

Ms Charlotte Church v The Sun

Clauses noted: 3

Ms Charlotte Church complained to the Press Complaints Commission through her representative Mark Melton that an article published by The Sun on 23 February 2007, headlined "Baby rumours for sober Church", intruded into her privacy in breach of Clause 3 (Privacy) of the Code of Practice.

The complaint was upheld.

Mr Melton said that the newspaper had told Ms Church's PR agent that it had received firm information that she was pregnant. The newspaper was told in response that such information was private and would not be commented on. Ms Church's representatives did however confirm that she was 'not more than 12 weeks pregnant' and said that if she was pregnant, no statement would be made until after the 12 week scan or when a doctor said it would be safe to tell family and friends. In spite of this, the newspaper published an article referring to rumours about a pregnancy.

The newspaper did not deny that it had received firm information that Charlotte Church was pregnant. However, it pointed out that it had simply reported speculation to that effect, which had been prompted by a 'very public change in behaviour when it came to her consumption of alcohol and cigarettes'. In particular, the newspaper pointed to press reports of Ms Church drinking excessively in January of this year. In addition, it noted a recent interview in which she had said she wanted to have children.

Mr Melton said it was nonsense to justify the article on the grounds of an apparent change in Ms Church's public behaviour and a recent interview. The fact was that the newspaper knew about the pregnancy and knew that it could not be reported. By referring to 'rumours' of a pregnancy the newspaper was simply trying to avoid its responsibilities.

Adjudication

The Commission has recently made clear that newspapers should not reveal the fact of someone's pregnancy before the 12 week scan without consent and when the information is not known to any significant degree. The newspaper's defence in this case was that it had merely reported rumours that the complainant was pregnant because of a change in her behaviour. But the newspaper had provided no evidence of any rumours, and had not denied that it had known for a fact that she was pregnant when it published the piece. In these circumstances it seemed to the Commission that the newspaper had simply tried to circumvent the privacy provisions of the Code by presenting the story as speculation. This was not acceptable within the spirit of the Code. The complaint was upheld.

Relevant ruling

Riding v Independent, 2006

Adjudication issued 03/05/2007