

November 9, 2018

To Bent Høie,

While attending the recent annual conference of the International Society on Traumatic Stress Studies, the largest academic and professional society dedicated to understanding, preventing, and responding to serious violence and other traumatic events, I learned that the Norwegian Government is considering a proposal to incorporate the Norwegian Center on Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS) into the Public Health Institute (FHI). Several of my colleagues and I have had the privilege of working with the wonderful researchers at the NKTVS on multiple successful projects over many years. Therefore, I am very familiar with the NKTVS and the work of its incredible team of researchers and staff members. As the Associate Director of two similar centers here in the U.S., I understand the administrative and organizational challenges of developing and maintaining a research center dedicated understanding violence and abuse. I am writing to express my concern and that of much of the international scientific community studying traumatic stress about this proposal. I believe it is important to Norway and the international field of traumatic stress studies that the NKVTS remain an independent, academically affiliated center dedicated to its current mission with sufficient resources to continue and expand its work.

Why is having an independent center focused on better understanding violence and traumatic stress important? Unfortunately, exposure to violence and resulting trauma-related problems are highly prevalent and very serious problems that plague every country and every community. Violence and abuse is extraordinarily common, as demonstrated by research conducted by the NKTVS. Multiple research studies, including those done by the NKVTS, have found that exposure to violence and other traumatic events is root source of a multitude of personal and societal problems. For example, a recent study in the U.S. found that serious violence and adversity in childhood is associated with the development of nearly one-third of all psychiatric disorders in the population. The negative impact of violence and traumatic stress to victims, their families, and communities is staggering. The good news is that research conducted by the NKVTS and other centers has found promising solutions and responses to these problems that can educate public policy and community services. Given the significant impact of violence and traumatic stress on society, having an independent research center that is laser focused on this problem is critically important.

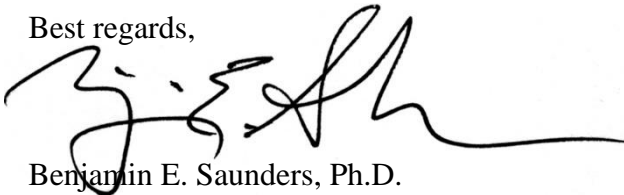
The government and people of Norway need to understand the importance of the work of the NKVTS to the international community and its significant influence. In short, it is one of the most highly respected research organizations in the world dedicated to research on violence and traumatic stress. Since its inception, it has conducted a series of highly sophisticated studies focusing on a wide array of topics, including the prevalence and impact of different forms of violence and abuse among children and adults,

mental health treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder and other trauma-related problems, and how best to implement and incorporate evidence-based interventions practices into community service agencies. These studies have had enormous impact not only in Norway, but internationally. Those of us who do these sorts of research studies always draw upon the work of the NKVTS and seek their consultation to educate and improve our own work. The NKVTS is simply an incredible international resource, a jewel in the area of violence and traumatic stress studies. Consequently, we are very concerned about any potential threat to its work.

Building a world-class research team such as the NKTVS takes leadership, vision, commitment, time, and dedicated resources. It is important that such as center be within an organizational context that supports its mission and understands the challenges of doing this sort of interdisciplinary, highly sensitive research about emotionally charged topics. Government public health agencies have roles and responsibilities about the broad field of general health that are dictated by law and policy. Such a context makes it more difficult to do innovative, cutting-edge research on highly sensitive topics such as violence and abuse. In addition, competing for research funds and resources with researchers investigating a large array of more traditional and familiar general health problems is a serious challenge for a new somewhat disturbing field like violence and abuse. I am concerned that the transfer of the NKTVS to a large public health government agency from an academic institution risks diluting its mission, reducing its resources, and ultimately disrupting its carefully constructed interdisciplinary research team. Such an outcome would be a disastrous loss to Norway and the international research community.

I urge the officials in charge to maintain the NKTVS as an independent research center dedicated to better understanding all aspects of violence and traumatic stress in society. Speaking from my own experience as a leader of two similar centers, being affiliated with an academic institution provides the best organizational context for centers such as ours. If you would like to know more about my high respect for the NKTVS or the organizational and administrative structures of our centers, please contact me.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Benjamin E. Saunders', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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