

Press Complaints Commission v Daily Star

Clauses noted: 5

The Press Complaints Commission has investigated whether an article published in Daily Star on 20th November 2008 headlined "Man cut off head" 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. It referred to the existence of the chainsaw, how it had been positioned and how it had been activated.

The newspaper made clear that it had taken steps in recent months to ensure that staff were aware of the need for care in the reporting of suicide. It pointed to the fact that the article in the Daily Express, its sister title, contained no further detail than the existence of the chainsaw. It argued that it had followed the spirit of the Code in its attempts to remove excessive detail from the copy.

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, due to the risk of copycat suicides. This means that, particularly in inquest reports (many of which would be provided by external agencies), care needs to be taken in the editing process to remove excessive detail.

Care had been taken to remove much of the graphic detail. However, while this was a difficult judgement call, the Commission felt – on balance – that the article still included slightly too much detail to comply with the Code.

Adjudication issued 02/01/2009