

PCC upholds complaint against magazine after identification of sexual abuse victim

The Press Complaints Commission (PCC) has upheld a complaint against Take a Break magazine under Clauses 3 (Privacy) and 11 (Victims of sexual assault) of the Editors' Code of Practice. The article was a real-life story told from the point of view of the complainant's sister detailing how the two women had been abused as children by their stepfather. The piece named both victims and included photographs of them, claiming that they had waived their rights to anonymity. The complainant said that - while her sister had chosen not to remain anonymous and tell her story in return for a charity donation - she herself had not. The complainant's sister had understood that the magazine would contact the complainant directly in advance of the article being published, but it had not done so.

The magazine apologised sincerely to the complainant and immediately accepted that the Code had been breached: the complainant had not waived her right to anonymity. Its reporter had told editorial staff on numerous occasions that both sisters had agreed to be identified and understood (incorrectly, it transpired) that the complainant's sister was speaking on her behalf. The editor took full responsibility for not contacting the complainant directly, and outlined to the Commission a number of changes which had been introduced to editorial practices to prevent such a mistake from happening again.

The Commission ruled that there had been an "unacceptable failure" on the part of the magazine to protect the complainant's identity. It was particularly concerned at the "apparent ease with which the story had appeared without sufficient checks having been made with the complainant". PCC Director Stephen Abell commented: "The preservation of the anonymity of victims of sexual assault is regarded as paramount under the Code, which is particularly strict in this area. This was an extremely serious breach of the Code that ought never to have arisen, and it is of course right for the magazine to take steps to ensure that such an error does not occur again. The Commission has also requested that these steps be followed up further, given the seriousness of the matter".

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. The PCC is an independent body which administers the system of self-regulation for the press. It does so primarily by dealing with complaints, framed within the terms of the Editors' Code of Practice, about the editorial content of newspapers and magazines (and their websites, including editorial audio-visual material) and the conduct of journalists.
2. To read the adjudication, which has been published on page 2 of this week's edition of the magazine please [click here](#).
3. For more information, please contact Jonathan Collett on 020 7438 1246 or 07740 896805.

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