

Call to action: Reinvigorating a global research agenda for the sector

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For the past nine months the Torture Journal has been conducting a Delphi Study on priorities of research in the field, involving the editorial board and more than 50 panellists from all over the world to reach a consensus. The results will surprise many readers, both in relation to the topics that were considered a priority and those that were not. The results are challenging as far as they draw, for the first time, a shared agenda for the sector. We have invited some leading authors in the field to comment on the results. As Jens Modvig, Chair of the United Nations Committee against Torture states in his comment, “these research priorities could form the backbone of an internationally agreed research agenda. For this to happen, stakeholders would have to get together and discuss and adopt a common research agenda, preferably with the presence of donors within the field. I can only encourage stakeholders to take such an initiative—a workshop—to facilitate that research”.

All research studies, like this Delphi study, depend somehow on sample and analysis. The results must always be considered in a cautious way. But this is a start. Not only the ten top-ranked priorities, but the more than 170 potential lines of research collected in Annex 1 to the paper. The Torture Journal will launch in the year to come targeted Calls for Papers on those topics considered a priority. This does not

mean that other topics are not considered relevant and will not have a space in our pages. We hope you find the exercise useful and enlightening.

We also have a quite technical and theoretical debate in this issue: Professor John W. Schiemann accepted a challenge from the Journal: summarise and expand on his 2016 book *Does torture work?* The book applies mathematical models of game theory to an interrogational torture setting. The result is thought-provoking. As are the three comments by Lawrence Alison, researcher from the University of Liverpool, Glenn Carle, former CIA interrogator and Hans Draminsky Petersen, past member of the SPT, and the final reply of Prof Schiemann.

These are complemented by a research paper by Ane Kirstine Viller Hansen, Nete Sloth Hansen-Nord, Issam Smeir, Lianne Engelkes-Heby and Jens Modvig on the Impact of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) on torture survivors in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Amongst other contributions, a much awaited and well-received Statement by the World Psychiatric Association is also included. After two years of consultations of a task group of the Section on Psychological Consequences of Persecution and Torture, the General Assembly of WPA approved in October 2017 the statement ‘Banning the participation of psychiatrists in the

interrogation of detainees'. This is a landmark and very important declaration in the fight against torture. Though torture is illegal, as stipulated by a number of well-known conventions and treaties, and thus subjected to international prosecution, psychiatrists have sometimes been involved in situations connected to ill-treatment and torture which are ethically unacceptable on any grounds.

The purpose of this position statement is to provide ethical guidelines for practice, in which psychiatrists are explicitly forbidden and must refrain from participating in any procedure linked to the interrogation of a detainee. This statement helps to address accountability for physicians involved. Useful supporting commentaries are provided by Professor Stephen Soldz, member of the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology, and Professor Steven Milles from the University of Minnesota Center for Bioethics.

This issue of the *Torture Journal* demands that time is taken over it. Mathematical models and research data require quiet consideration. Even more so, the call to action suggested by the Delphi Study and the commentators requires further deliberation. Responses, ideas and comments from all readers are most certainly welcome.