What is Self-Defense Training for Women?

Women's Self Defence (WSD) is not a martial art or sport. It is a gender aware and comprehensive provision, drawing its practice from feminist theory, bringing together physical, social, cognitive and emotional dimensions.

While recognising that women are not responsible for the violence they suffer, WSD gives women effective choices for responding to the threat of violence in time, as individuals and in groups.

WSD is very much in demand, because women want to know how to better manage safer lives. It has a 30 year history and has established itself as a professional field across Europe. It is, says Professor Liz Kelly, “arguably the most evidence based prevention method, focused on the direct empowerment of women and girls. Yet, it is seldom included as a vital aspect of strategies to address gender violence.” (Seith & Kelly, 2003)

National Crime Surveys (BCS) have consistently shown that women report greater fear of crime. Other studies show that women constantly plan for and think about their safety, albeit without the benefit of correct information about what works best to prevent and stop assault. Women are also targets for stereotypical safety advice and interventions that are not gender aware or evidence based, and which fail to take into consideration women’s experiences and needs.

Ill-informed and stereotypical views of WSD continue to be a barrier to women and girls access to the provision. It is important that policy makers, funders and women’s organisations are aware of the powerful contribution that WSD makes to the goal of ending violence against women, and of the evidence that challenges misrepresentations of WSD.

“Women self-defence challenges the stereotype of women and girls being passive victims, who do not and cannot resist harassment and physical assaults. It both recognises and validates women’s active resistance, expands their options for action whilst reinforcing a sense of entitlement, that women have the right to defend themselves.” (Seith & Kelly, 2003)

References