

HOW TO HELP EMPOWER A WOMAN CONFRONTED WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

INTERACTIVE PATHWAY FOR (RE)INTEGRATION AT WORK OF WOMEN FACING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Step 3 Remobilisation



WHAT IS THE MEANING OF EMPOWERMENT?

Empowerment is a polysemous concept, i.e. it covers several meanings depending on the chosen perspective (social, political or ethical) and the level studied (individual or community). Nevertheless, although many researchers and authors have tried to transpose the term, none of them fully covers the field of empowerment.

Etymologically, the word empowerment refers to "within" (Em-) and to power (Power-), i.e. the inner power of the individual. It is about identifying the starting point of all empowerment work: oneself. Empowerment is a process that enables individuals, communities and organisations to increase their capacity for action and decision-making, and to have a greater influence on their environment and their lives. This concept therefore focuses specifically on the internal dimension of individuals and not on external aspects (political, economic or socio-professional situation). Thus, inner resources, skills, talents are more emphasised before the empowerment approach.

The empowerment concept encourages, "people to recognise and strengthen their knowledge, skills, self-esteem and self-confidence. The aim is to be able to mobilise, individually or collectively, the resources needed to overcome the obstacles encountered in the course of one's life. And thus to feel in control of one's own life."

In terms of social intervention, the concept of empowerment is the opposite of assistance. It is not about doing things "in place of" the person, but about giving them the tools to activate their inner power. Empowerment is often associated with the emancipation of individuals. It is a fundamental aspect of helping people to develop their own power to act by promoting self-esteem, self-confidence, initiative, creativity, etc.

GENESIS OF THE CONCEPT

The concept of empowerment originated in the 1970s in the work of the American sociologist Saul Alinsky. A precursor of one of the first forms of empowerment, S. Alinsky set about observing the poorest neighbourhoods of Chicago in the 1930s to collectively bring out the problems and encourage citizen power; this is "community organising". The logic of this theorisation is that the inhabitants of disadvantaged neighbourhoods have the "capacity to construct by themselves the answers to the social questions they face".

Although the concept was born in the field of social intervention, it was the feminist and anti-racist social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s (the fight for women's right to vote, the fight for civil rights with M. Luther King, etc.) that brought this new paradigm to light. In the United States and South Asia, activists used this concept to claim a form of emancipation for oppressed people.

Subsequently, empowerment extended to the more general field of social relations. It is fully in line with the history of social movements and serves as a paradigm for social intervention and public policy.

In France, it was in the 2000s that the term empowerment emerged in the context of a call for a radical reform of urban policy, a co-development "based on citizens' initiatives based on the power to act of citizens and on the recognition of collectives in working-class neighbourhoods". Citizens are often considered as problems, and not as resources capable of responding themselves to the problems that surround them. The concept is therefore emerging in public debates and in the scientific literature. Researchers are working on the development of new methods of horizontal citizen participation (participatory democracy model). There is a desire to create a bottom-up dynamic, i.e. from below, in all these social movements.

This brief genesis of empowerment allows us to understand that this concept has had a long and diverse trajectory and that it has been used in many fields, on many continents, at many levels and by many different actors. This evolution allows us to understand the polysemy of the term and the increased difficulty of its transposition/translation.

EMPOWERMENT, A MATTER OF POWER

Power is a central concept in empowerment. It is defined as "a state (having power) as well as a learning process (acquiring power) or a dynamic within power relationships (exercising power)".

There are four forms of power:

- Power over refers to the hold that an individual or group has over areas of reality, moving from a state of subordination, dependence or submission to a position of greater control over a context. This is the effective exercise of power.
- Power to" refers to the ability of an individual and/or a group to make decisions, to set in motion, to solve problems or to take action. It is the capacity to act in which the intellectual and motivational dimensions play an essential role.
- Inner power" refers to self-image and self-esteem. It is the "capital" of self-confidence that allows the individual to dare to want changes for him or herself and for others and to imagine being able to influence his or her life.
- The "power to act" refers to the implementation of solidarity values and their translation into the life of a group. It is the ability to create a "we" that perceives itself as a full social actor.

These different dimensions of power are interconnected. They complement each other. However, not all actions carried out under the banner of empowerment necessarily call upon all the dimensions of power mentioned above. The variety of empowerment practices reflects the social priorities and political philosophy of those who carry them out.

WHY TALK ABOUT EMPOWERMENT TODAY? WHAT CONCEPTS ARE RELATED TO IT?

Empowerment is nowadays a term used to describe the means of action of an individual or a community to free themselves from a situation of subjection deeper than mere inactivity, to acquire the capacity to use their rights and to free themselves from social, moral or intellectual dependence. This concept is an avenue for action to combat the inequalities that some individuals may suffer.

This booklet focuses on the empowerment of individuals. The aim is to promote awareness and empowerment at the individual level. The audience can be broad, as the phenomenon of internalising discrimination applies to "any social group that is a victim of a set of negative beliefs held by society". Thus, individuals can sometimes self-discriminate in an unconscious way (self-perception) and end up qualifying themselves by their weaknesses and shortcomings rather than by their strengths.

1. Discrimination

Discrimination is a key concept related to empowerment as it is the basic assumption of every oppressed person in our societies. Discrimination is a difference in treatment attributed to an individual or a group of individuals because of their personal characteristics (age, origin, gender, morals, sexual orientation, physical appearance, etc.). Differentiation becomes discriminatory when it is made according to illegitimate or illegal criteria. Indeed, discriminatory acts are offences that can be punished by law. However, as these acts are sometimes hidden or implicit, it is often difficult to find the necessary evidence to convict.

2. Internalisation of discrimination

Internalisation of discrimination is the unintended consequence of discrimination experienced by an individual or a group of individuals. It is manifested by "psychological dispositions, including stereotypes and beliefs, internalised as a result of direct or indirect exclusion, without necessarily being perceived as discrimination" by the individual. It is a mechanism that allows discrimination to become entrenched and to continue to produce its harmful effects on the individual or group.

3. Acceptance

Acceptance is the recognition of things and situations for what they are. Instead of denying, avoiding or remaining in denial, acceptance is the acknowledgement that establishes a starting point for action and empowerment. It is a proactive and resilient posture, because acceptance does not mean resignation. It is a preliminary step that allows us to choose lucidly what will be best for us and for the achievement of our personal and professional goals.

4. Self-confidence

Self-confidence is acquired. It stems from a lack of confidence in one's skills and abilities which leads to self-deprecation. Empowerment is about increasing the self-confidence of individuals. It is about giving people the keys to believe in their abilities and potential by putting aside denigrating thoughts and irrational fears.

5. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is a person's perception, or judgement, of his or her own worth. It varies over the course of life, is never fully acquired, and evolves in response to the environment or the overall context. The French psychologist Rebecca Shankland defines self-esteem as "a more or less favourable attitude of the individual towards himself, the consideration and respect he has for himself, the feeling he has of his own value as a person". She goes on to say that "good self-esteem is therefore an inner attitude that consists of considering oneself to be valuable, unique and important".

6. Limiting beliefs

Limiting beliefs, sometimes called "limiting thoughts", are beliefs that act as grids for reading our lived experiences. They are subjective interpretations of reality that limit our ability to act, and sometimes even lead to paralysis. These beliefs hold us back in our personal or professional development, because they focus on our incapacity and limitations. Everyone faces limiting beliefs. Empowerment allows the identification of limiting beliefs and the fight against them. For example, in the case of women's professional integration, the most frequently listed limiting beliefs are self-censorship, i.e. the non-legitimacy of expressing oneself or one's opinions in a professional context, or the impostor syndrome, i.e. the feeling of not being up to the task and not deserving of one's place, leading to an increased fear of being "found out" by one's colleagues.

7. Emancipation

Emancipation is a process of political liberation, either individual or collective, which aims to break free from minoritising norms or discrimination (women's emancipation, sexual emancipation, worker emancipation, etc.). Emancipation also refers to the liberation of women from a situation of male domination, as may be the case in situations of domestic violence. Empowerment can be a process that enables the activation of the mechanism of women's emancipation.

8. Safe place

The concept of a 'safe place', also known as a 'positive space' or 'neutral zone', can be defined as a place or environment where an individual or a category of individuals who are usually marginalised can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment or any other physical or psychological harm. Generally, the term refers to a physical place that allows members to meet in 'safety', although the concept is increasingly being exported as an ideology in its own right. The concept is part of an empowerment approach as it allows individuals to extract themselves from the discriminating society, similar to a moment of respite, which can initiate the process of reactivating inner power. Safe places allow individuals to change their view of themselves, to strengthen their confidence and self-esteem. Women who are victims of violence should be supported in safe places that liberate them.

EMPOWERMENT AND SUPPORT OF WOMEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE LABOUR MARKET

As a counsellor, your role is to help women victims of domestic violence to become aware of their value and capacity following traumatic events, often destructive of personal confidence. The ACTIV project highlights the benefits of vocational rehabilitation as a means of empowering women. A woman facing domestic violence who has a stable job has a better chance of getting out of the cycle of violence in the long term. Nevertheless, finding a job, or even keeping one, can sometimes be difficult for women with low self-esteem.

In the face of this interpretative bias, the empowerment approach helps to free women from their false limiting beliefs. Your role is to trigger the power to act and to impact on women's own perception of themselves. This is a coach/caregiver situation that transcends the classic helper dimension. The support worker is there "to do something with the person - to help them, not for or in place of the person, so as not to encroach on their power to act." Your role is therefore to equip women to become aware of their own power to act, to trigger the trigger that will enable them to begin their job search with peace of mind.

There are three basic elements in an empowerment relationship:

- 1. Equity in the relationship**, i.e. the fact that both the support worker and the person being supported have the same value, although they are not subject to the same discrimination. Understanding and accepting the differences that result from the external dimension (social, economic, physical criteria, etc.).
- 2. Reciprocity in the relationship** means understanding and accepting the vulnerability of the other, without ever reducing them to this, because "we are all vulnerable and perfectible beings". It is necessary here to go beyond basic assumptions to interact with an open mind and without judgement. Accompaniment is then perceived as a balanced exchange which brings benefits to both the people being accompanied and the accompanying persons.
- 3. The person being coached is at the centre of the relationship**, as empowerment is above all an introspective process of self-reflection on the part of the individual. The support worker is a trigger for the process of reactivating power, the person being supported is the central actor.

In short, the support worker who uses the empowerment approach must encourage the process and ensure the right conditions for its initiation. The reintegration of women victims of domestic violence into the labour market is a context that requires the determination of a rhythm and modalities adapted to the persons concerned.

In short, the counsellor who uses the empowerment approach must encourage the process and ensure the right conditions for its initiation. The reintegration of women victims of domestic violence into employment is a context that requires the pace and modalities to be adapted to the people concerned.

Practical applications:

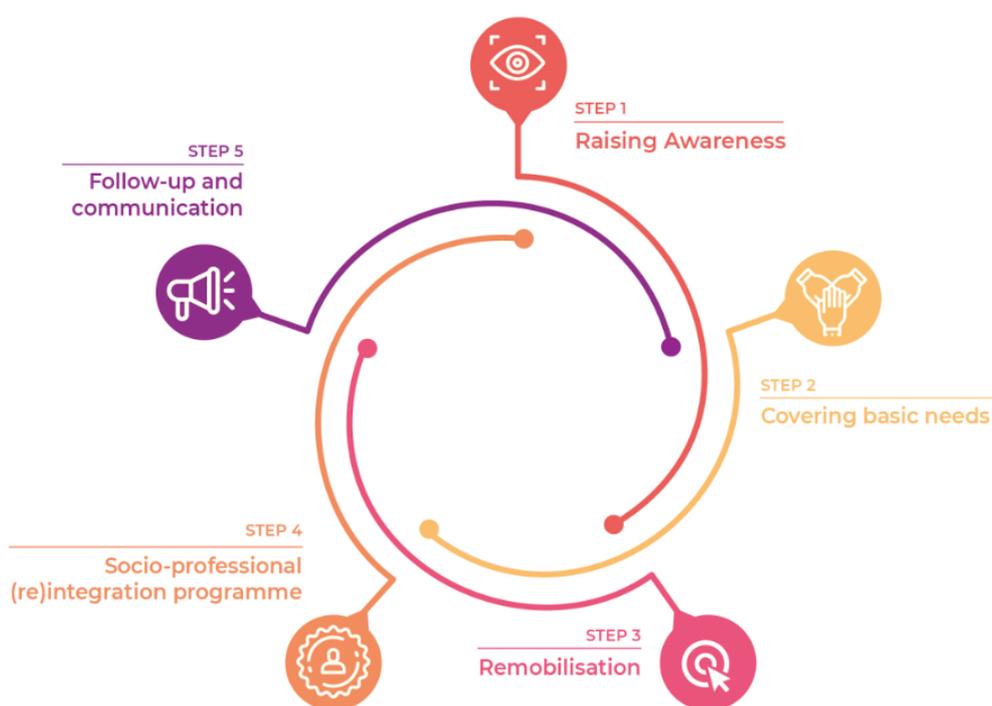
Workshop	Objectives	Topics
Benefits and support for people in difficulty	Provide women information about how to get social and financial support/benefits	Unemployment allowance Social housing Access to nursery services
Managing your own budget	Help women to get some financial autonomy	"Do more and better with less" Where and how to shop Energy consumption
Health and nutrition	Teach women to cook healthy food using staple aliments	To cook healthy food with less money Canned food preparation Food pyramid
Assisting to parenting	Teach parents to raise independent and emotionally balanced children	Healthy limits The importance of education How to support children to reach their full potential
Sexual education	Provide information about relationships, sexual and affective life Deconstruct beliefs about relationships, sexual and affective life Raise awareness about the importance of consent	Male and female sexual organs Definition of sexual relationship and consent How to ask and give consent
Prevent abuse	Prevent abuse within the family	Healthy relationship Signs of abuse What needs to be done in case of abuse
Values, citizenship and public space	Raising awareness of one's role in the society Explore ways to take an active role in the society	Human rights Values Voting system and right to vote Critical thinking
Mobility issues	Help women to move into the city	How to use public transportation Access to alternative means of transportation

To go further: "Change of View, le référentiel", guide on empowerment.

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