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Is Taekwon-Do practical for street Self Defence? How do you know?

One of the first questions I ask potential students and their parents is why Taekwon-Do? What are you hoping to achieve from this particular Martial Art?

The main answers being : Discipline – I want my child to learn discipline (don't we all? But I strongly believe discipline should be taught at home that way you encompass your family values and your family beliefs on your child), the 2nd being Self Defence – I want my child to be able to look after themselves, and the 3rd being fitness – I want my child to join into something and be active rather than sit in front of the PS4 all day (easy solution buy a skipping rope not the PS4.)

Self Defence I believe is dependent on 2 things, (1) having the ability and the commitment of the practitioner to execute accurate technique when it is called for and the ability to also control that technique, and (2) the Instructors ability to give the tools to achieve that accurate technique in some situations life and death, something of much importance for both is common sense. You would not conduct a wrist lock on someone of a greater strength, height, weight, gender and age. Nor would you want a student to go straight into a physical altercation when the situation could have been diffused ahead of time. This, I believe is the better and more sensible solution. Self Defence is exactly what it is defending of oneself and of course dependent so much on the situation at hand. It is my belief a good instructor would first encourage his students to deter themselves away from any confrontation using his skills of de escalation prior to physical as a last resort.

One area seen as a risk factor is when women fight back, with some offenders there is a mindset of 'If you fight like a man, I will drop you like a man.' The same for youth against older people, in some situations standing your ground could result in more harm.

As I think closely about the question given, in the back of my mind I see self defence not as a Martial Art, nor an unarmed combat. I see Martial Arts as a way of life, skills learnt and practiced over a long period of time, used to sync the body and mind to an utmost readiness. Unarmed combat in some way can basically be the quickest way of attacking somebody and grinding them into little pieces before you move onto perhaps your next victim. Self Defence to me is like a First Aid kit, it cannot guarantee that you are certainly going to be alright or come out in one tact, but it can help you to improve your chances.

However, there will be situations where this is not practical, I believe that most techniques in Taekwon-Do can assist in defending yourself in everyday situations on the street; a practitioner needs to be aware of some things prior; their surroundings, the threat, also their limitations. Fortunately Taekwon-Do is in some sense a live paper of techniques that with a solid foundation of philosophy and the Do complementing the scientific fundamentals, can achieve a basic starter of techniques.

With a various range on Martial Arts being highlighted recently in movies and sports channels one would be cautious with counter attacks and styles, weapons playing a major role in street altercations and also the influence of recreational drugs that have no moral obligation to mankind.

We also need to look and the legal obligations behind "self defence".

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Defence against assault

48 Self-defence and defence of another

Everyone is justified in using, in the defence of him or herself or another, such force as, in the circumstances as he or she believes them to be, it is reasonable to use.

Ref : New Zealand Legislation Crimes Act 1961 No 41

Section 48: replaced, on 1 January 1981, by section 2(1) of the Crimes Amendment Act 1980 (1980 No 63).

The key word being reasonable, pending again on the circumstances and of course whom the perpetrator is could be a difference between life and death.

Had this question been asked to me 10 years ago maybe even 5 years, I would have confidently said yes! Yes Taekwon-Do would be practical for Street Self Defence, but in all honesty the attitude has evolved, sadly not in a positive way. Some practitioners have goals that have been altered with focus turning to tournament orientated techniques, the attackers are drug fuelled and do not have respect for themselves let alone the public. I raise the topic of tournament just to acknowledge the difference between realism and pre arranged, what we would execute in a dojang for a tournament is very different to what we would execute in a life and death situation on the street.

Today, as that question is asked I would say Taekwon-Do would not alone be practical for street self defence, because of the change in attitude, the change in focus and the change of our world as a whole. We have a responsibility to use our knowledge but only to get us out of trouble, not for revenge or of retribution. As mentioned earlier I wrote the term *live paper*, meaning it has an area that can be developed to adapt perhaps addressing those scenarios that harm people on a day to day basis, again in the likelihood more than one person is attacking, or the attacker is using a weapon, easy definition of weapon is an object that is used to cause harm or damage against.

So in conclusion to the question; Is Taekwon-Do practical for street Self Defence? I believe you would require a combination of techniques to be adequate for street self defence, I believe common sense plays a major part in self defence as well and I believe at anytime a confrontation or altercation should be best avoided, defused or de escalated at all costs.