

1 IS PHYSICAL FITNESS A NECESSARY REQUIREMENT IN PROVIDING PERSONAL PROTECTION?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether physical fitness is a necessary requirement in providing personal protection in the United Kingdom, particularly as the competences guidelines set by the Security Industry Authority for licensing do not stipulate physical fitness requirements. The study is also timely as, since the introduction of the SIA CP Licence in 2006, there has been little research in this area. The method used in this research was quantitative data analysis based on a questionnaire administered to a purposeful sample of SIA licensed close protection personnel. The key findings suggest there is a need for physical fitness in the CP industry, and that such a need is perceived to lead to improved level and quality of close protection service.

Introduction

This research focuses on the skills required of close protection (CP) personnel in the United Kingdom (UK) as set down by the Security Industry Authority (SIA); it does not cover the skills required by CP operatives working overseas, providing armed protection in hostile environments. This paper will investigate if physical fitness is a necessary requirement in providing personal protection. The reason why this research is important is two fold: firstly, to the author's knowledge there has been no specific paper written on this subject, and secondly, that with the introduction of the SIA CP Licence (on 20th March 2006), the syllabus of close protection courses consisted of ten units of competence, none of which required physical fitness. Ten of the 108 SIA approved CP training companies, who were contacted, confirmed that physical fitness was not a prerequisite to attending the course, nor were their trainees expected to participate in any physical activities.

Prior to the introduction of SIA CP Licence, training companies offering CP courses did not have to comply with a national syllabus and therefore the content of courses did vary. The variation also covered the level of physical fitness required by candidates prior to attending the course and the actual level of fitness taught on the course. For example, the Task International course in January 1997 required candidates to be able to run five miles in under forty-five minutes with additional physical exercises being performed in order to pass a section of the course.

The requirement for physical fitness as a skill was supported by a number of publications (Holder & Hawley, 1998; Consterdine, 2000). There was an underlining theme that CP personnel should be physically fit; Holder and Hawley (p6) point out that CP personnel should be in the best possible physical condition, and Consterdine (p290) suggests that fit people are better able to deal



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with stressful situations – ‘fight or flight’. Padgham (2006: 27) also argues that physical fitness is necessary for health, alertness and speed of reaction, as well as the more obvious physical demands of long hours or conflict management situations.

It is thus argued that the reason why physical fitness is important is due to the physically demanding situations that a CP operator may face. For example, it is not uncommon for the CP operator to run up a flight of stairs to meet the principal who has entered a lift with colleagues, leaving no room in the lift for the CP operator. Instances are also known where the CP operator had to carry a collapsed principal. The physically demanding activities make it imperative that CP operators follow and maintain some sort of physical conditioning program (Haney, 2005), so that they can perform at their best in every situation (Holder & Hawley, 1998). A physically fit CP operator will experience less fatigue and have quicker reactions (Brown, 2007).

In comparison, failure to keep fit can present problems not just to the CP operator but to the principal as well. This can lead to issues of the CP operator becoming a liability within the team especially if lack of fitness contributes to a physical incident with the principal. Additionally an unfit CP operator portrays an image which emphasizes lack of: self-discipline, professionalism, and capability (Brown, 2007). Lack of professionalism, in particular, reinforces the public perception that the ‘big guy’ has an automatic right to work in this industry (Horak, 2007), where in fact ‘the strength you need is the kind that is immediately available rather than pumped-up beach boy muscles’ (Elhanan, 1985: 16). Although, physical ability is seen as important, it should, however, be noted that it is only one of the hard skills needed for a competent CP operator (Padgham, 2006).

There is also a need to explain physical fitness within the close protection industry. Physical fitness is defined by three types of exercises: aerobic exercises such as running, where the body is exercising, forcing its heart and lungs to work harder and deliver oxygen to the muscles that are being used; anaerobic exercises such as heavy weightlifting which requires the performer to use short bursts of physical power; and resistance exercises such as using free weights to increase muscle strength and mass (Brown, 2007).

Study Method

The purpose of this study was to discover if physical fitness is a necessary requirement in providing personal protection. The most useful and direct method of collecting data for quantitative analysis was a questionnaire survey. A two-page questionnaire was designed and administered online to a purposive sample (Veal, 1997) of male and female SIA CP Licence holders based in the UK. The age of the respondents ranged between 30 and 56 years; they included respondents with both former military and non-military backgrounds. There was also an opportunity in the questionnaire for respondents to add additional comments.

Respondents received all communications electronically, including the reasons why they were being asked to participate in the research and



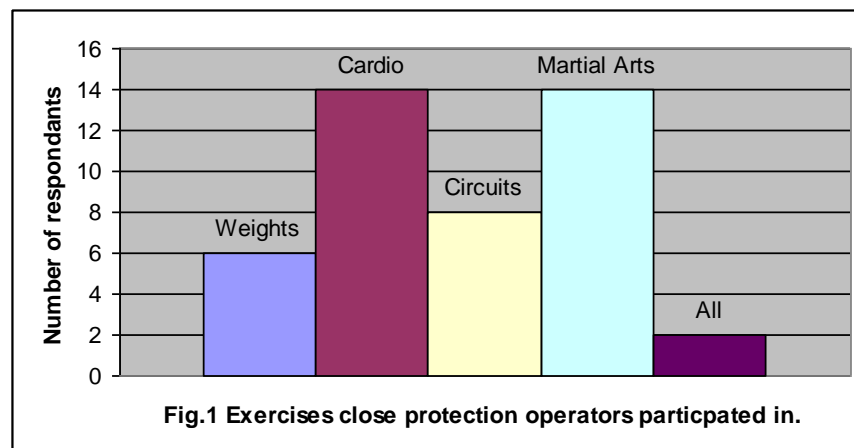
instructions on how to fill the questionnaire and submit their replies. This meant that respondents did not have direct communication with the questionnaire's designer (Barnes, 2001).

The questionnaire was designed to solicit answers to questions, such as: fitness exercises the respondent participates in, importance of forms of fitness necessary for providing personal protection, and whether principals should expect a level of fitness from their protectors.

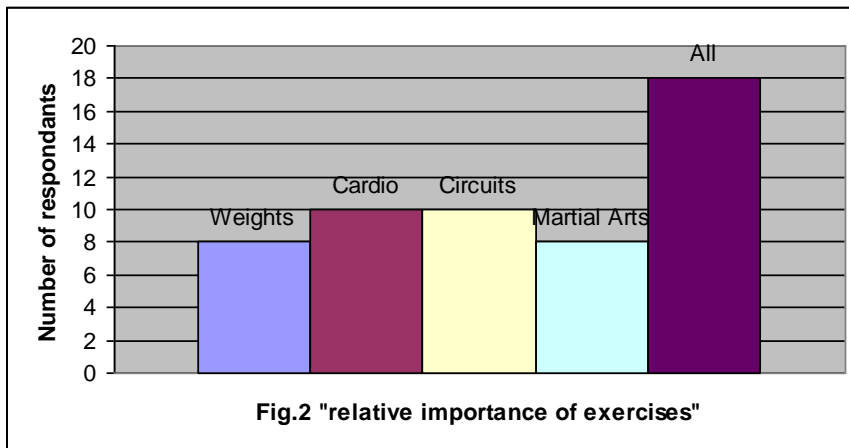
Results And Analysis

Questionnaires were sent to 56 SIA CP Licence holders, accounting to 1% of potential candidates who hold SIA CP Licence. The number of questionnaires that were returned was 38, consisting of 37 males and one female. Analysis of the data of this small number of respondents shows that:

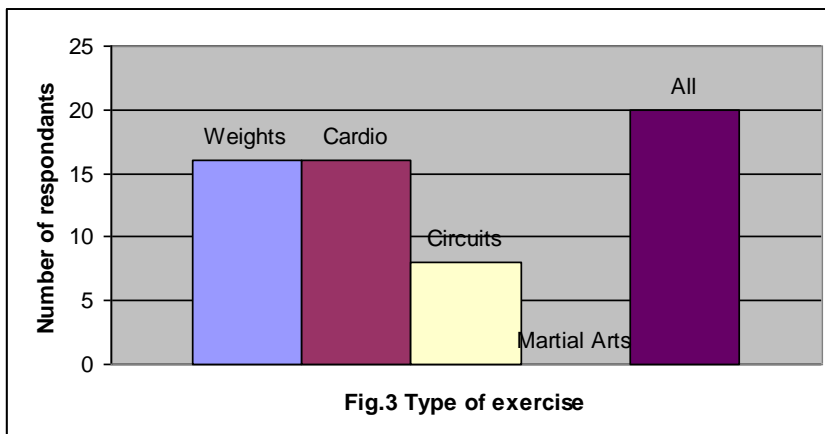
- 24 (63%) respondents had military experience.
- 24 respondents participated in physical fitness during their SIA CP course.
- The physical fitness exercises that respondents participated in included cardio (14 respondents), martial arts (14), circuits (8), and weights (6); see Figure 1. After the introduction of the SIA CP course in 2006, physical fitness was not part of the syllabus, some respondents had attended courses prior to 2006 and those that attended after 2006 took these courses as an add-on to the core syllabus.



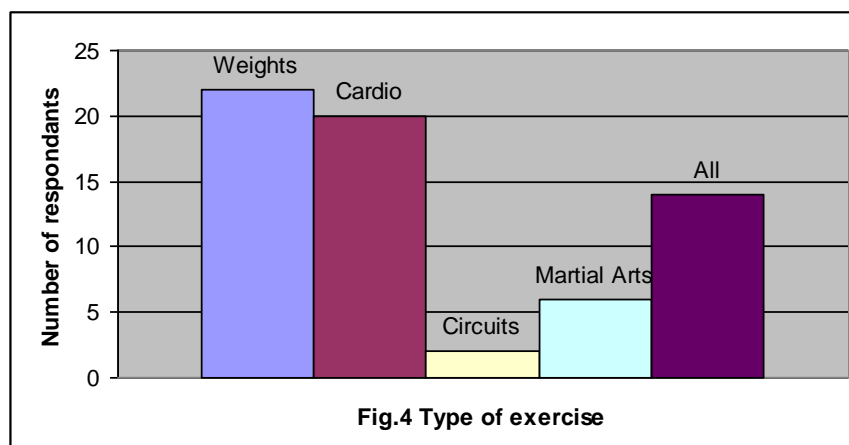
- 24 respondents agreed that physical fitness exercises are important in providing close protection service. The largest number (18) felt that all exercises (cardio, weights, circuits, and martial arts) were important; see Figure 2.



- 37 (95%) respondents stated that fitness helped them in their close protection role.
- 30 (79%) respondents indicated that having a military/police background helped them physically in providing close protection.
- 26 (68%) respondents suggested that their latest close protection role required them to be physically fit. Of these, 20 indicated all physical fitness exercises were required; 16 emphasised weights and cardio; and 8 mentioned circuit exercises. Martial arts had a zero response (see Figure 3).



28 (74%) respondents felt that they were of intermediate fitness, while 10 (26%) stated that their level of fitness is that of an athletic; none described their fitness level as that of a beginner. Furthermore, 37 respondents said they were physically fit, and 1 was not fit. Those who described themselves as fit, engaged in fitness exercises. Weights and cardio exercises proved the most frequently practiced by respondents, with a total of 22 and 20 respectively (see Figure 4).



- 28 respondents felt that fitness should be a compulsory part of the SIA CP courses, as opposed to 10 (26%) who felt they should not.
- All the 38 respondents agreed that clients should expect a level of fitness from their protectors. 28 respondents also felt that the CP industry would benefit from having a standard level of fitness for licence holders, while 10 respondents said the industry would not benefit.

The results of the questionnaire showed that those respondents from a military background believed that physical fitness was a necessary requirement in providing personal protection. These respondents also kept physically fit; they described their level of fitness as intermediate and believed that clients should expect a level of fitness from their protectors.

Another finding shows that respondents who attended the SIA CP courses participated in cardio and martial arts exercises. The general theme that seems to run through the answers is, that all types of fitness are important when providing close protection. The majority of the respondents said they kept physically fit, particularly, through attending weights and cardio exercises. Physical fitness, respondents stated, provided confidence, promoted self-discipline and provided a more professional image.

Overall, respondents felt that there were advantages for CP operators in keeping physically fit. Fitness was seen as necessary to enable CP operators to work up to eighteen hours a day where they would need to maintain a high level of awareness, focus and concentration under extreme pressure, and cope with stressful situations.



Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that most practicing CP operatives think that physical fitness is necessary in providing personal protection.

Physical fitness is seen as a requirement not only as part of the SIA CP course but also afterward as part of the CP operator's continuing professional development. Fitness requirement is seen to make the CP operator more employable and able to provide a professional level of service.

The findings also revealed that CP operators from a military background, in contrast to those from a civilian background, believed that physical fitness is necessary in providing personal protection and that having a military background provides the physical attributes needed for close protection roles.

More research is required in the field of physical fitness and the CP industry, not only on the affect various levels of fitness provides but also what type of fitness is beneficial to the industry as a whole. An independent governing body made up of individuals from the fitness industry, the SIA, civilian and military CP operators may be required to discuss the possible introduction of a physical fitness programme on future SIA CP courses. The myth of the media generated 'bodyguard' has led to the perception that close protection is an industry dominated by the physically fit, martial art people, and those with excellent shooting skills. While this perception may add to the belief that all CP personnel keep fit on a regular basis – as the respondents to this questionnaire did; those candidates who attend a current SIA CP training course may, through the contents of the course, believe that physical fitness is not a requirement of the CP role.

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