

# When karate becomes violent

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## Authors' Contribution:

- A Study Design
- B Data Collection
- C Statistical Analysis
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## Dictionary

**Neo-gladiator** – a person who trains mix martial arts (MMA) and similar forms of hand-to-hand fighting that do not meet the definition of sport according to the Olympic Charter [3].

**Budo (Budō)** – originally a term denoting the “Way of the warrior”, it is now used as a collective appellation for modern martial arts of *kendō*, *jūdō*, *kyūdō* and so on. The primary objective of these ‘martial ways’ is self-perfection (*ningen- kasei*) [2].

**Technique** – *noun* a way of performing an action [87].

**The Delphi method (Delphi technique)** – a method of group decision-making and forecasting that involves successively collating the judgments of experts [17].

**Violence** (in the praxeological sense) – physical pressure (physical force) or the application of chemical, electrical stimuli, etc., which causes the subject of action to be flung into a situation undesirable by him and becomes the object of someone's action [36].

## Abstract:

**Background and Study Aim:** In the social space, journalistic phraseology and the language of emotion permeate not only statements concerning the attraction and mystery still associated with karate. From karate practitioners and didacticisms, science (scientists with the competence of karate practitioners) should first be expected to formulate premises that would be intersubjectively acceptable to other practitioners, not necessarily with the competence of a scientist as well. Therefore, the aim of this article is to argue from the intersection of the analysis of karate as combat sports, traditional martial art, and self-defence systems, so that the conclusions can be considered as a scientific rationale for further research of the violent phenomenon within the complex of hand-to-hand combat exercises that are identified in the social space with the different varieties of karate.

**Material and Methods:** The method of expert opinion used ( $n = 2$ ) is admittedly based on the assumption that the sentences formulated (for which there is no empirical justification) are considered true when there is no basis for the allegation that they express the authors' emotional connection to the phenomenon under investigation. As a criterion for identifying violence, we have adopted a praxeological definition of the term, in the knowledge that in many circumstances it is very difficult, if not impossible, to define the boundary between violence and aggression. Our analysis of the main source materials included scientific (also popular scientific and didactic) articles and books, which, especially in the practitioner community, are generally regarded as the most valuable. This analysis is supplemented by our subjective conclusions from the current insight into events available in the existing social reality, which qualify for any of the above-mentioned criteria of division.

**Results:** Violence in karate as a combat sport occurs primarily in circumstances when a particular competitor continues to attack an opponent who is no longer able to fight. But there are also circumstances where the accomplices to this form of violence are referees who delay intervention. As traditional martial art, when karatekas begin to break the norms and values of traditional karate culture and use karate knowledge, skills and motoric competence against weaker people in deliberate ways. As a self-defence system, it applies to every case when karate practitioners repelling physical aggression in particular (and more so verbal violence) consciously violate the criteria of legitimate defence.

**Conclusions:** The conjuncture of the results of our analyses, combined with the knowledge of the traditional values of karate implemented with such a message into the area of universal accessibility in every society, and associated with the human right to self-defence under the

**Dojo** – Japanese term for a training place for fighting methods or a meditation hall [85].

**Sensei** – literally meaning a ‘teacher’ or ‘master’ – is a Japanese title honouring people who have reached the level of mastery in a particular field [86].

**Shihan** – Japanese honorary title budō master-level model teacher who sets standards [86].

condition of not exceeding necessary actions, constitutes, in our opinion, a set of basic premises for further detailed research. We consider the complementary approach to be the most appropriate, while clearly identifying with the hypothesis of the supreme value criteria of global civilisation.

**Keywords:** combat sport, traditional martial art, self-defence, technique, theory of combat sport

## 1. Introduction

In the social space, journalistic phraseology and the language of emotion permeate not only statements concerning the attraction and mystery still associated with karate. This category would also include: ‘recent years have witnessed a resurgence in the popularity of karate training among young people; however, there has been a discernible decline in the traditional values of karate, particularly in the context of its interaction with popular culture’. These sentences, on the terrain of science, cannot be considered true in the absence of empirical evidence. If, on the other hand, they are intuitions with some degree of truth, this is not enough to consider them as true premises. However, since these intuitions appear in the free statements of karate practitioners and didacticisms, science (scientists with the competence of karate practitioners) should first be expected to formulate premises that would be intersubjectively acceptable to other practitioners, not necessarily with the competence of a scientist as well.

It is a commonly held belief that hand-to-hand combat techniques of budo origin are invariably employed for honourable purposes and possess significant educational value [1, 2]. A notable example of such a hand-to-hand combat technique is karate, which has experienced a resurgence in popularity within contemporary popular culture. This resurgence can be attributed, in part, to the recognition of the World Karate Federation (WKF) by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) as an official Olympic discipline, alongside the promotion of karate fighting within the world’s foremost full-contact striking league, the Karate Combat (KC) league [3]. However, the transformation from a traditional martial art (but not as neo-gladiatorship [4]) into a highly commercialised sport raises questions about the preservation of karate’s core values.

Karate has become firmly entrenched within the commercial sector, with a notable emphasis on its business aspects as a component of the broader sporting industry [5]. However, this shift has led to a commodification of karate ideals, resulting in a decline in their moral integrity [6]. On the one hand, karate values are emphasised as a marketing tool to promote karate tournaments and galas. In contrast, the behaviour of athletes at karate tournaments and galas has been observed to deviate from the values that are typically associated with the discipline [7]. This mismatch between values and actual practices raises the question of the impact on the karate community and wider society. According to social learning theory, negative patterns are modelled in society [8]. Therefore, if aggressive actions are tolerated or even encouraged in a karate environment, they may be internalised as acceptable norms. There has been a notable increase in violent behaviours among individuals from karate cultures [9].

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence as ‘the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation [10]. Furthermore, the WHO distinguishes four types of violence: physical, sexual, psychological, and deprivation. In addition, the WHO divides violence into three subtypes depending on the relationship between the victim and perpetrator: self-directed violence, interpersonal violence, and collective violence [11].

Importantly, violence should not be confused with aggression, which is defined as ‘a destructive struggle or the transition in a verbal dispute to factual arguments that make the opponent uncomfortable’ [12]. The deliberate and intentional use of superior force against the victim, resulting in violations of the victim's rights and personal property and the infliction of suffering and harm, characterises violence. This dynamic is characterised by an asymmetrical relationship, where the perpetrator holds a superior position over the victim, who is typically weaker. In contrast, aggression is characterised by a symmetrical relationship, where both parties initiate the confrontation and neither holds a distinct advantage [13]. Importantly, in cases where legal orders are implemented, coercion is used, although violent acts may occur if the law specifying the use of force is transgressed [14].

These premises and assumptions do not exhaust the methodological possibilities of studying the phenomena of violence and aggression in the area of broadly understood hand-to-hand combat, and even more so in the area narrowed down to the practice and culture of karate. Moreover, this means disregarding the theory of combat sports [15] and omitting the important aspect that karate is at the same time a combat sport, a traditional martial art and an art of self-defense [15, 16].

Therefore, the aim of this article is to argue from the intersection of the analysis of karate as combat sports, traditional martial art, and self-defence systems, so that the conclusions can be considered as a scientific rationale for further research of the violent phenomenon within the complex of hand-to-hand combat exercises that are identified in the social space with the different varieties of karate.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The method of expert opinion used ( $n = 2$ ) is admittedly based on the assumption that the sentences formulated (for which there is no empirical justification) are considered true when there is no basis for the allegation that they express the authors' emotional connection to the phenomenon under investigation. However, it is impossible to accept the assumption that many years of personal practice involving, *inter alia*, participation in top-level sport competition (which, by its very nature anyway, could not cover all varieties and styles of karate) does not affect the authors' emotional connections with the subject of the scientific exploration undertaken. Awareness of these non-enthymematic assumptions may prove to be an important methodological guideline for researchers who would like to continue exploring the phenomena of violence and aggression in relation to karate. Regardless of the above, the applied form of expert opinion meets the basic criteria of the Delphi method [17]. Moreover, we respect the methods of scientific analysis appropriate to the subject of the undertaken exploration [19-20], but we try to emphasize the complementary approach [21, 22]. Such an approach is the basic method of the new science – ‘innovative

agonology' [23-35]. The issue we are solving clearly fits into the research area of this discipline.

As a criterion for identifying violence, we have adopted a praxeological definition of the term (see Dictionary and [36, 15]), in the knowledge that in many circumstances it is very difficult, if not impossible, to define the boundary between violence and aggression. Since the motoric dimension of karate and the applicable combat sport regulations are subject to direct observation and evaluation by licensed judges (regardless of the multitude of variations of this combat sport), so these circumstances make it easier to define criteria for identifying violent phenomena. The results are presented and divided into karate as a combat sport, as a traditional martial art, and as a self-defence system.

Therefore, in the latter two areas, the analysis of violence already requires more frequent references to psychological criteria. To ignore ethical criteria in any of the areas of the division made would be to deny methodological correctness. Our analysis of the main source materials included scientific (also popular scientific and didactic) articles and books, which, especially in the practitioner community, are generally regarded as the most valuable [16]. This analysis is supplemented by our subjective conclusions from the current insight into events available in the existing social reality, which qualify for any of the above-mentioned criteria of division.

Notably, this study did not require the approval of an ethics committee.

### 3. Results

#### **Karate as a combat sport**

The social determinant for deciding what constitutes a sport and what does not is the White Paper on Sport [37]. Therefore, karate competitions that adhere to certain rules in accordance with the White Paper on Sport are considered sports [38]. Sport karate exists in a regulated system, with certain organisations setting the rules and techniques allowed.

Currently, the two leading sport karate organisations are the WKF for the semi contact system and the KC for the full-contact system [3]. Importantly, the WKF is completely embedded in the structure of the world sport. In these semi contact confrontations, the objective is to demonstrate superiority over the opponent without causing harm. Consequently, these confrontations are oriented toward speed, motor accents and technical accuracy [39]. In contrast, full-contact confrontations in the KC system are oriented towards demonstrating superiority over the opponent, with the possibility of causing harm. Thus, these confrontations are oriented towards speed and strength motor accents and the effects produced by bodily inflicted techniques [40].

In both the WKF and the KC, there are noticeable manifestations of aggression that are in accordance with the regulations of these karate competitions [9]. It is instrumental aggression, which is sanctioned by the sporting rules of karate, that represents one manifestation of the prowess of the competing athletes [41]. The onset of violence in karate as a combat sport occurs when a given competitor continues to attack an opponent who is no longer able to fight [42]. And this is the moment of the

analysis of the phenomenon that shows the sense of using the praxeological definition of 'violence' (it is physical pressure...etc. [36]).

The role of the referee is pivotal in such situations, as they are required to swiftly interpret the situation and halt the contest [43]. This intervention by the referee frequently ensues following a knockout technique or an uppercut by the opponent and the subsequent continuation of the finishing sequence [33]. Furthermore, the referee's function encompasses the interpretation of fouls during a match, with the authority to impose penalties on players [44]. Such measures are effective in eliminating the hallmarks of aggressive behaviour, leading to the prevention already at the stage of violence (in the praxeological sense [36]) in karate sport duels [45].

### **Karate as traditional martial art**

All aspects of karate training, both physical and mental, are integral to the development of karate culture [9]. This culture involves the education of karate adept at the budo trend, encompassing the transmission of bushido knowledge and attitudes, philosophy, ethics, symbols and hierarchies specific to karate [46, 47, 1, 2, 48, 49]. Certain research results provide evidence that the goal of people practicing karate as a traditional martial art is to achieve and maintain optimal psycho-physical health and this is an important aspect of their identification with karate culture [50]. This result is an important premise that karate should therefore be seen not only as a fighting technique but also as a broader cultural and social phenomenon.

The socially observable norms of karate include a distinct dojo environment, an emotional approach to training, discipline, respect for masters and traditions, hygienic practices, meditation exercises, and high physical fitness among practitioners [51]. Within this cultural context, karate practitioners regard karate as a method of personal self-improvement [52], with the objective being the enhancement and improvement of life through karate practice [53]. Therefore, these cultural and social norms not only shape the overall identity of karate but also become the basis for the personal growth of practitioners.

Two questions remain open. First, what is the proportion of practitioners in the various karate clubs around the world with such preferences? Second, is this model dominant in particular local communities and are there sufficiently qualified staff to implement it?

Through a consistent and disciplined training process, both physical and psychological qualities are developed that contribute to personal development. This pursuit fosters the development of positive habits among practitioners, including diligence, perseverance, consistency in actions, respect for established social norms, and self-control [54]. These qualities not only improve a karate practitioner's mastery of karate in the sense of motor (technical) skills, but also help him or her integrate into society as a responsible and conscious individual. However, not all karate practitioners internalise these values in the same way □ some part, consciously or unconsciously, ignores the ethical values conveyed (assuming that the teacher is competent) and focuses only on fighting skills.

From this perspective, the propensity for violent action among karate practitioners is predicted to be influenced by their disregard for the norms and values of karate

culture and their deliberate utilisation of karate knowledge and motor skills (narrowly understood karate competencies, or otherwise: proficiency in karate) against vulnerable individuals [38]. Consequently (from a legal liability perspective), attaining a particular level of this proficiency in karate invariably carries with it a concomitant responsibility to ensure its judicious application. The extent of this responsibility is directly proportional to the level of this proficiency attained [46]. The greater the level of karate proficiency achieved, the more responsibility the practitioner has for his or her actions and their impact on the environment. In traditional karate culture, masters (sensei and shihan) play an important role in shaping this responsibility, not only by imparting technical skills but also by transmitting moral values that should prevent karate from becoming a violent practice. It is imperative that the validation of karate culture among adepts is entrusted to the authority of sensei and shihan [55].

### **Karate as a self-defence system**

Importantly, the limits of self-defence are not absolute. The primary legal provision pertaining to the concept of necessary defence stipulates that the act of incapacitating an assailant and advancing towards them constitutes a breach of necessary defence [56]. Consequently, individuals engaged in training that focuses on karate as a self-defence system, or the utilisation of karate skills from combat sports or traditional martial arts in self-defence contexts, are subject to this legal regulation [57-59]. This legal regulation delineates a limit beyond which the utilisation of karate for self-defence, irrespective of the degree held, becomes an act of violence [60]. Thus, when using his or her skills in self-defence, a person should assess when he or she must stop to stay within the lawful limits of self-defence.

However, it is imperative to acknowledge the significance of both external and internal factors in any act of necessary defence [16]. These factors encompass the circumstances and psychophysical state of both the assailant and the victim [61]. Notably, certain dynamic and effective karate actions undertaken by the victim of an assault have the potential to significantly alter the position of the victim, thereby placing them in a position analogous to that of the assailant [62].

Karate training can meet not only professional acquisition criteria of physical self-defence skills but also can increase their ability to manage stress in dangerous situations [53, 63]. In such situations, there is a risk of losing self-control, and a sudden outburst of emotions can lead to inadequate use of force. Karate training, which promotes self-control and emotion regulation, helps address this problem [63].

It is evident that karate training incorporates a significant element of emotional regulation and the ability to exercise control over the execution of combat techniques [64]. Furthermore, the significance of legal authorities in validating karate actions undertaken in circumstances of self-defence is underscored [38]. However, it is not only the legal but also the moral assessment of actions that matter. Although karate research does not directly address the criteria of moral responsibility, it is possible to consider violence-related research that shows how people resolve moral dilemmas in violent situations [65-67]. For example, depending on one's ethical perspective and associated value attitudes, people may morally justify harming another person. Therefore, importantly, in this context, respecting the values of karate in everyday

training and in circumstances of necessary defense can significantly contribute to the formation of pro-social values, which are necessary for public safety [16].

#### 4. Discussion

The analysis of the collected qualitative data has enabled the identification of specific regulations that delineate the boundaries beyond which karate becomes violent. From the perspectives of karate as a combat sport, a traditional martial art (not as neo gladiatorship [70, 4, 71, 33]), and a self-defence system, these regulations are, in turn, the rules of sport competition, the norms and values of karate culture, and the right to necessary defence. The role of karate coaches, designated sensei and shihan [72], in the proper education of adepts through bodily and mental exercises is emphasised [71].

In competent karate training, adepts assimilate the rules of sports confrontation, the principles of karate culture and the proper use of skills in self-defence [72] through the attainment of successive training ranks and later master's ranks. However, it is also not to ignore the truth that there are dojos where karate is taught in isolation from traditional values [73]. This could be a contributing factor to the misuse of karate skills by young people. Drawing from the principles of social learning theory, it is plausible that young karate students may learn negative behaviours from their teachers through imitation [8]. This phenomenon could be considered intergenerational violence transmission, where violent patterns are adopted as appropriate [76]. This is based on the assumption that the likelihood of young karate students using violence is a result of their personal violent experiences from their coaches or their observation of the coaches' violent actions with other practitioners [77]. Such violence is a characteristic of karatekas who forcibly subjugate trainees, and a common excuse is to enforce absolute subordination due to the formally held authority [3]. Such phenomena are far from the necessary discipline in the dojo [46]. Consequently, when selecting a karate section, it is imperative to ascertain the conduct of the pupil-master and master-pupil relationships within the dojo, taking into account kindness and respect [36]. This transmission of karate knowledge, skills and competence contributes to 'the management' especially the boundaries of decency and responsibility. When these boundaries are crossed karate becomes violent. This remark, only seemingly concerning the micro scale, is connected with the positive aspect of the hypothesis about the criteria of universal human values: "survival of humans and nature in a non-degenerate form and responsibility for coming generations" [74, p. 285].

While legal compliance is an essential component of karate practice, it is also essential that practitioners learn to make the right moral decisions. Moral considerations are not just ancillary; they are the basis for the use of self-defense and technical skills, as they help to decide when and how to use one's own skills to ensure that they are only applied in a legal and harmless manner.

The values and social norms of karate, as in any other martial practice, can help prevent violent actions when practitioners are aware of their moral responsibility. Furthermore, moral decision-making ensures that even when threatened, karateka will not exceed the required criteria of honorable self-defense [75] and resort to

violence that would be detrimental to both themselves and the other person. Both law and ethics must limit violence and ensure that any action, even if defensive, is proportionate and based on a realistic perception of danger rather than an emotional reaction.

In light of these findings, the question of contemporary culturally conditioned social norms in relation to those of the last century remains salient [78]. In numerous instances, what was once an expression of discipline now exhibited hallmarks of violence [79]. This prompts inquiries into the limits of discipline for younger generations, who are well versed in their rights but not necessarily their obligations [80]. This dynamic has given rise to a scenario in which the younger generation is increasingly assuming the role of a disciplinarian towards the older generation [81]. However, the historical and cultural context of this phenomenon is deeply rooted in the long-standing tradition of elders imparting knowledge to younger generations, a practice that has been in place since time immemorial [74]. Consequently, the boundaries delineated in this article with respect to karate training are subject to the influence of social factors. This influence is most evident when we compare the specifics of karate training for children and young people in the 20th century with those in the 21st century.

### **Limitations of the study**

This article is limited to perspectives on karate as a combat sport, traditional martial art, and self-defence system. The above does not address the problem from other perspectives, but owing to the location of the study in the areas of combat sports theory [15], humanistic martial arts theory [82], combative theory [83], the general theory of fighting arts [84], and 21st century hand-to-hand combat theory [33], the perspectives adopted are valid.

## **5. Conclusions**

The conjuncture of the results of our analyses, combined with the knowledge of the traditional values of karate implemented with such a message into the area of universal accessibility in every society, and associated with the human right to self-defence under the condition of not exceeding necessary actions, constitutes, in our opinion, a set of basic premises for further detailed research. We consider the complementary approach to be the most appropriate, while clearly identifying with the hypothesis of the supreme value criteria of global civilisation.

Future research into optimizing resource allocation and reducing operational costs will be essential to ensure that further expansion of robotic surgery remains economically viable and widely accessible, meeting the evolving needs of healthcare systems in Poland and beyond. Continued investment in robotic technology and research into cost management and environmental sustainability are critical to expanding access to services and improving patient outcomes across the healthcare spectrum.



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