

Independent Press Standards Organisation
Gate House
1 Farringdon Street
London EC4M 7LG

Monday 23 November 2015

Dear Sir,

I am writing with a complaint about a probable breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice by newspaper publications which today have erroneously published results from a poll to suggest that 1 in 5 British Muslims harbour "sympathy for jihadis".

The Sun and the Daily Mail published articles about a Survation poll conducted for the Sun newspaper: '1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis, EXCLUSIVE: 'Wake-up call' after Paris blitz' (<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/politics/6758207/1-in-5-British-Muslims-have-sympathy-for-jihadis-in-poll.html>); 'Divided Kingdom: One in five British Muslims have sympathy for those joining ISIS - as it's revealed attacks on hijab-wearing women have rocketed since Paris massacre' (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3329921/One-five-British-Muslims-sympathy-joining-ISIS.html>).

The survey results have been misrepresented in articles published in the respective publications.

The Sun claims, "Nearly one in five British Muslims has some sympathy with those who have fled the UK to fight for IS in Syria."

The Daily Mail, citing the survey, headlines its article, "One in five British Muslims have sympathy for those joining ISIS".

The question in the Survation poll asked, "How do you feel about young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria?"

There is no mention of so-called Islamic State in the question and professional polling agencies, such as Ipsos Mori, have pointed out that the question is highly ambiguous with the likely effect of respondents being confused about whom "fighters in Syria" might refer to.

There is certainly no direct mention of IS in the question to merit the inference that respondents might be expressing a "sympathy" with fighters who have left the UK to "join IS".

Given the number of Britons who have left the UK to fight *against* IS, and those who have fought alongside factions allied to anti-Assad forces in Syria; Sunni groups which are supported by the British Government, there are a number of competing ways in which responses to a question about "fighters in Syria" might be interpreted. This nuance is not evident in the articles published on the poll which are determinate in their interpretation that the results indicate "sympathy for jihadis".

What is clear, and evidence of a demonstrable inaccuracy in the manner in which the survey results have been reported, is that respondents were not asked a question about how they felt about young Muslims who leave the UK to "fight for IS".

The Sun newspaper placed the erroneous coverage of the polling results on its front page today adding insult to grave injury.

At a time when anti-Muslim hate crimes have spiked in response to the tragic terrorist attacks in Paris, it is inexcusably negligent for British newspapers to stoke anti-Muslim sentiment with false headlines and inaccurate reporting.

I look forward to your consideration of my complaint about a Clause 1 breach.

Yours sincerely,

Sufyan Ismail
CEO, MEND.