcomes from the point of view of those who were included, but did not do so in terms of the concept of causality (Park, et.al, 2022). It is essential that this point be made crystal clear because, although we do not assert the existence of any empirically verifiable causal connection between the practice of martial arts and improved mental health, what we are doing here is shedding light on the relationships and connections that the people who participated in this research make for themselves. It is abundantly clear that "well-being" is a multifaceted concept that encompasses not only intellectual and social spheres but also physical ones (Youngtaek, 2021). The concept that

intellectual stimulation, social connections, and physical "confidence" are highly relevant dimensions to mental well-being, albeit to varying degrees of importance, and to broader concepts of health is the idea that underpins all of these different approaches to the topic. In addition to this, the significance of "ownership" of one's health and the connection between well-being, self-efficacy, and health was brought to light as an important aspect of this domain. It is important to have a sense of 'taking charge,' rather than a sense of 'controlling,' in order to have the belief that one's health and well-being can be controlled. A significant number of security officers found that martial arts provided a medium through which they could learn about their own bodies and become aware of the extent to which their mental and physical selves are intertwined. One of the most important aspects of successfully managing one's stress was recognizing the connection between it and the physical manifestations of it. It is much simpler to find ways to control both the mind and the body once one recognizes the connection that exists between the two (Gharayagh et.al, 2020). Awareness of this kind is absolutely necessary for the preservation and administration of mental health.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study will provide valuable evidence regarding the training effects of participating in martial arts on the outcomes of one's mental health. Additionally, the findings will provide information for security officers looking for alternative or complementary psychological interventions. The acceptability and practicability of a trauma-informed Taekwondo and mindfulness programme for a security officers in Kenya both public and private, as well as the potential utility of successful collaboration between Taekwondo service organizations in the provision of trauma-informed practices, will be investigated in this study. Participants gained an understanding of trauma as well as the trauma-informed delivery of Taekwondo skills such as breath work, movement, meditation, and touch, and indicated their commitment to both apply and share the tools after completing the training.

Taekwondo is a type of martial art and exercise that anyone of any age can engage in, and doing so is rather prevalent among security officers. Because of this, taekwondo has a good chance of being selected as a component for an exercise-based therapy intervention in preventing and curing mental illness among security officers globally, as it has the potential to be used with a wide variety of people age and occupation.

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