

Richard Kay



# The issue of Pressure points in Defensive tactics...

**T**here has been much debate about the use of pressure points in defensive tactics programs, and whether they are effective, relevant or appropriate. With the imminent implementation of compulsory use of force certification linked to security licensing after 1 July 2005, it is important for personnel in the industry to understand this vital issue so they can make informed decisions.

Firstly, I acknowledge that pressure point theory is valid. Much of my training in martial arts at an advanced level has involved their study and application. However, my personal opinion is that their use for lawful defence and control of others is not appropriate, and furthermore, not required. My aim in this article is to present information pertinent to

pressure point tactics and let readers decide for themselves.

It is also important to clarify the term 'pressure points', as there can be several interpretations. I am referring to the meridians of energy flowing around the body, as used in healing arts such as acupuncture and shiatsu. I am not referring to nerve motor points, which are anatomical locations in the body where nerves meet and function, nor am I referring to simple gross anatomical weak points on the human body that can be exploited to cause pain or dysfunction, of which there are many.

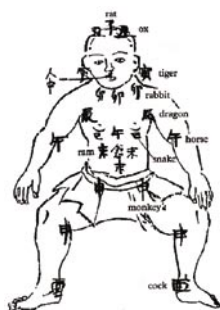
### Vital Point Theory

Pressure points are based on qi theory, the life-force energy that flows around our bodies much like the circulatory and nervous system.

Eastern medicine is based on the principle of the balance of qi in the body. A healthy body contains a balance of positive and negative energy. Sickness is the result of an excess of one or a deficiency of the other. The energy

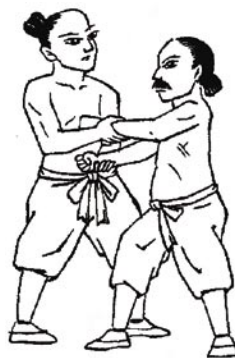


flows around the body along meridians, or channels, and these are well documented in acupuncture charts. Along these meridians are junctions, which are the pressure points used for manipulation of energy to rebalance the energy for healing. Many eastern cultures practised these natural healing methods, with the central pretext that this type of medicine was chiefly concerned with bringing the energy back into balance and allowing the body to heal itself, often used in conjunction with natural herbal remedies to facilitate faster and more effective healing. Historically, doctors were the keepers of this knowledge of pressure point manipulation, a skill they gained over many, many years of study and practice.



About 1000 years ago, certain proponents discovered which points on the human body induced optimum injury when traumatised. They also came to understand how the lunar and solar cycles of each day influenced the blood and qi flow and at what times of the day it was more vulnerable than others. Hence, if certain areas were traumatised during those prominent times, the vital points were more likely to be damaged, which could cause a number of internal disorders ranging from pain and paralysis, to knockout and even death. Striking the vital points means closing the lines of internal bodily communication by cutting off their transportation function, and the various methods of vital point striking were protected by an ironclad ritual of secrecy.

Traditionally, the application of vital points for defence and combat were taught to advanced students of martial arts, and only after long and arduous study under a recognised master, who assessed them as much for their character as their technical ability. Further, the healing aspects of pressure points were generally taught simultaneously with the harming aspects, so that, if forced to use this knowledge, the proponent could



administer care as necessary after the fact. The sensitivity and knowledge required to administer appropriate care and re-establish the body's energy was a skill of the highest level and took years to acquire. It is also important to keep in mind that these techniques were developed and refined during periods when warfare and civil unrest were commonplace, and combat skills were a premium commodity.

Over time, as society became more 'civilised', the need for these advanced and highly dangerous skills became far less frequent, and the resultant 'civil fighting traditions' replaced the 'martial arts' of the day. As the need diminished, so did the skill and knowledge of practitioners in combat application of vital point striking. The healing side, however, continued to flourish and is steadily growing in popularity today.

### Application for Defence & Control

So, how does all this relate to the use of pressure points for lawful defence and control in today's society? Logically, the only reason any person will ever use force, in any aspect of their life, is to gain or maintain control, and this control should only be used when required under adverse circumstances, such as self-defence or in execution of lawful duties. In either case, the strategies employed to gain or maintain control should not aim at harming others, even those who may be trying to harm us. The primary aim should always be tactical disengagement, and where this is not possible, due to circumstances or job responsibility, we should endeavour to use compassionate control strategies.

An examination of the viability of pressure point strategies from 3 important viewpoints is necessary. These are: practical, legal and ethical.

### Practical Application

The 40/10 Theory states that when targeting a specific point during the stress of a confrontation, 40% of the time the strike will be high, 40% of the time it will be low, 10% of the time the person will miss completely and 10% of the time the targeted point will be hit. If a system of defensive tactics relies on targeting specific points, they are promoting strategies that give users a 10% chance of success under stress. Targeting specific points, especially small, localised areas of the body such as pressure points, violates the theory of forgiving principles (procedures that remain effective even if not done exactly right or directed to the precise target). Tactical skills for control and defence should be based on gross motor skills (forgiving, easily accomplished skills involving simple movements of large muscle groups), as fine motor skills (non-forgiving, difficult skills involving complex movement of small muscle groups) deteriorate rapidly under the onset of stress. Gross motor skills offer important advantages. They require less instruction time, reduced refresher time, have a high level of retention, and are also more likely to be performed during times of high stress and are more forgiving. The reality is that pressure points are extremely difficult to apply under stress on a moving, thinking subject, and even more so for people with minimum training experience in the application of these strategies. Simple techniques based on gross motor movements are what will work, and they should be geared as much as possible to the individuals natural defensive reactions to ensure retention and application.

### Legal Application

For use of force to be lawful, there are many factors to take into consideration – the definition of the application of force itself, being reasonable and proportionate, justified before use and defensible afterwards, as well as effective during application to affect a lawful purpose (control). In The Crimes Act 1958 under the definition of Assault (s.31) an element of unlawful use of force is 'with the intent to inflict or being reckless as to the infliction of bodily injury, pain, discomfort, damage, insult or deprivation of liberty, and results in the infliction of any such consequence (whether or not the consequence inflicted is the consequence intended or foreseen)'.

If users are trained in targeting specific

points and they miss those targets, as they most likely will do (40/10 Theory), then they may be operating outside the parameters of their training. Similarly, if their training does not educate them fully in vital point theory, they are still responsible for the damage caused through their application, and although they may not have intended to inflict harm in that manner, they may be recklessly inflicting the harm and are still liable for that harm. The Control versus Injury Theory applies to evaluating use of force options based on evaluating the need for control versus the possibility of causing harm, or a means of evaluating techniques based upon the likely outcome of their application. Is it therefore lawful to use these types of strategies to gain control of another person considering the potential long-term affects? Does the use of pressure points without true and complete knowledge of their potential consequences render the user liable for both short and long-term affects?

### Ethical Application

There is a vast amount of information regarding vital point striking available to the general public. The availability of books, videos and practical seminars are wide ranging and common, and there is no restriction on purchase or scrutiny of moral ethics prior to attainment. People with little or no experience can acquire this information freely and apply

it at will, often without knowledge of the potentially severe consequences that may result. The human body is weak enough to control, if required, without having to resort to the use of pressure points. The use of pressure points may give us control of the subject in the short term but with little or no understanding of the long-term residual health affects manipulation of those points may cause. A cornerstone principle of traditional training in pressure points advocates, "If you want to learn to harm, first learn to heal". There are stark differences between western and eastern approaches to treating harm caused in this manner, and there is even a lack of eastern doctors who fully understand how to restore harmony disrupted through vital point striking, as it is a very specialised field that few have seen the necessity to study, except for some responsible martial arts teachers and a few eastern doctors. Currently, most research of pressure point systems is conducted from a western medical standpoint, which is very valid in terms of affects to gross anatomical structures like muscle, bone, blood, nerves, and so on, but fails to address the effect of energy disruption in the body as a result of their manipulation. The application of resuscitation skills for reviving people who have had their vital points struck traditionally forms a vital part of every study syllabus on this subject, an aspect most systems advocating pressure point attacks fail to address.

In the end, there are far simpler and practical methods available for defensive tactics that are medically, legally, and tactically safer and easier to apply, with far less training required to learn, apply and maintain them. Strategies should always be based on what officers will do under the stress of a violent encounter, and linked to what they must do as part of their lawful duties - conduct an arrest (restraint & control) or affect self-defense (tactical disengagement).

Unfortunately, security personnel, like law enforcement and corrections officers, have a need for use of force skills in their daily job functions. Ideally, those skills should be based on compassionate control strategies, just as an important aspect of your initial risk assessment is harm minimisation. Your future is in your hands. Train hard, work easy, stay safe. ■

*Richard Kay is the principal of Dynamic Training, a registered training organisation, and has been designing and implementing defensive tactics and personal safety programs for agencies and civilian groups alike since 1994. He has been studying martial arts since 1984 (karate, tai chi, ba qua, hsing-i, aikido), including 3 trips to Japan, and is currently a 4<sup>th</sup> dan black belt. He holds an ASP Trainer Certification and 3 PPCT instructor certifications. He has been involved in security operations since 1994. For more information: [www.dynamictraining.com.au](http://www.dynamictraining.com.au)*

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