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Men Can Help Stop Violence Against Women

Villari's Martial Arts Cooperative Launches "SAFE Men for Women's Self-Defense" Training Program

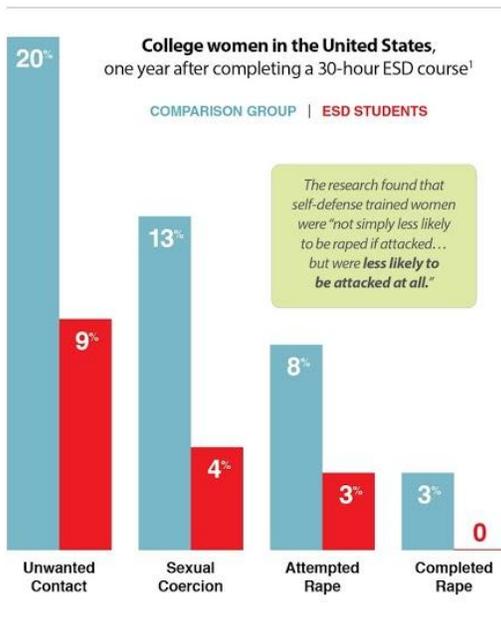
Madison, WI— Since the start of the pandemic, demand for self-defense training has increased. That's why [Villari's Martial Arts Cooperative](#) self-defense instructors are looking for more men to support classes as specially trained practice attackers.

"We were completely shut down for in-person training from March 2020 to June 2021, and there was only one kind of inquiry that kept showing up in our inbox: women's self-defense classes." said Ali Treviño-Murphy, [SAFE Women's Self-Defense](#) (SAFE) co-founder and 4th degree black belt. "We developed an online course that has served well over 100 women, but we're struggling to meet the demand for private workshops since reopening. We get multiple inquiries per week. The biggest challenge is scheduling enough trained male practice attackers to give participants that realistic, empowering experience they need."

The SAFE Women's Self-Defense program uses the [Empowerment Self-Defense](#) (ESD) model, which combines learning about the dynamics of violence against women, learning assertiveness and de-escalation skills, and learning how to physically fight back if needed. ESD is the only sexual violence prevention strategy with solid evidence of effectiveness at reducing rates of victimization. Studies show that ESD participants are not only more effective at stopping attempted sexual assault, but they are less likely to be assaulted in the first place. ([Hollander, 2004](#))

SELF-DEFENSE TRAINING REDUCES WOMEN'S RISK OF SEXUAL ASSAULT.

Empowerment self-defense training is the only sexual violence prevention strategy with solid evidence of effectiveness at reducing rates of victimization. Recent studies reveal:



University women in Canada,
one year after completing
a 12-hour ESD program²



Reduced risk of
Attempted Rape



Reduced risk of
Completed Rape

What is Empowerment Self-Defense (ESD)?

ESD is a comprehensive approach to violence prevention and resistance education that emphasizes awareness and assertiveness skills in addition to verbal and physical strategies. All of the strategies are easy to learn and highly effective in preventing or ending an assault. ESD classes are designed to empower women and build their confidence.

- National Women's
Martial Arts Federation



Adolescent girls in Kenya,
one year after completing a 12-hour ESD course³



¹Hollander 2014 | ²Senn et al., 2015 | ³Sinclair et al., 2013, Sarnquist et al., 2014, 2017



Not all ESD classes use male practice attackers, but Treviño-Murphy says they enrich the experience for women. “I’ve taken self-defense classes in women-only spaces, and I really felt something was missing,” she said. “For example if I’m the attacker, it’s not hard to get out of my wrist grab. In contrast, many of the men who attack for us can wrap their fingers more than all the way around my wrist. There is no ‘weak point’ in their grip.”

While some self-defense instructors consider the use of men to be too triggering, Treviño-Murphy, who also holds a masters degree in social work, says there is a way to do it that is both empowering and trauma-informed. Some of the strategies employed in the SAFE class include foreshadowing in detail what to expect, inviting students to participate to their comfort level (including opting out or choosing to practice with a classmate or female instructor), and highly training the male practice attackers to be sensitive to the needs of the students.

Orlando Acevedo has been studying martial arts at Villari’s since he was six years old, and has served as an attacker for the SAFE course for the past six years. He has planned a curriculum for men who would like to be hired as practice attackers.



Orlando Acevedo (left) with Tyler Bunge (right) demonstrating self-defense techniques



“I do this because I want women to feel safe and confident,” Acevedo said, “And we’re looking for other men who feel the same way. A lot of times when you see things that aren’t right in the world, it’s hard to know how to help. This is a really meaningful way that men can help. Plus, they will learn a lot about self-defense in the process!”

The first “SAFE Men for Women’s Self-Defense” course will include two 2-hour sessions on Sundays, June 12th and 19th from 11am-1pm. The cost of the course is \$49 and successful graduates will be eligible to be hired as practice attackers at \$15/hr (for public workshops) or \$20/hr (for private workshops).

Classes cover:

- Intro to striking for self-defense
- How to safely hold pads & shields for partner practice
- How to escape various grabs/holds and how to grab/hold a partner for safe/realistic practice
- Establishing consent
- Trauma-informed practice

Upon course completion, students may be invited to join paid opportunities to serve as practice attackers in self-defense workshops.

Eligibility requirements for employment as practice attackers:

- Physically able to perform the attacks
- Emotionally safe for women and other vulnerable populations
- Commitment to violence prevention and intervention beyond the dojo setting

More about Villari’s Martial Arts Cooperative:

Villari’s Martial Arts Cooperative started as Villari’s Studios of Self-Defense in 1989 founded by Mary Murphy Edwards. After many years of serving the community with martial arts, kickboxing and self-defense instruction, Master Murphy’s daughter Ali Treviño-Murphy managed the school from 2007-2011, then initiated the transition to cooperative ownership. In 2013 Villari’s became the first and only cooperatively-owned martial arts school in the U.S. The school’s mission is to help people grow safer, stronger, together. They offer group and private instruction in martial arts, kickboxing and self-defense for ages 5 through adult, both in person and online. Proof of vaccination is currently required for all instructors and students in order to participate in in-person services.