

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

Tuesday 24 November 2015

Dear Sir,

I am writing with a complaint about a breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code of Practice by The Times newspaper.

An article published in today's paper headlined "One in five British Muslims has sympathy for Isis," is based on the same Survation poll which was the subject of a complaint I submitted yesterday in relation to inaccuracy and misrepresentation by The Sun and Daily Mail publications.

I have enclosed a copy of The Times article for your reference.

The article repeats the same point of inaccuracy displayed in the articles published by The Sun and the Daily Mail in suggesting that "One in five British Muslims has sympathy for 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 or its various acronyms, (ISIL, ISIS, IS), 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.

It is certainly clear from the question that ISIS is not mentioned and the inference by The Times headline writers that the figure of 19% refers to Muslim respondents who expressed "sympathy for Isis" is a blatant distortion of the facts.

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.

The Times makes some small effort to explain this in a paragraph raising questions which have since been aired about the reliability of the poll amid criticisms which surfaced yesterday when The Sun headline was published. It does not, however, appear to take much regard of these criticisms since the headline repeats almost verbatim the most flagrant error evident in yesterday's coverage and misconstrues the survey data to the same effect.

It is manifestly not the case that "One in five British Muslims has sympathy for Isis". This is not what the survey data suggests given the wording of the question posed to respondents.

It is rather distressing to find, despite widespread condemnation at the misrepresentation of survey results and the publication of an incendiary headline by The Sun newspaper, that The Times should repeat so manifest an error a day later.

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.