

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE MOTIVATION OF KRAV MAGA ATHLETES

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^AStudy Design, ^BData Collection, ^CStatistical Analysis, ^DManuscript Preparation, ^EFunds Collection

Abstract This qualitative research examines the motivations behind individuals who participate in Krav Maga, a renowned self-defense system celebrated for its practicality and efficiency. The study's objective is to uncover the diverse array of factors inspiring Krav Maga enthusiasts, illuminating personal and societal dimensions. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, it becomes apparent that Krav Maga practitioners are primarily driven by a combination of self-defense concerns, fitness aspirations, and a thirst for personal empowerment. Additionally, participants underscore the significance of building self-confidence, enhancing physical fitness, and fostering self-awareness as pivotal motivators in their journey. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of motivation within the Krav Maga community, offering valuable insights for instructors, practitioners, and researchers keen on martial arts and self-defense training.

Key words: Krav Maga, motivation, sport, athletes

Introduction

Krav Maga is an Israeli martial art system. The Jui Jutsu system was developed for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and derived from a combination of techniques used in judo, karate, boxing, and wrestling (Green, 2001). Known for its situational focus and high efficiency, Krav Maga was developed and utilized by the Israeli military forces. A simplified version, omitting lethal techniques and tailored for personal defense, is taught through courses open to civilians. These courses cover methods of protection against threats encountered in daily life, emphasizing that Krav Maga aims to teach survival rather than combat (Gross, 2010).

The emergence of Krav Maga is credited to Imi Lichtenfeld, a Hungarian-born Israeli martial artist. Imi utilized his boxing and wrestling training in the mid to late 1930s to defend Jews against fascist groups in Bratislava, adding field experience to his skills. After migrating to Mandatory Palestine in the late 1940s, Imi, who later formed the IDF during the Israeli War of Independence, began providing combat training courses to Jewish militia groups (Green, 2001). Subsequently, Krav Maga evolved into a global defense sport. Currently, the Krav Maga System lacks official recognition by a federation in Turkey and has no status in the Ministry of Sports. However, it is offered through

private institutions and organizations, providing international certifications and their own certificate systems (Levine & Whitman, 2007).

In this context, it is hypothesized that the structure of Krav Maga may influence the motivation levels and reasons for participation, goals, and performances of its practitioners. Many Krav Maga practitioners are believed to be motivated by factors such as self-defense, maintaining physical fitness, building confidence, stress management, and establishing social connections. Additionally, Krav Maga is not seen as a competitive activity with ring-match rules; instead, it is embraced as a skill for defending oneself in daily life.

According to Gould et al. (1985), research on sports participation motivation can assist coaches and educators in program development by better addressing the needs of individuals engaging in activities. The motivation of Krav Maga practitioners is influenced by factors such as the support provided by instructors, the quality of training, and environmental elements. Overall, Krav Maga practitioners generally believe that the benefits provided by the sport and the effort required to achieve their goals are worthwhile.

In conclusion, the motivation of Krav Maga practitioners is based on factors such as the benefits provided by the sport and their reasons for participating. These factors can help practitioners achieve their goals and improve their performances.

Krav Maga System

Origins and Concepts

The original concept of Krav Maga was to gather the most effective and practical techniques from other fighting styles and quickly teach them to soldiers. It emphasizes simultaneous attack and defense maneuvers and has been used similarly by both Israeli special forces and regular infantry units. There are two versions of Krav Maga one adapted for Israeli security forces and the other for civilian use (Levine et al., 2009).

Basic Principles

Krav Maga encourages students to avoid conflict whenever possible. In situations only where avoidance is impossible or dangerous, it teaches to end the fight as quickly as possible, with some techniques capable of causing permanent damage or even death to the attacker. It prioritizes the safety of students and teaches the fastest and most effective defense techniques against any type of attack (Levine & Whitman, 2007).

Application of Krav Maga

- Counter-attack as quickly as possible or before the opponent.
- Targeted attacks on the body's most sensitive areas, such as eyes, neck, throat, face, abdomen, groin, ribs, knees, feet, and fingers to maximum efficiency and effectiveness to quickly incapacitate the enemy.
- Use of surrounding objects for self-defense or as attack tools.
- Training based on increased situational awareness, understanding urban warfare psychology, and recognizing potential threats before an attack occurs.
- Include physical and verbal ways of dealing with situations to avoid violence when possible (Kahn, 2016).

Motivation

In psychology, motives are conscious or unconscious factors that define, initiate, sustain, and direct attitudes and behaviors in the formation of personality (Yiğit, 2011). Motivation is defined as an internal force that drives an individual into a situation and enables them to manage and sustain that situation (Kula & Taşdemir, 2014). Motivation

helps individuals take action and achieve desired goals more quickly (Dur, 2014). Motives are cyclical and, once identified, never disappear forever. The motivation cycle consists of feeling a need, taking action to meet that need, and steps to fulfill the need (Bacanli, 2013).

Motivation in Sports

Motivation in sports has psychological, social, and biological aspects. Psychological characteristics are closely related to the athlete's internal motivation, involving sporting achievements, goal setting, and achieving those goals (Hosseinalipour, 2015). Sports motivation plays a developmental role in the behavior and behavioral variables of athletes and coaches (Duda & Hall, 2001). Coaches should understand what is important for athletes, as this awareness helps athletes achieve team or individual success (Çakıroğlu, 1987).

Krav Maga and Motivation

Reviewing existing literature, only one study has been found to date on the motivation of Krav Maga practitioners. Körner et al. (2017) conducted a study on "Motives in Self-Defense - An Example of Krav Maga and Wing Chun" aiming to gain insights into the motivations of Krav Maga and Wing Chun trainees. The results clearly indicated that the motivation to learn self-defense and the need for security and protection were prominent in both systems. However, the study also showed that other motives played a significant role.

Krav Maga training not only equips individuals with physical self-defense skills but also helps mold a "fighter personality" by building self-confidence, determination, and controlled aggression. This martial art, developed for real-world combat scenarios, focuses on practical techniques for defending against armed and unarmed attackers. Its emphasis on efficiency and adaptability makes it accessible and effective for people of all fitness levels and backgrounds (Farkash et al., 2017)

Given these aspects and the unique features of Krav Maga discipline compared to other combat sports, this study was designed to explore the factors influencing motivation in Krav Maga practitioners.

Material & Methods

This research employed qualitative research design using the interview technique. Interviewing is a qualitative research technique where the researcher collects data about the social world by asking questions about the participants' lives (Yıkımiş, 2020). The interviews were transcribed, coded and thematized. Thus, content analysis was conducted.

Research Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the motivation factors of Krav Maga practitioners in Turkey and explore the reasons influencing these factors. The study utilizes qualitative research methods to determine the factors influencing the motivation of Krav Maga practitioners. Since Krav Maga discipline is relatively new in Turkey and has distinct characteristics from other sports, this study aims to investigate whether there are different elements affecting the motivation of practitioners and, if so, what these elements are.

Research Question

The primary questions of this research are "what are the factors determining the motivation of Krav Maga practitioners" and "what are the reasons behind these factors".

Research Model

Qualitative research involves using various empirical materials (case studies, personal experiences, life stories, interviews, observation texts, historical, interactive, and visual materials) to capture significant moments and meanings in individuals' lives. It does not involve numerical data, and results are generated without statistical analysis (Altunışık et al., 2001). In other words, qualitative research is a process of uncovering experiences related to a phenomenon, highlighting the connection between individuals and the phenomenon itself (Kocabıyık, 2015). Given the nature of the study, a phenomenological design was chosen. Phenomenological studies aim to reveal the experiences of individuals regarding a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), emphasizing the connection between the person experiencing the phenomenon and the phenomenon itself (Kocabıyık, 2015).

Study Group

The study group was determined using the criterion sampling model. Participants were 10 Krav Maga practitioners who have been regularly practicing Krav Maga for at least two years, with different ages, genders, and experience levels. Convenience sampling was used to select participants, considering accessibility. Krav Maga training institutions in Istanbul's Anatolian Side were preferred due to their ease of accessibility. The study was conducted between May 10, 2023, and May 20, 2023, with Krav Maga practitioners training at Krav Maga Global and Close Combat Self Defense Academy.

This research explores the motivation factors driving individuals to engage in Krav Maga training, a unique form of martial arts focused on self-defense. The study adopts a phenomenological design to delve into the experiences of Krav Maga practitioners and understand the connection between their motivations and the discipline itself. The data collection process involved semi-structured interviews conducted through Zoom and recorded with participants' consent.

Table 1. Study group

Participation labourers	Gender	Age	Profession	Certificate Level	Branch Experience (Years)
K1	Male	32	Engineer	KMG - Practioner	5
K2	Male	38	Architect	KMG - Expert	15
K3	Male	29	BJJ Coach	CCSDA - Advanced	3
K4	Male	32	Software Developer	IAC - Expert	8
K5	Male	42	Finance Director	KMG - Practioner	3
K6	Male	34	Sports Coach	KMG - Expert	10
K7	Female	25	Psychologist	-	3
K8	Female	23	Student	CCSDA - Advanced	4
K9	Female	31	Fitness Trainer	-	2
K10	Female	32	HR Manager	CCSDA - Advanced	4

Researcher's Role

The lead researcher holds a master's degree in sports sciences, specializing in Krav Maga, and possesses an advanced certificate in Krav Maga. The co-researcher is an associate professor at Pamukkale University's Faculty of Sports Sciences. Both researchers contributed to the development of open-ended interview questions based on relevant literature reviews.

Data Collection Tools

Semi-structured interview formats were prepared by the researchers after reviewing both domestic and international literature. Open-ended questions were formulated, considering the Sport Motivation Scale-II by Yıldız et al. (2019) and the Sport Motivation Scale's Turkish validation study by Kazak (2004). Demographic information included gender, age, years of Krav Maga practice, certification levels, and participants' professions.

Data Collection Process

Data were collected online via Zoom from May 10 to May 20, 2023, with participants' recorded consent. The recorded interviews were securely stored for further analysis. Participants were assured that the recordings would be used solely for scientific research purposes. Ethics committee permission was obtained for this study. The number of the relevant ethics committee decision is E-93803232-622.02-384569.

Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the research is Krav Maga athletes. The sample group of the research consists of 10 volunteer Krav Maga athletes who are receiving training at Krav Maga Academies in Istanbul.

Research Questions

Demographic Information Form

Your age	
Gender	
Profession	
Your Certificate Level	
Your Krav Maga Experience Period	

Interview Form

1	Why do you prefer Krav Maga sport?
2	How does it make you feel to be involved in Krav Maga sport?
3	What are the things you think Krav Maga sport has contributed to you?
4	How does Krav Maga sport affect your social life?
5	How do you feel when you are not doing Krav Maga sport?
6	In which areas (social / education / work) does Krav Maga sport contribute to you the most?
7	What are the main reasons that push you to do Krav Maga sport?
8	How does practising Krav Maga affect your relationship with your environment?
9	How do you identify yourself with Krav Maga Sport?
10	What is the psychological effect of Krav Maga Sport on you?

Validity

The validity of the research was ensured by considering the context of data collection, maintaining internal consistency, coherence of results, and alignment with the conceptual and theoretical framework.

Reliability

Reliability was established through detailed documentation of research questions, methods, and steps. The research process, data collection methods, analysis, and results were transparently explained. Raw data were stored for external verification.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was employed to analyze the obtained data. The analysis involved transcription, coding, theme development, and validation. Consistency checks were performed to ensure reliability.

Findings

Themes identified include Physical (fitness and health), Security (self-defense and discipline of Krav Maga), Social (socialization, friendship, and distinctiveness), Psychological (mental health, self-confidence, stress management, pleasure), and Personal Development (awareness, empathy, and personal gain).

Figure 1. Findings related to motivation factors of Krav Maga athletes

PSYCHOLOGICAL	SOCIAL	SECURITY	PHYSICAL	SELF DEVELOPMENT
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Table 2. Themes and Codes Generated

THEMES	CODES	SIMILAR STUDIES
PHYSICAL	FITNESS	Gill, D.L., Gross, J.B., Huddleston, S. (1985). Participation motivation in youth sports. <i>International Journal of Sport Psychology</i> , (14), 1–14.
	HEALTH	Gould, D., Feltz, D., & Weiss, M. (1985). Motives for Participation in Competitive Youth Swimming. <i>International Journal of Sport Psychology</i> , 16, 126–140.
SECURITY	SELF DEFENCE	Körner, S., Staller, M., & Heil, V. (2017). <i>Motive in der Selbstverteidigung – Eine qualitative und quantitative Studie am Beispiel Krav Maga und Wing Chun. Martial arts & society – Zur gesellschaftlichen Bedeutung von Kampfkunst, Kampfsport und Selbstverteidigung</i> (pp. 146–159). Universitätsverlag.
	KRAV MAGA SYSTEM	
SOCIAL	SOCIALISATION	Gould, D., Feltz, D., & Weiss, M. (1985). Motives for Participation in Competitive Youth Swimming. <i>International Journal of Sport Psychology</i> , 16, 126–140.
	FRIENDSHIP	Kahle, L. R., Kambara, K. M., & Rose, G. M. (1996). A functional model of fan attendance motivations for college football. <i>Sport Marketing Quarterly</i> , 5, 51–60.
	DIFFERENCE	Şimşek, K. (2010). A qualitative research on the motives of Turkish extreme athletes to participate in sports. <i>CBÜ Journal of Physical Education and Sport Sciences</i> , 5(3), 107–118.
PSYCHOLOGICAL	MENTAL HEALTH	Wann, D. L. (1995). Preliminary validation of the sport fan motivation scale. <i>Journal of Sport and Social Issues</i> , 19(4), 377–396.
	SELF-CONFIDENCE	McDonald, M. A., Milne, R. G., & Hong, J. B. (2002). Motivational factors for evaluating sport spectator and participant markets. <i>Sport Marketing Quarterly</i> , 100–113.
	PLEASURE AND DELIGHT	Koivula, N. (1999). Sport participation: differences in motivation and actual participation due to gender typing. <i>Journal of Sport Behaviour</i> , 22(3), 360–380.
	STRESS MANAGEMENT	Türkay, H., & Sökmen, T. (2014). Motivation sources and stress coping styles of physical education and sports department students in sports. <i>İnönü University Journal of Physical Education and Sport Sciences</i> , 1(3), 1–9.
SELF DEVELOPMENT	AWARENESS	
	EMPATHY	
	PERSONAL GAIN	

Discussion and Conclusion

There is quite a lot of information in the literature on traditional sport participation motives. However, when the relevant literature was examined, only one study was found with the motivations of krav maga athletes. In this context, it is aimed with this study to contribute to and to improve the literature.

Krav Maga discipline unlike other sports branches, different features of different performances emerge due to the discipline it contains. Among these, the branch has its own characteristics and the factor of self-defense. The different theme is the theme of security (self-defense (20) and the disciplinary feature of discipline (29)), and the self-defense and krav maga system has emerged in general. In addition, a relationship with personal development (13) emerged.

In the studies on motivation in sport, the theme of personal development was not found, and in this study, findings on personal development were found. However, in the study conducted by Güler & Yıldız (2023) on sport and personal development, it was concluded that personal development orientation and psychological well-being of the individual affect the working life of individuals and that the positive effects of these two elements also affect the work performance of sport organization employees.

When the themes and codes were analysed, the physical theme emerged first and fitness (9) and health (4) items emerged. The participants stated that physical strain, gaining fitness and strength, and regular exercise motivated them to this branch.

K2

‘..... It increases my physical fitness level and provides strength gains.... ‘

K6

‘The fact that Krav-Maga has an effective cardio as a sport increases serotonin levels in the body and supports the immune system.....’

Similar to these findings, Gill et al. (1985) stated that the concept of motivation for participation in sport is not limited to young athletes, but determining the reasons for adults to participate in sport and physical activity will contribute to the sport programmes.

In the safety theme, the need for self-defence and the belief that the krav maga discipline is an effective system in terms of defence and security have emerged. In the sub-dimension Krav Maga System, the participants stated that this branch motivated them to gain the ability to protect themselves against risks on the street and in real life, the training system being effective and practical, and preparing the person against potential threats.

Körner et al. (2017), in the study on the motivations of Krav Maga and Wing Chun trainees, stated in parallel with our findings that the motive to learn self-defence and the need for security and protection come to the fore in both systems.

K3

‘I liked the fact that it was a branch for individual defence. How can you protect yourself on the street or in a bad situation, what should you do? I think these were interesting topics as well as important topics. Practising on these, doing trainings, establishing the logic of some things there and so on. I think these are also very nice aspects.’

K6

'I prefer Krav-Maga, which is an organic structure that constantly improves itself by using science and current threats as an approach, because it has the most appropriate and active curriculum for the conditions we may encounter today.'

In the self-defence dimension, the participants stated that they were motivated by the need for self-defence, protection of loved ones and self-defence.

K4

'Why did I prefer krav maga sport? I started a research with the need for self-defence. Therefore, I quickly looked at what I could learn quickly, that is, when I searched for the quickest and most effective way to work rather than the philosophy of the job, I came across krav maga. In other words, since it is based on a military system, I was actually more suitable for the street rather than a ring fight.'

K7

'I wanted to start because it is a self-defence sport, especially on the street, and I felt insecure as a woman.'

In the sociability theme, it was revealed as a result of the analyses that the factors affecting the motives of krav maga athletes to participate in sports are socialisation (19), friendship (13) and difference (4) sub-dimensions. In the socialisation sub-dimension, the participants who participated in the interview mentioned that doing krav maga adds a social environment, is a pleasant social activity and gives a social personality to the person.

K2

'It has a great effect on my social life because I am in contact with people as much as the hours I train during the week, people and socialise. These can be my students, my elders, my teachers. I meet new people all the time, I meet new characters, I touch new lives at some point because I am a teacher, I enter into them at some point. This is a good thing for me. Normally, if I did not do krav maga sports, this kind of socialisation or interaction. For this kind of socialisation or interaction, it was necessary to turn to different places. So it indirectly gave me a nice socialisation opportunity.'

K7

'Actually, thanks to the friends I made while doing krav maga, my circle of friends has expanded. Like spending more time with them, spending more time with them, sharing our meals. In other words, it reinforced our friendship with different activities other than krav maga. Therefore, it contributed a lot to my social life.'

When the friendship dimension was analysed, comments such as establishing many new friends and friendships, strengthening the relations between friendships and expanding the circle of friends were made.

K7

'First of all, it added a nice circle of friends because of my teachers and friends.'

K1

'So I started with my friends. interestingly, a friend of mine got married to his wife thanks to the krav maga environment. We had such a group of 3-4 friends. You know, when we were looking for something to start something together, there was krav maga. Good, we all read it, saw it, maybe we wondered something. I've done jujitsu before, I'm curious, I want to try it. Other friends, there was quality in between, there was something going on, etc. Anyway, we entered. It was a very pleasant experience all together. It was like an activity we did as a group activity and continued for a long time.'

In the sub-dimension of diversity, the participants made comments such as seeking difference and learning new things.

K3

'When I started krav maga, I was boxing, I mean, I preferred it to be a slightly different activity, not in terms of direct self-defence. Well, I was boxing at that time and I was getting a little bored. I was not in a position to compete in boxing all the time. Well, I had some injuries, but I wanted to try something else. Boxing was starting to repeat the same things. I saw a krav maga course through a friend of mine, I saw it and I was interested. I mean, I was interested in the image, the things people did later.'

K6

'The combat sports I was previously interested in started to give me a feeling of dissatisfaction after a certain period of time. As a result of my long research (such as understanding the purpose and basis of all combat sports), I realised that Krav-Maga is the right technique for us humans in today's century. In addition, feeling safer when I visit places such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa, which can be called unsafe in the world due to my job, is one of the main reasons that pushed me to Krav-Maga.'

Under the psychological theme, it was determined that many parameters had an effect on psychological motivation. As a result of the transcriptions and coding; mental health (14), self-confidence (13), stress management (10), pleasure and pleasure (22) sub-dimensions were inferred.

When the psychology theme was analyzed, the following conclusions were reached. In the study conducted by Turkay & Sökmen (2014), it was seen that the mean scores of the sub-dimensions and total scores of the coping with stress scale of the students of the School of Physical Education and Sports were above the middle level. According to these findings (p. 10) "they emphasized that the candidates actively struggle against stress sources and show a coping tendency to intensively receive the support of their social environment in the face of stressful situations; they struggle by ignoring the stress sources they encounter from time to time".

Ko et al. (2008) added the factor named Fun/Enjoyment to their scale in their research. In addition, Koivula (1999) and Wankel (1993) stated that sport participants choose fun/enjoyment as the most important motivator and that fun/enjoyment is significantly effective in sport commitment.

Participant comments on these factors are presented below.

K8

'Honestly, it boosted my self-confidence. The biggest one. Let me put it that way as a feeling, I felt more self-confident.'

K9

'The first feeling it gave me was definitely self-confidence. It is a very difficult process. Dealing with Krav Maga is really a very challenging process both psychologically and physically. But the return is worth it. Because you experience a very serious increase in self-confidence.'

K2

'For one thing, the happiness hormones such as oxytocin and endorphins secreted in the body created by doing 100% sports have a positive effect on me. This positive effect keeps my psychology healthier in the longer term. So to speak, when we go through bad, troubled, problematic processes in life, when we are in such periods, with or without krav maga. But most of all, of course, since the point where I discharge myself is krav maga, it keeps

me more vigorous, keeps me healthier. It allows me to discharge. I say oh, I relax, I mean, I relax as much as if I had therapy. Not for every training I enter, but in ninety-five percent or ninety-five percent of the trainings I experience, I leave with a high rate of psychology positively improved, positively developed.'

When the sub-dimensions of the personal development theme were analysed, it was found that the dimensions of awareness (5), empathy (4) and personal gain (4) emerged. The personal development factor was revealed by the participants as follows.

K4

I'd say it's more of an awareness dessert, actually. It happens to those who are interested in every combat sport. Besides, I have learnt something at first. Okay, it feels like I have immunity now, but in fact, as you continue and see, your awareness increases.

K5

'Since I think it has improved my ability to empathise, my relationships with my other social environment have also been positively affected.'

As a result of the analyses, the factors and sub-dimensions mentioned above have emerged, and unlike other studies, security and personal development factors have been revealed. In addition to the studies on motivation in sport, this study is believed to contribute to the literature in this field.

Recommendations

Personal development has taken its place in literature as a new and current subject. This factor can also be taken into consideration in future studies and analyzed in different disciplines.

Both previous studies and the current study provide important information about the motivation of combat athletes to do sports. With this information it is expected to provide a positive development at the point of participation and continuation of combat sports such as krav maga. Therefore, in addition to this study, it is thought that in future studies on different branches and in different geographies, especially focusing on personal development factors, and for combat sports, focusing on the motivation of people of safety parameters will have a positive effect.

At the same time, this study adds a different perspective on the Krav Maga discipline, which is limited in the literature, and it is believed that it will contribute to the literature on combat sports and Krav Maga sports.

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Cite this article as: Yüksel, A. U., & Dağlı Ekmekçi, Y. A. (2025). A Qualitative Study On The Motivation Of Krav Maga Athletes. *Central European Journal of Sport Sciences and Medicine*, 2(50), 13–23. <https://doi.org/10.18276/cej.2025.2-02>