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EMPOWERMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH

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The word empowerment has been used to describe the efforts to give disadvantaged groups in the population a better chance to state their opinion and influence decisions affecting the population as a whole as well as themselves. In psychiatry the word is used both when talking about the process of raising self-confidence of an individual and in speaking about the need to increase the role of people with a mental illness and of their families in the shaping of the services which are to serve them.

In these and other instances it would be possible to expect two positive outcomes if empowerment were to happen: firstly, disadvantaged individuals (including people with mental illness) who were empowered would feel better and be more likely to participate in the work of the group that has helped them to gain or regain self-confidence; and secondly, if given a chance people who were empowered would help to shape services that are to help them in harmony with their needs and the environment in which they are to work. The presentation will exemplify some of these points by a description of the experience gained in programmes that fought stigma and consequent discrimination.