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## Sports Education as a Self-Defense Strategy to Physically and Mentally Strengthen

The so-called weak gender: the case of the Algerian Women

التربية الرياضية كإستراتيجية للدفاع عن النفس لتقوية بدنيا وعقليا

ما يسمى بالجنس الضعيف: حالة المرأة الجزائرية

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# Sports Education as a Self-Defense Strategy to Physically and Mentally Strengthen

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## Abstract:

The Algerian society is, these last decades witnessing severe and critical street assaults and violence against females especially; a socio-cultural new faceted phenomenon blended by religious misunderstandings and masochist beliefs. Hence, the pivotal aim of this paper is threefold: Firstly: to shed light on the issue of violence against women and the main reasons that trigger it from an Algerian socio-cultural perspective, secondly: to exhibit the importance of integrating self-defense techniques in the Algerian sports education curriculum and finally, to reveal general recommendations and solutions that may help limiting this socio-cultural phenomenon.

**Keywords:** violence, Physical assault, sexual abuse, religious misunderstandings, masochist beliefs, self-Defense, sports education curriculum- Algerian women.

## المخلص:

إن المجتمع الجزائري يشهد هذه العقود الأخيرة اعتداءات شديدة وحرجة في الشوارع وعنف ضد الإناث بشكل خاص. ظاهرة اجتماعية ثقافية جديدة ذات أوجه ممزوجة بسوء الفهم الديني والمعتقدات الماسوشية. وبالتالي ، فإن الهدف المحوري لهذه الورقة هو ثلاثة جوانب: أولاً: تسليط الضوء على قضية العنف ضد المرأة والأسباب الرئيسية التي تطلقها من منظور اجتماعي ثقافي جزائري ، وثانياً: إظهار أهمية دمج تقنيات الدفاع عن النفس في مناهج التعليم الرياضي الجزائري وأخيراً ، للكشف عن التوصيات والحلول العامة التي قد تساعد في الحد من هذه الظاهرة الاجتماعية والثقافية.

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## 1. Introduction

The massive demographic evolution and the increasing technological advancement brought by globalization and urbanization generate unwilling, severe and critical changes in the social structures and lifestyles of the Algerian woman. In fact, the Algerian women feel more and more threatened in their society because of the constant feeling of insecurity in the streets, public transportation or work place which presents another face of violence: moral or sexual assaults. Indeed, the statistics of violence against women are alarming. Moreover, the Chourouq newspaper (2016) reports that more than eight cases of physical, sexual and psychological violence is taking place in Algiers per week. Such violence would impair women fundamental freedom and civil rights. Though, many laws are enacted to guarantee women's welfare and protection, the occurrence of such violent acts is prevalent in the Algerian society. However, women should have some knowledge about how to protect themselves from an outside danger. The earlier women learn to protect themselves, the safer they would be. As such, it is suggested that Algerian schools integrate self defense techniques and strategies in sports education curriculum. Furthermore, education and the modern state of the new lifestyle require an urgent change in the traditional social structures. Traditionally, women were confined to the domestic sphere, while the outside was exclusively a male bastion. Today's increasing feminine wage-earner and education brought a change in the public environment which became a action field for both genders. However, there is a constant and haunting feeling of insecurity that threatens the Algerian woman outdoors, because of the violent reprisals some pigheaded men who categorically refuse any change, practice on them. According to the prior data we collected while conducting a street interview, most of the society males relate this change to a plague against traditions, culture and mainly against religion. Therefore, this paper depicts the socio-cultural problem of violence against Algerian women, whether they are students, teachers, and workers in public streets, work places and public transportations. It also addresses the different types of physical, psychological and even sexual assaults the Algerian women daily encounter. Investigating into the issue of violence and assault against women would bring within its folding the reasons that trigger such a phenomenon. Indeed, the perpetuation of violence against Algerian women in public is due to many factors amongst which the traditional practice that presents women with lower status in the family. The study's analysis is based on the

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statistics exhibited on the aforementioned newspaper and other sources as well as on our belief that social pressures and the laws that effectively and practically prohibit violence against women perpetuate the phenomenon of violence and street assault with its different ways of occurrences. This paper endeavors to discuss the issue and, hence, attempts to suggest appropriate bases as to exhibit openly and to a wide range the rights and protections women are empowered with and integral techniques of self-defense to integrate in the Algerian sports education curriculum. The importance of integrating such strategies and techniques, as put by Lina Khalifeh (2016), is to build confidence, determination and defensive skills.

## **2 - Violence and Assaults As an Impediment to the Algerian Women in the Social Space**

Safia (2013) argues that despite the strenuous efforts the Algerian woman undergoes to build her society, she encounters many hindrances in the public space. Indeed, her status quo in the public sphere triggers social tension and, thus, resistance from the part of men who refuse the integration of women in the socio-cultural and economic growth of their societies. The same issue is tackled by Monqid (2012, p: 03) who states:

*Women's access to the outside and the expansion of women's spaces has led to an identity crisis among men who are not sufficiently prepared for the mix. Some men arrogate the right to assault women either verbally or even physically.*

According to our findings, three types of violence committed against women in the Algerian society have been identified; the verbal and psychological abuse, the physical assault or violence and the sexual harassment. The statistics exhibited in the International day of the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against women that was held in the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2014 revealed the following results in Algeria in the first nine months of the year 2014: the predominance of violence has been embodied in 5163 physical assaults' cases, 1508 cases of psychological abuse and 205 cases of sexual harassments, clarifying that physical violence might include pushing, kicking, slapping, choking to death by an assailant, etc. The psychological abuse or emotional abuse might be engendered in many acts like verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, confinement, or any behavior that belittles women's self worth, dignity and self identity. The

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psychological abuse might also take the form of name callings. For instance some men exercise their illusion of power and domination by means of emotional abuse and the use of names of animals like: hey you, the cow, the mule, the donkey and the monkey. Al Monqid (2012) stated in another study that such animal name callings are used as a reference to the limited intellectual abilities of women. Al Monqid further claimed that women are attacked by sexual insults and obscene language like the words whore or slut or other obscene phrases. They also undergo derogatory and hurtful insults about their physical appearance, way of clothing, wearing their hair, putting make ups etc. Along similar lines, the issue of harassment, especially street harassment and violence against women in public spaces has become more and more familiar after being considered a taboo. Among the different forms that may appear in different ways in the social space like sexual rubbing in public transportation, sexual harassments' mimes in the street, rape, etc.

Such types of violence diminish the value of the Algerian woman in society, threaten her existence and violate her sexual, physical and moral integrity.

The aforementioned physical, verbal or sexual violence cause a negative attitude and psychological disorders that may spoil the image of the woman's body, self esteem and self respect. Regarding this Al Monqid claimed (2012) the overwhelming reality that we tend to hear those little girls often saying: why god didn't make me a boy? Hence, men's ways of proving their male chauvinism and virility, has badly shaken women's, and especially little girls, mental health and psychological safety. Consequently, the public space engenders a constant feeling of discomfort, tension and insecurity, as J Coutras stated "possible insecurity is part of the definition of the space for women" (1999, p.41)

With all such ill treatments, discomfort, aggression, insults and other threats in the public spaces, the Algerian women presence in the social space becomes vulnerable. However, what worsens the situation is the fear and shame of certain women to denounce such violent acts. Their main fear is becoming vulnerable to social ostracism. However, by being silent women become unconsciously enablers of such threatening acts that stifle them. Thereby, it is high time women denounced and fulminated against this threatening violence.

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## 3-- The socio-cultural Factors that perpetuate Violence against Women in Algeria

The positive contribution of women in the social, cultural and economic growth of the Algerian society and her attendance in the public social spaces caused certain men a feeling of insecurity, anxiety and hostility. Certain men chose to nullify and impair women existence in the social space by exercising all types of violence on them. However, the feeling of insecurity is not the only reason behind sexual harassment, physical assaults and psychological abuse. The issue of violence against women however, harkens back to the ancient times, and it is still perpetuating to the present day despite the different organizations that were held to prevent and eradicate violence against women such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women<sup>1</sup>. The phenomenon of violence is an intricate social phenomenon that occurs through the Algerian Women life cycle as a manifestation of the unequal traditional patriarchal practices and sexual differentiations that took place and is still taking place within certain Algerian families; for instance, the fact of splitting the family members into two gatherings when serving food; an impressive table of food is confined for the masculine members alone and another table of moderate food that is confined for the feminine members of the family. More, this persistence goes beyond any imagination. During meals, Males are actually and incontestably the first to be served, satisfied while the rest of the meals go to females. Such a practice reinforces the assumption of male-dominance not only indoors but also outdoors. It has been reported to one of the local newspapers that the lack of laws that effectively ban violence against women, the dearth of efforts on the part of the public authorities to spread awareness of an understanding of the problem, its causes and consequences adds insult to injury and lead to the widespread of the phenomena of violence against the Algerian women. In addition to this Marzuki (2013) admits that encouraging female victims of physical assault, sexual harassment or any kind of public violence to compromise in order to avoid blame, social conflicts and social ostracism

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<sup>1</sup> The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women was adopted without vote by the [United Nations General Assembly](#) in its resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993. Contained within it is the recognition of "the urgent need for the universal application to women of the rights and principles with regard to equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity of all human beings".

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would encourage the assailants to do more harm and to commit other social crimes against women. For example, rape victims are encouraged by their families to compromise with the family of the accused. At some cases, they either drop charges or solve the problem by marrying the victim to the attacker. The awkward social reality is that the woman's marriage to the rapist is better than bringing him to justice. Similarly, the lawyer Fatma Zohra Ben Brahem (2014) argues that some women who were sexually abused are discouraged by their families. However, the law must be revised and more effective must be implemented. Moreover, the sociologist Samir Aimar (2013) claims that violence against women is a universal phenomenon, but the reasons behind such a phenomenon differ from one society to another. He emphasizes that one factor that augments the phenomenon in the Algerian society is the fact that families tend to glorify the status of boys and men within the family if compared to the status of women. For example the Algerian mother in general tend to prepare her little girl to do the household chores, while prohibiting boys from doing such housework because they are men. Hence, women are considered as men obedient servers. Furthermore, he stated that the lack of an adequate education of the Algerian child is the reason why the problem occurs in our society. That is to say that the Algerian family seldom valorizes the status of the sister and the mother and the female relative, or raise the child awareness about the exalted position given to the woman by the Islamic religion. In fact, the Algerian family blindly follows the rules and traditions of the patriarchal society that is premised on the fallacy of: 'women are better handled when brought below the knee'. All in all, other factors that help in the spread of violence in the Algerian society are: the lack of public safety, the absence of police in the public space, the absence of the educational and religious awareness from the media. Indeed, the predominance of images that depict rape, sexual slavery, the use of women as sexual objects in advertisement and media are other factors that contribute to the prevalence of violence in the Algerian community.

#### **4- Integrating Self Defense Strategies in Physical Education as a means of Empowerment**

Since the odds of rape, violence and assaults are increasing in the Algerian public space, we must start thinking of including Self-Defense techniques in public space such as primary, middle or secondary schools and even private spaces like gymnastic centers.

The idea of discussing the issue of integrating self –defense in physical education curriculum sprang from the initiation of the Jordanian sport woman Liana Khalifeh<sup>1</sup> (2016) who has opened the first Self-Defense studio for women in the Middle East that is designed to empower women both physically and physiologically through Self-Defense training since 2012. Lina’s passion to empower women helped her to win the first place in the UN’s Women Business Global Awards. She stated that Self-Defense trainings will make girls wiser as it helps build self confidence and defensive skills. She typifies that girls and women will become stronger gradually through the training sessions. Besides teaching self –Defense, she teaches women different kinds of Arts like Taekwondo, Kung Fu, Boxing, and Kickboxing. Moreover, she denotes that if girls are raised in a martial art atmosphere since an early age, they will grow up safer and more confident. Her She Fighter initiation in the Middle East inspired many schools in Jordan and Dubai and, hence, they started to integrate the strategies of Self-Defense in physical education in middle schools in Jordan’s public schools. In this respect she suggests:

*She Fighter has to be as an important curriculum in schools everywhere starting in the Middle East. We actually got our first acceptance from the Ministry of*

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<sup>1</sup>Although Lina earned her degree in French Literature in 2007 from the University of Jordan, she went on to get certified as a personal trainer in martial arts, she is extremely skilled, knowledgeable and a diligent professional who has trained successfully around 10,000 women. She uses her talent of public speaking to raise awareness on violence against women and the need for women to defend themselves. Retrieved from <http://en.arabwomanmag.com/lina-khalifeh-a-she-fighter-empowering-women/>



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*Education in Jordan to start integrating She Fighter in Public schools.* (Khalifeh, 2016)

As far as the Algerian Physical education curriculums in middle and secondary schools are concerned, students are mainly trained in the long jump, the shot put, jogging and racing. However, it is suggested that the ministry of education add Self-Defense to empower the Algerian students especially female ones. The inclusion of Self Defense would not only build self confidence and defensive skills, but it will also help in the eradication of violence against girls and women to protect their self –integrity and dignity. If students learnt self protection strategies in gym classes, they would be better equipped to handle an unexpected attack either at their schools or outside the school realms. Nevertheless, self Defense strategies would teach them how to react to a sudden and unexpected attack. Brown et al (2005) pinpoint that schools have taken steps to raise awareness about bullying and violence by the implementation of character-building programs. But, educators need to limit physical violence in addition to teaching tolerance among students. Therefore, the best way to do that, teachers must think about the inclusion of Self-Defense in gym classes.

Hayrettin Gümüřdađ, et .al (2014) argue that it is highly integral for students to know that they can defend themselves when they are confronted with harmful situations without having to fight. In other words, Self defense is the last resolution the student opt for when she or he feels a direct harm to their physical well-being or life.

Moreover, Chen (2011) adduces that there are many benefits to teaching self defense in schools curriculums, such as protecting students, establishing awareness, developing physical skills and hands-on experience, improving the ability to fight back, developing self-confidence, improving communication skills, improving fitness, and developing mental strategies. In an earlier study, Branks (2010) explained that the integration of a self-defense unit in physical education programs is becoming more common and compulsory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century curricula because of the threats of crime, violence and assault. Furthermore, Hayrettin Gümüřdađ, et .al (2014) attests that the Self-defense content can provide them proper instruction as to how to protect themselves. Hence, teaching students the proper way using self-defense strategies can help limit the amount of violence and assaults in society. On parallel lines, Hayrettin Gümüřdađ, et .al (2014) confirm that teachers, administrators and students won't benefit from the Self Defense

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unit, unless an adequate atmosphere and a productive leaning environment is supplied for teaching lifelong self defensive skills. However, students need to understand that the misuse of skills taught in class can be harmful to others and will not be tolerated. Each class varies and has its own unique characteristics and chemistry. Therefore, creating a safe and comfortable environment presents different challenges for each group of students and discussing the issue of self-defense will help the students to understand the importance of defending themselves. However, Hayretin Gümüşdağ, et .al (2014) confirms that before setting forth and starting the teaching of Self-Defense techniques, the teachers must teach the essence of tolerance as related to bullying. Nevertheless, the teacher must also make the students aware about their environment and surroundings. To illustrate he provided the following example: with today's prevalent technology students are constantly holding their smart phones, Ipods or looking down as they walk while texting on their cell phones. So, students must be aware of the threat that may be engendered due to disconnecting from their environment. They must understand that such behavior may make them an easy target for the assailant. From a similar perspective Brown and Johnson (2010) infer that an attacker chooses victims who are at disadvantaged position as compared to his position. Ergo, the teacher must stress the fact the students need to seek the aid of a responsible adults when involved in a bullying situation. Among the bulling or physical assault situations that Hayretin Gümüşdağ, et .al (2014) display are the followings: being pinned against a wall, being pulled and being pushed. They provided each situation with the self-defense techniques that are needed when the students are involved in it. When training, the students work n pairs; each work with the student he or she feels comfortable with to practice the skill. For instance, when being pinned against the wall,

*one partner will be the victim and one will be the attacker. The victim will have his or her back against the wall while the attacker grabs his or her shoulders applying pressure so that the victim cannot move. To get out of this hold, the victim quickly drops straight down to his or her knees and rolls underneath the attackers arms either right or left, to move away from the situation. When the victim drops, the attacker will lose balance and fall into the wall, at which time the victim makes the first moves.*

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(Hayrettin Gümüşdağ, et

.al, 2014 p: 49-50)

By teaching Self-Defense techniques in a physical education, teachers can adequately teach students and supply them with the needed knowledge to successfully use and understand the art of self-defense while training in a safe environment. It is important for physical education teachers to research the art of self-defense and have a savvy about its principles.

They could bring in guest speakers or demonstrators from local martial arts facilities in the area to help aid in the teaching of skills and ensure students safety. Self-defense is a lifelong skill that can help to raise awareness about bullying and help prevent a threatening situation from escalating into something more. (Ibid)

In his book, *'The Science of Self-Defense for Girls & Women'* (1929), Okazaki states that if girls are aware enough to take control, break grips and know how to control a person who is endangering their safety, they are the stronger through possessing knowledge, even though physically they are inferior to the enemy. Among the generalities that he picked up in the course of the lesson were: "remember that the whole body functions in self defense, the hands and feet and head: all have their share in rendering the enemy helpless (1929 p, 7).

## 5- Conclusion

The Algerian street appears to be male dominated territory that threatens women's presence. Despite the fact that the Algerian women shine in every social, cultural, economic and political domain, they still undergo difficulties and hindrances due to the social violence exercised on them. So, Self-Defense techniques are highly recommended to be integrated in the Algerian curricula of physical education. Self-Defense skill will not only better women self-esteem and build their physical defensive skills; it will also boost the quality of their social productivity as it empowers them. In addition to that, the media, the school and family must instill the proper Islamic education by highlighting the great position Islam has granted to women, comparing the status of women in the pre-Islamic era and during Islam and revealing the fact that the woman is the pillar of society. The Algerian youth must be aware that Islam has granted both men and women equal rights. For example the right for women to seek Knowledge is no different from that of men as stated by our prophet Mohamed peace be upon

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him: “Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim”. (Sahih Muslim)

Integrating Self-Defense techniques along with raising awareness of the essence of learning sports’ defensive skills would shape a better and promising future for the Algerian women. So, it is high time we integrated the culture of Self-Defense in the Algerian realm. Learning self –defense skills and sport in general is also part of the Islamic education as the prophet Mohamed peace be upon him encouraged parents to teach their children, including boys and girls, different sports like swimming, archery and horse riding; or as stated in the Hadith: “ teach your children swimming, archery and horse riding”. (Sahih Muslim)

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## 5- Appendices

Figure 1: Figure title



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- The volume of the research article should not exceed 30 pages, including appendices and references;
- The article must be exclusive and has not already been published.
- The article must be in one of the following areas: Social sciences, education, human factors and the working environment, cultural studies, urban studies, anthropology, demography, social work, health (social sciences), sociology and sociology Psychology sociology, philosophy,

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history, and communication.

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