



Kuwaiti women practice hybrid martial art kajukenbo.

MARTIAL ARTS HELPS YOUNG WOMEN IN KUWAIT COUNTER VIOLENCE

Asma Hasnawi and her daughter Riham spend more than 12 hours a week learning kajukenbo, a mixed martial art the mother says boosts her child's confidence and thwarts bullying. In a small hall in Kuwait City, women and girls in black uniforms gather to learn the basics of self-defense.



KUWAIT: Kuwaiti Faisal Al-Gharib (left), a Kajukenbo hybrid martial art master, practices with his assistant Fai Al-Fahad, in a club in Kuwait City. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

On their left sleeves are the flags of Kuwait and the US state of Hawaii, where the hybrid martial art of kajukenbo was developed in the 1940s. The sport's name was derived from the various forms of martial arts it includes: karate (KA), judo and jujitsu (JU), kenpo (KEN) and boxing (BO).

Each form teaches techniques that can be used to fend off an attack, says Hasnawi, 33, who stands in class alongside her 12-year-old daughter and other girls. "I initially wanted to explore this sport, but I continued to practice it to be able to defend myself," she said.

Hasnawi still remembers being bullied as a child—something her daughter has struggled with at school too. But she says Riham has 'changed a lot' since they started practicing kajukenbo, gaining patience and strength through the sport. "She has transformed. At school, she used to get really angry and quickly agitated if someone would say something to her," Hasnawi says. "Now, it's something normal that she can (healthily) deal with."

There is no recent data in Kuwait on cases of violence against women, who enjoy more freedoms than those in neighboring countries. A 2010 study found that a woman is assaulted a day in Kuwait, according to Ghada al-Ghanem, of

the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS). The WCSS, whose goal is to help and encourage women's participation in the Kuwaiti community, has dealt with a number of assault cases and Ghanem believes the actual figure may be higher.



Kuwaiti Asma Hasnawi (left) and Fai Al-Fahad, kajukenbo hybrid martial art assistant-master, practice in the club.