



2003-02-24

The Board
Sahlgrenska Academy
Gothenburg University

Regarding a petition from Assoc. Prof. Eva Kärfve (dated 2002-06-25, ref. no. H5 1493-02)

The Ethics Committee at the Sahlgrenska Academy have on four occasions discussed a request from Assoc. Prof. Eva Kärfve (attachment 1) to investigate the research that has been the foundation for an article published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol. 11, p. 1424–1431, 2000 (“Natural outcome of ADHD with developmental coordination disorder at age 22 years: a controlled, longitudinal community-based study”) written by Assoc. Prof. Peder Rasmussen and Professor Christopher Gillberg at the Gothenburg University. The article is about a group of children who were investigated earlier at 6, 10, 13, and 16 years of age. The authors of the article were given the opportunity to respond to the original petition and thereafter Kärfve and Rasmussen–Gillberg were given the opportunity to respond to each other (attachments 2–4). I have also contacted three of the four child psychiatrists (one of the doctors was on sick leave) who participated in the investigation about the individuals who took part in the disputed article. Finally the Ethics Committee had an interview with the nurse who had coordinated the scientific investigation.

Several of Kärfve’s critical comments about the article have nothing to do with scientific misconduct, but rather deal with interdisciplinary differences of views. Science is about an ongoing discussion between researches with different opinions. Examples regarding interdisciplinary differences of views, which Kärfve regards as fraud, are for example whether or not a depression should be regarded as a “poor outcome” and the assessment of two different types of reading tests.

In her original petition Kärfve questions two things, which have been discussed in the following attachments: (1) the summary of the material and the drop out rate; (2) how to be sure that the investigative doctors were unaware of their study subjects’ identities and diagnoses. Rasmussen–Gillberg have, in their responses, thoroughly discussed the first point, and they explain in detail the reasons for the drop out rate at the different investigations, including the last investigation. In the investigation by the Ethics Committee, nothing has been brought forward that contradicts the assertions of Rasmussen–Gillberg. From the interview with the coordinator [nurse], it appeared also to be clear that the researchers have put in a lot of effort to make the drop out rate as low as possible.

The young adults who participated in the [last] study were examined by other doctors than Rasmussen–Gillberg, who summarized and evaluated the investigations. One of the investigative doctors participated both in 6 and the 22 year investigation. The Ethics Committee does not find a reason to believe that an investigation of a child 16 years earlier would affect an assessment of a 22 year old individual. Another child psychiatrist, who investigated about ten young adults in this study, had six years earlier examined the individuals as part of his doctoral thesis. This doctor did not know which group the investigated young adults belonged to and he says he did not recognize any of them from earlier investigations. You cannot, however, completely exclude that the doctor in this case could have recognized some individuals of those examined.

Kärfve put forward that Rasmussen is the co-author in this [last] study. That cannot be regarded as an odd thing, considering that Rasmussen's and Gillberg's doctoral theses were dealing with this group of individuals when they were six years of age.

In summary the Ethics Committee finds that the petition does not prove that Rasmussen–Gillberg's research is not following good scientific conduct.

The Ethics Committee at the Sahlgrenska Academy suggests that the Academy Board leave Kärfve's petition without further actions. The Ethics Committee did not unanimously agree with this recommendation. [Of the four] members of the Committee, one (BS) was of the opinion that the long dragged-out discussions, not least in the media, between Kärfve and Rasmussen–Gillberg motivated an examination by external experts of the original scientific material.

For the Ethics Committee

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