

## Portrayal of sex work and sex workers in recent news media - making a complaint to the Australian Press Council

CW: violence, sexual violence, sex work stigma and whorephobia.

Over the past few weeks, sex work and sex workers have received significant media attention, with sensationalist coverage of sex work and sex workers featuring heavily in media articles about both Bruce Lehrmann and Joel Cauchi, despite being of minimal relevance to either case.

The Australian Press Council is an independent body who can investigate complaints about printed or digital news or opinion media. They cannot make any orders, or grant compensation, but they can declare that a publication breached one or more Principles (see below), issue statements and request that publications print a retraction or apology.

**It is unlikely that the complaints will be upheld**, but the Press Council does keep data on the number of complaints received and informs the publication of the complaint.

Press Council Complaints Form (this will bypass the screening questions):

[https://forms.presscouncil.org.au/prod?entitytype=Case&layoutcode=Case\\_Web\\_Form&Refresh=true](https://forms.presscouncil.org.au/prod?entitytype=Case&layoutcode=Case_Web_Form&Refresh=true)

You will need to fill out a separate complaint form for each piece of media.

After filling out personal information you are asked to:

“Please state in no more than 400 words the reason for your complaint and, where possible, state which of the Council's Standard of Practice you think have been breached.”

You can read the principles at

<https://presscouncil.org.au/standards/statement-of-principles/>. We suggest focusing on the below principles 5 and 6.

Privacy and avoidance of harm

5. Avoid intruding on a person's reasonable expectations of privacy, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.

6. Avoid causing or contributing materially to substantial offence, distress or prejudice, or a substantial risk to health or safety, unless doing so is sufficiently in the public interest.

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Here is some text that may assist you for media in relation to Joel Cauchi:

The articles' focus on the perpetrator's sex worker advertisements, and alleged work as a sex worker, breach of General Principles 5 and 6. There is no public interest in publishing these details, and the sensationalist focus on these details only acts to further stigmatise and marginalise sex workers across Australia.

Such attention is rarely, if ever, afforded to the similarly unrelated occupations of other perpetrators of violence; and doing so distracts from the broader story and the impacts on the victims and families; so much so that it may also breach the Council's General Principle 3.

Suggested articles to make a complaint about:

The Australian

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/bondi-junction-mass-murderer-joel-cauchi-advertised-as-male-escort/news-story/ed2464dc575cb35b2d318cc14bb5c047>

The Daily Mail

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13306051/Joel-Cauchis-double-life-male-escort-revealed-new-details-emerge-Bondi-Junction-Westfield-attack.html>

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13306409/Sydney-killer-escort-Joe-Cauchis-sex-work-massacre.html>

News.com.au

<https://www.news.com.au/national/nsw-act/darkhaired-bondi-shopping-centre-killer-wearing-kangaroos-jersey-from-queensland/news-story/6064db5194a0cc5097ed723d29e18f8a>

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Here is some text that may assist you for media in relation to Bruce Lehrmann / 7 Spotlight:

The articles' publication of the details of the massage business and the massage workers are in our view breaches of General Principles 5 and 6. The undue weight placed on the massage expense in contrast to the other expenses creates the impression that it is the main issue at hand, rather than the broader issue of journalistic ethics and paid interviews.

There is no public benefit in publishing the details of the business involved, or photographs (even if blurred/de-identified)/advertising materials associated with the business. The sensationalist focus on these details only serves to further stigmatise and marginalise the massage workers themselves, and sex workers more broadly. Specific identification of the business and the publication of images associated with the business (even if blurred/de-identified) may generate privacy and safety concerns for the massage providers who work for the business.

Suggested articles to make a complaint about:

Sydney Morning Herald

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/more-details-emerge-of-bruce-lehrmann-s-boozy-night-with-masseuses-20240403-p5fh5d.html>

News.com.au

<https://www.news.com.au/national/courts-law/sydney-business-that-allegedly-provided-bruce-lehrmann-with-thousands-of-dollars-in-thai-massages/news-story/b7e6a485a487db4f0c17ed9edeb82a4b>