

Judo can mitigate youth violence

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Practicing traditional martial arts such as judo, karate and tae kwon do have been proven in a meta-analysis by Bar-Ilan University researchers to reduce aggression, anger and violence in children and teens.

The study, recently published in the peer-reviewed journal *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, was carried out by doctoral student in psychology Anna Harwood, under the supervision of Dr. Uri Rassovsky.

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Traditional martial arts focus on group cohesiveness, they are grounded in strong philosophy and they emphasize personal character, strict structure, and routine, said Harwood.

Research clearly showed that traditional martial arts – with their common themes of repetitive movements, controlled behaviors and respect – are most beneficial in reducing anger and violent behaviors. This is opposed to more modern martial arts, which can actually increase aggression. Generally referred to as “martial sports,” the goal is personal advancement, beating the opponent and advancing for personal gain, she added.

Harwood, who brings previous criminology experience to this project, focused her research on innovative rehabilitation programs. Her doctoral research looked at the effect that martial arts has on at-risk children.

“I wanted to see not only whether martial arts training reduces aggression but if it also improves cognitive and psychological factors, which may lead to this reduction,” she said.

Harwood said martial arts can be a cheap intervention of real benefit to a host of populations. However, because there is little research, it is difficult to get funding for these programs, and, thus, martial arts becomes a sport for those who can afford it, she said.

“If we can show a real benefit then it will be easier to fund and introduce to the kids and adults who really need it,” she said.

A meta-analysis is a statistical method that allows researchers to test data from multiple studies. Although a vast amount of research was analyzed, there were so few empirical studies in the field that only 12 studies were judged relevant for meta-analysis. The meta-analysis combined data from 507 participants (aged six to 18).
