

## **2021-48: Smith vs Vancouver Sun**

*May 25, 2021*

The National NewsMedia Council has reviewed and dismissed a complaint about potential negative impact on individuals living with post-traumatic stress disorder based on an April 21, 2021, article, “Off-duty paramedic with PTSD avoids criminal record for dangerous driving,” published by the Vancouver Sun/Province.

The article reported on two cases of dangerous driving. In the first example, the story examined the court case of an off-duty paramedic who, despite pleading guilty to a dangerous driving offence, received a conditional discharge and avoided obtaining a criminal record.

The second case described another incident where the defendant pleaded guilty to dangerous driving after driving a vehicle into the Fraser River whilst engaged in an argument with their partner. In this case, the court decided a conditional discharge was not warranted.

In his submission, the complainant, Nicholas Smith, argued the news story was written and published without any consideration of the impact the piece would have on the defendant, or other first responders who may be experiencing occupational stress injuries.

In response to the complaint, the Vancouver Sun stated the news story did not stigmatize anyone with PTSD, but rather highlighted the tragic impact of mental illness. The news organization also stated the story provides insight into the decision-making process about how some individuals guilty of the same offence can receive different sentences.

The NNC promotes widely-accepted journalistic standards that demand news articles be accurate. Journalistic standards do not prohibit reporting on trauma, though they require that care and respect be afforded to interviewees who have experienced grief. The Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma, for example, has developed useful [guidelines](#) on topics including mental illness, suicide, and trauma.

After carefully considering the arguments brought forward by both parties, the NNC supports the view of the news organization that the article highlights the impact of mental health issues on individuals dealing with trauma, and offers readers insight and information on the outcome of a court case.

In considering the complaint, the NNC found no evidence to support the argument that the story perpetuates stigma or harm to persons living with PTSD. Furthermore, the evidence presented in the article was done so at a trial. Open court principles allow media organizations to report court proceedings freely.

In light of the above, the NNC finds no breach of journalistic standards in this case.