**Research Proposal**

**Abstract:**

This research proposal examines the influence of martial arts on the mental health of women experiencing post-trauma brought on by sexual assault. Today, many women are exposed to sexual violence and are forced to live with post-traumatic stress disorder. This research will investigate whether the practice of martial arts improves mental health among these women.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is defined in the DSM-5 (2013) as an ongoing stress reaction to a traumatic event; this reaction may include heightened arousal, intrusive memories of the traumatic event, dissociation, and avoidance of stimuli that call the event to mind. Trauma causes damage on multiple levels: damage to biological and conditioning processes as well as psychological and social damage (Shalev, 1994).

In her book “Trauma and Recovery” (1992), Judith Lewis Herman writes that “trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control over her own life; therefore, the guiding principle of recovery is to restore power and control to the survivor. According to Ben Yaakov-Ashman (2020), the body and the mind are a single mechanism. Therefore, the necessary process of returning control to the individual can also be taught via the systems of the body, and thus connect to the systems of the mind.

The scholarly literature proposes a number of definitions for the phrase “mental health.” Chaplin (Chaplin, 1971) claims that it describes a state of successful adaptation combined with a subjective feeling of mental wellbeing, a will to live, and a sense that one is using his or her talents and abilities. In addition, mental health is a phrase that includes not only the presence or absence of physical or mental symptoms, but positive elements such as an optimistic approach to life and a sense of hope (Drori and Florian, 1990).

Scaer (Scaer, 2001) claims that the treatment of trauma victims must incorporate body-based processes. Indeed, studies have shown the positive influence of tai chi and qi gong practice on the physical and mental health of people suffering from post-trauma (Shaham, 2009). As trauma detaches the individual from the present, body-based processes help enable connection to the “here and now” (Scaer, 2001).

Today, many women are exposed to the cycle of violence. According to the data provided by the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel, one in three women experiences sexual assault over the course of her life, and one in five women is raped (2021). Trauma brought on by sexual assault has unique characteristics; therefore, it is crucial to understand the best possible options for treatment among this particular population.

**Research Question:**

Does the practice of martial arts have a positive influence on the mental health of women with post-trauma brought on by sexual assault?

**Method:**

*Participants:*

The research will include approximately fifty women diagnosed with post-traumatic symptoms following sexual assault.

*Tools:*

A demographic questionnaire that will include details such as age, income level, education level, background, etc.

A questionnaire on post-trauma according to the definition in the DSM-5.

Mental Health Inventory (MHI) – a self-reported inventory consisting of 38 items, developed by Veit and Ware (Veit and Ware, 1983), that examines feelings of mental distress and/or health.

*Procedure:*

The research will be conducted according to a between-subjects design. The participants will practice martial arts twice a week for half a year. Every participant will complete the MHI before the beginning of the experiment, three months into the experiment, after half a year, and after a year.

**Potential Implications:**

The present study may shed some light on the influence of martial arts on mental health. More specifically, this research may help us to understand whether the practice of martial arts improves mental health among those suffering from post-trauma. At a time when one of every three women experiences sexual assault, there is an urgent need to understand how to help sexual assault survivors deal with post-trauma and reach mental health.

Further studies may examine the connection between martial arts and levels of self-confidence and adaptability.