
APPENDIX TO
CHAN-TV re a News Report (Provincial Crackdown on Child Support Defaulters)
(CBSC Decision 03/04-0860, October 14, 2004)

I. The Complaint

The following complaint was sent to the CBSC on February 7, 2004:

Concern: Sophie Lui was reporting a story from Ontario where the Provincial Government is looking at cracking down on parents who are not paying their child support. The story used the term "deadbeat parents, mostly men" while Sophie Lui repeatedly used the term "deadbeat dads".

I find the term "deadbeat dads" is offensive and sexist. It is equally offensive to men who struggle to pay child support as the term "money grubbing moms". Neither is appropriate. It is a generalization that, in my opinion, is as offensive as any other racial or gender slur. This is no different than Don Cherry's controversial comment about visors.

In my opinion, Sophie Lui owes her audience an apology and she should be reprimanded for her story.

II. The Broadcaster's Response

The broadcaster responded to the complainant on March 10:

Dear Mr. N.,

Your letter to the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council - regarding Global TV news coverage, has been passed to me for response.

First, let me inform you that as responsible broadcasters, our entire news team strives to uphold the highest level of journalistic integrity and ethics at all times. Our staff members are educated to make programming decisions thoughtfully and with sensitivity and to produce, purchase and schedule material in accordance with community standards and with the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' (CAB) Code of Ethics, Sex-Role Portrayal Code for Television and Radio Programming, and the Voluntary Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming. BCTV News also adheres to the Radio Television News Directors Association of Canada (RTNDA) Code of Ethics.

Broadcasters are given the task of providing a broad spectrum of entertainment and information for a wide variety of audiences. What one viewer may consider to be an interesting and exciting program may lead another to change the channel. Each viewer will have their own interpretation based on their personal background, experience and values.

With respect to your specific complaint about a story carried on our February 7 Morning News regarding "deadbeat dads." The story was, in fact, reported by our Global National reporter Graham Richardson and ran on the newscast anchored by Sophie Lui.

The story noted that the Ontario government is taking a hard line against "deadbeat dads" - and said that there are thousands of stories of misery, poverty and despair because parents- the vast majority of them men - hadn't kept up support payments. Richardson said that "deadbeat parents, mostly men, slip

through the cracks" in Ontario, and the Province is now going after them with a vengeance. More than \$1.3 billion dollars in payments is outstanding.

Richardson wasn't the first, and won't be the last, person inside or outside the media to use the term "deadbeat dads." Governments, interest groups and myriad other institutions have also used the expression. The expression is used to describe those fathers who wilfully avoid paying support payments at all costs, and these are the parents the Ontario Government is targeting. The term isn't intended to include those fathers or mothers who sincerely work hard to make those payments. They are hardly deadbeats.

We are careful not to use gratuitous or offensive phrases in our newscasts. I strongly believe we were in our right to use this term in this context.

Thank you.

II. Additional Correspondence

On March 10, the complainant sent the following message to the CBSC, indicating his dissatisfaction with the response:

Concern: I find the term "deadbeat dads" used in the Global news broadcast to be as offensive as any other slur against a group based on gender, race, religion, disability and so on that is prohibited from use on news broadcasts. It is intended to create a negative stereotype against divorced men.

The response that I received from [the News Director] shows how destructive this term is. The news story from Ontario referred to parents, "most of whom were men", who were not meeting their child support obligations. Global immediately turned that into a story about "deadbeat dads" when in fact there were a number of women included in the Ontario story. By doing so, it created a negative stereotype about men in general based on their family status and their gender. This would be unacceptable against any other group.

In the penultimate paragraph, he says "Richardson wasn't the first and won't be the last person inside and outside the media to use the term "deadbeat dad". That is like saying Mark Furman was not the first or the last person to use the word "nigger" so it is all right. I disagree. Both Richardson and Furman were wrong.

He then goes on to say that the term is used for fathers who don't meet their child support obligations. Here is the negative stereotype.

The term is gratuitous and offensive. I urge you to put a stop to this type of language.

Thank you.