

OPP: HEALTH & SELF-ESTEEM

Vital oldies with adapted old martial arts

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Purpose We experience a double ageing crisis (rising percentage of aged persons who also attain a higher age). This stresses the importance of a good quality of life. The positive effects on physical and cognitive functions of QiGong und the internal martial art TaiChi is well documented (Park et al, 2023). In the Western World this is usually taught without the self-preservation aspects that reduces harm from other persons. So-called external martial arts include self-defence but are taught to children and younger adults who focus on competition, not on self-preservation as is a concern of older people (Bronswijk 2021). Comparing fitness with karate, an external martial art, showed increased reaction speed by karate only (Witte et al, 2016), providing an essential element of self-defence. **Method** We combined internal and external arts in a training curriculum after Ries & Wogawa (2016) that was adopted afterwards by the Nederlandse Federatie voor Krijgskunsten. It includes didactics, focusses on health and self-preservation, does not have competition, asks for daily training at home, weekly sessions at the dojo, and may lead to a black belt. Specific martial art content derives from the classical art practised by individual teachers. Okinawan martial arts from before the Japanese Meiji Restauration (1868-1890) focusses on self-preservation and supplied us with age-proof techniques. We developed full-day courses for martial arts teachers at three dan-levels stimulating further learning while focussing on capabilities and aspirations of older people and methodical ways to address these. A follow-up of their experiences took place. **Results and Discussion** Around 80 teachers (7♀, 72♂) completed a course. Gender diversity was larger with a female recruiter (Table 1). In June 2024 two German and four Dutch teachers, taught older adults martial arts. Needed low-tech punching pads, prepared breaking boards, etc. were supplied in the dojo, while most students used a privately owned smart watch at dojo and home. Entering older students had commonly practiced a martial art before, sometimes decades earlier. Each class contained around 4 to 8 students. A Dutch group that started in 2019 saw 6 students leaving (1♀ died, 1♀ and 1♂ moved, 1♀ and 2♂ losing interest), while 4 (3♀, 1♂) remained and reported positive results in daily live. One ♀ attained a blackbelt. To prevent association with violent martial art games and videos, the Dutch introduced a neutral term, VITOK. It derives from **VIT**ale **O**uderen door **K**rijgskunst (Vital elderly through martial arts) and sounds well in Dutch. Recruiting students remained difficult. Only practising older students were effective recruiters. A slow but steady growth in participation is expected. In our workshop all ISG2024 participants are welcome to experience a class.

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Table 1. Classical styles of martial arts and gender of experienced practitioners who took an application course for teaching older adults (2019-2024)

Martial Art Origin*	Germany		Netherlands	
	♀♀ n=1	♂♂ n=47	♀♀ n=6	♂♂ n=25
Chinese	-	2	1	5
Indonesian / Philippine	-	1	2	1
Japanese	1	43	5	20
Okinawan	-	8	1	5
Korean	-	22	-	6
Other	-	8	-	2

*Practitioners were commonly experts in several martial arts