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Dear Minister Wara

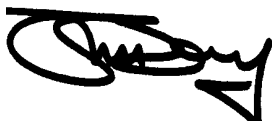
It has been brought to my attention that the Norwegian Government is considering the amalgamation of the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS) with the Norwegian Institute of Public Health. In my capacity as the former Chairperson of the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, and on behalf of colleagues in academic institutions in the United Kingdom, I am writing to ask you to reconsider any such plan, and to consider the potential impact of such a decision on the nature and quality of social scientific research in Norway, and the reputation of Norwegian research on violence and trauma internationally.

I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with the staff at NKVTS over the past decade. I have no vested interest in the Centre, save to speak up for the thousands of children and adults who benefit daily, both in Norway and elsewhere, from the knowledge generated by staff working at NKVTS. The work undertaken in the Centre is held in the highest regard internationally, and has advanced our knowledge, understanding and practice globally in many ways. While I appreciate that there is a belief that the work of the Centre can continue within a new organisational arrangement, there is compelling evidence from other countries of large health orientated bodies not being well placed to curate and undertake social research. This has significant implications for society when we know that many of the most challenging issues for society, such as abuse, violence and exploitation result from the complex interplay of individual and societal factors, that require the bringing together of researchers specialising in sociology, psychology, social policy, economics and law. This is not to dismiss the important contribution that health researchers can make, but our cumulative understanding of these issues highlights that a public health approach to studying abuse, violence and exploitation is limited in its ability to do more than describe the problem, rather than analysing the cause, proposing new societal responses and individual interventions, and testing whether these remedies are effective.

Prior to the establishment of the NKVTS in 2004, there were few studies on violence and traumatic stress undertaken in Norway. During the last 14 years, NKVTS has succeeded in establishing a research community with high research standards, an interdisciplinary approach, and international recognition. Studies on child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, rape, disaster and terror attacks have provided Norway and the international community with crucial knowledge to implement adequate measures and enhance the level of care in child protection, children`s crisis centres and health services. I am in my fourth decade of work in this area, and looking back I am able to reflect on the trajectory of research on these issues. The most successful research centres have needed twenty plus years to become established through developing the subject and methodological expertise required to meaningfully make a difference in relation to abuse, violence and exploitation. As such, at the point whereby NKVTS is now starting to realise it`s unique and significant potential, the Ministry of Health could, through seeking to amalgamate the Centre with the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, set back progress rather than consolidate expertise within a larger organisational unit. I appreciate that this is not the intent, but I fear that this will be the outcome.

I would respectfully urge you and your officials to maintain the NKTVS as an independent research centre dedicated to better understanding all aspects of violence and traumatic stress in society. As you consider your options for NKVTS please be assured that any support either I or my colleagues can provide is at your disposal.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Devaney', with a stylized flourish at the end.

John Devaney, PhD, MBE
Centenary Chair and Head of Social Work