

# Reporting on Sensitive Issues

**NB: These documents are purely for guidance, for legal issues please contact [su-studentmedia@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:su-studentmedia@qmul.ac.uk)**

Student journalists may be faced with sensitive issues when reporting. The below issues and guidance are outlined by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). If the issue you are reporting on is not covered in this document, please email [su-studentmedia@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:su-studentmedia@qmul.ac.uk) for advice on how to proceed.

## Sexual Offences

A fundamental principle of justice is the reporting by the media; however, sexual offences are a major exception to this rule. When reporting on sexual offences, the reporting cannot be open and transparent to the degree where it infringes on the legal protections for victims of sexual offences. These protections are outlined below.

Victims of sexual offences are automatically guaranteed anonymity for life. They may waive this in writing. When reporting on this, if a victim waives anonymity they must do so to each journalism outlet. They do not waive anonymity universally. Similar, if an allegation is made in a public sphere, they are still entitled to anonymity.

Offences guaranteeing lifelong anonymity for the victim include: rape, sexual assault, exposure, up skirting, indecent photography, paedophilia, female genital mutilation, human trafficking, and modern slavery.

When reporting on sexual offences, journalists should include details and resources for support services.. They should also include a trigger warning.

You can find more guidance [here](#).

## Suicide

Journalists can publish information around a suicide because it is within significant public interest and is a significant public health concern. As the leading cause of death in people under 35 in the UK, it can be reported on in University settings. A death can affect individuals, family, friends and the wider community. Journalists do not need permission from the family to report the death, but getting their permission input is strongly advised.

Details which are reported about the suicide need to be carefully selected. Journalists should not report details about the method in excessive detail as it can serve as a trigger for other vulnerable people. Journalists should also be wary how they chose to publish information around clusters of suicides, as this can also serve as a trigger. Furthermore, speculating on the reasons for a suicide is strongly discouraged.

When reporting on suicide, journalists should include details for support services and resources. They should also include a trigger warning.

You can find more guidance [here](#).

## Privacy

Privacy law is based on Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights; some journalists feel this contradicts freedom of information.

A journalist should avoid publishing details about someone's private life that will embarrass or humiliate them as this can lead to civil suits. Sometimes it can lead to a criminal suit because it is a breach of human rights.