



Press Council of Ireland

Extract from Speech of the Chairman of the Press Council, Mr Dáithí O'Ceallaigh

at the launch of the

2014 Report of the Press Council of Ireland and Office of the Press Ombudsman

The Morgan Hotel, Dublin 2

Friday 22 May 2015 (embargo 11am)

One of the major issues facing Irish society today is the level of suicide with over 500 people taking their lives each year. The level of suicide amongst young males in Ireland is very high by European standards. Obviously tacking this problem requires approaches on a number of levels. Experts in the field of suicide-prevention are convinced that the media has a role to play in not glamorising suicide, in not creating a sense of victim around those who take their lives and in particular by not giving too much detail of the means of suicide. The reason for this latter concern is that there is clear evidence of the phenomenon of copy-cat suicide. In other words vulnerable people on learning of a particular method of suicide are more likely to use that method to take their own lives. It is for this reason that the experts are convinced that the media should avoid over-describing methods of suicide.

In order to address this the Codes Committee of the Press Council, an independent group of editors and journalists, has inserted a new requirement in the code. This reads "In the reporting of suicide, excessive detail of the means of suicide should be avoided". This new requirement should not inhibit the reporting on and analysis of issues around suicide. Experts agree that it is important that the media should address issues around suicide. Hopefully what the inclusion of this reference to the reporting on suicide in the Code will achieve is a greater awareness amongst editors and reporters of the need to exercise great care in how they report on suicide. Our experience of the Code over the last 8 years is that its very existence has created a greater sense of awareness of standards and procedures.

In drafting the new requirement in regard to suicide-reporting we sought the assistance of the Samaritans and we are grateful for their advice and expertise.

We have taken the opportunity to make one or two other minor changes to the Code. This include a new title that recognises the growth and importance of online publications and a clarification on what is meant by fairness in the code.

ENDS