

Press Complaints Commission v The Daily Telegraph

Clauses noted: 5

The Press Complaints Commission has investigated whether an article published on The Daily Telegraph website under the headline "Man cut off own head with chainsaw", contained excessive detail about the method of suicide used in breach of Clause 5 (Intrusion into grief or shock) of the Code.

The Commission found a breach of the Code.

The article reported the suicide of a man, who had taken his own life using a chainsaw. The article contained a long and graphic reference to the method of suicide. It set out the precise apparatus that had been constructed by the individual to enable his death.

The newspaper indicated that it endeavoured to avoid publishing excessive details about the method of suicide. It considered that there was a difficult balance to be drawn between the public interest in the free reporting of court proceedings and the need to avoid excessive information. It suspended the article from its website following the contact from the PCC.

Adjudication

Clause 5 (ii) was introduced specifically to prohibit the inclusion of detail that would act, in effect, as a blueprint for the method of a suicide. It is crucial that newspapers abide by its terms, in order to minimise the risk of copycat suicides. This means that, particularly in inquest reports (many of which will be provided by external agencies), care needs to be taken in the editing process to remove excessive detail.

On this occasion, the online article contained far too much detail and had not been sufficiently edited. It was a matter of concern that the newspaper had allowed the material to be published on its website. The Commission expected that the situation would not be repeated, as this was a clear breach of the Code.

Adjudication issued 02/01/2009