

More women learning to pack a punch



Photo: ST

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SINGAPORE - She stands at 1.65m and weighs only 46kg, but she was not afraid to stand up to the burly man.

Last month, Wong Xinyuan, a 20-year-old student on a gap year, put her self-defence skills to good use when she stopped a man from threatening a couple on the MRT.

"I saw him raising his fist at the woman," she said. "So I pulled him away...and used what I learnt from Kapap Academy to attack him in the neck, as that is one of the spots where it will hurt the most (if hit)."

Afterwards, the aggressor moved away.

Ms Wong is one of an increasing number of women taking up self-defence classes.

Various fighting styles are offered, and many of the schools here have recorded a rise in female memberships and students.

For Kapap Academy (Singapore), the number of female students has increased by between 200 and 300 since it was corporatised in 2008. Today, 85 per cent of its students are women - up from 70 per cent three years ago.

The school specialises in kapap, a hand-to-hand combat self-defence style. It is also the only school in Singapore to teach gracie jiu-jitsu and American catch wrestling.

At Krav Maga Culture Singapore, the number of female students has risen to 38, up from two when it started in 2009. The gym specialises in krav maga, one of the newest fighting styles to hit Singapore, which draws techniques from fighting styles such as wing chun and muay thai.

U-Elite, a 10-year-old gym that specialises in kickboxing, has seen a surge in the number of women members - from 557 in 2012 to 889 last year.

Over at Evolve Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), the number of female students has grown 10 times since it opened in January 2009. The gym teaches fighting styles that include MMA, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, kickboxing, muay thai and boxing.

Demand is so strong that an all-women's training centre - Women Protection SG - was set up last year in Lavender Street.

Head instructor Elaine Lim decided to start the gym because she found that "there aren't really any female instructors who are teaching self-defence".

"During training, some females don't really feel comfortable having body contact with male instructors, so they might hold back," she said.

Ms Lim, whose most popular class is kickboxing incorporated into self-defence, has seen membership rise from just one to 30 in the past year.

According to the Annual Crime Brief 2013, the number of outrage of modesty cases reported for the year stood at 1,325, with arrests on board bus and trains increasing from 70 to 80 people during the period.

One of Evolve MMA's students, Clarissa Choh, 38, took up self-defence because she feels that people "cannot be complacent, even in Singapore".

The housewife escaped a rape attempt 10 years ago, during which she was pinned down by an aggressor. After picking up self-defence, she feels she is "definitely more prepared" to handle such situations.

She added: "I am able to defend myself not just physically, but also mentally. Now, I am calmer and able to react more appropriately when faced with danger."

The courses are also popular with women who travel alone or unaccompanied by men.

Pearlynn Sim, 20, a student of Kapap Academy, took self-defence classes before she journeyed to Taiwan in June last year with a female friend.

She added: "Learning self-defence has made me more prepared for a potential attack, and I think that is really important as I can react faster and more effectively, which means a greater chance of surviving an attack."

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