



**Interventions
encouraging public self-
advocacy as means of
empowerment of
persons with disabilities
or mental health
problems outside the
psychiatric care system**

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What is self- advocacy?

A skill to stand for oneself and own rights.

Learned by every person throughout childhood/adolescence.

Why is self-advocacy crucial for people with disabilities or mental health problems?

- Traces of the medical model of disability in treating people with disabilities/mental health problems.
- Proneness of people with disabilities/mental health problems to greater control from the environment.
- Proneness of people with disabilities/mental health problems to abuse.
- Limited (compared to other people) opportunities for independence in decision making and exercising self-determination of people with disabilities/mental health problems .

Self-advocacy types (Ryan & Griffiths, 2015)

- Individual – acting for own interests, making independent everyday decisions.
- Group – individuals clustering together to act for a common matter.
- Public – educating others, raising awareness of own social group.

- This distinction is not limited to the people with disability/mental health problems. We can also observe the self-advocacy of other minority groups (LGBT+, ethnic minorities, refugees...), which types can be also seen through this lens.

Self-advocacy model (Anderson & Bigby, 2017)

- Possibilities created by self-advocacy:
 - Having power and status
 - Speaking out
 - Being a friend/having friends
 - Having fun/being happy
 - Helping others
 - Overcoming boredom
- Results:
 - Greater confidence
 - Engagement with own life
 - Building a positive identity
 - Developing a sense of self
 - Strengthening self-determination, sense of empowerment, resilience

A study of a self-advocacy intervention (Nowakowska & Pisula, 2021a, 2021b)

- A public self-advocacy project promoting anti-discrimination.
- Conducted by one of the Polish NGOs.
- Self-advocates: people mainly with intellectual disabilities, but also with other kinds of disabilities and/or in mental health crisis.
- Acted as educators about their disabilities/mental health issues by conducting workshops for students, employers, companies, prisoners etc.
- Study aims:
 - To explore the opinions of self-advocates about their activity (an interview study – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, $N = 6$).
 - To assess the effectiveness of the workshop in combatting the stigma of intellectual disability among high school students (a longitudinal survey study, $N = 50$ students in an intervention group and $N = 43$ in a control group).

An interview study

- Fragments of the interviews presented (reading).
- Relation to the self-advocacy model (Anderson & Bigby, 2017).
- Clear value of the activity for self-development.
- A sense of making a change in perception of people with disabilities.

Evaluation study

- 3 measurements: two weeks before the workshop, a day and 3 months afterwards.
- The picture of people with intellectual disabilities more complex than before the intervention.
- After the workshop the people with intellectual disabilities perceived as more calm, compliant, but also adult than before. This change in perception has not been observed in the control group.

Conclusion: A realistic approach

- Self-advocacy can be very promising in empowering individuals experiencing disability or mental health crisis.
- The public self-advocacy may be not leading directly to combatting the stigma associated with disability/mental health problems, but may be informative and contribute to building a complex picture of people experiencing difficulties.
- Public self-advocacy may require external help on the early stages of implementation. It is crucial to provide this help in a way that is congruent with the self-advocacy ideas of independence in decision making.
- Especially in the case of young students, involving an education specialist to co-develop methods of conducting workshops can be helpful in maximizing the impact of the workshops.

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