Pensioner ‘stabbed wife and then killed himself’ after ‘struggling with lockdown’

Father, 42, used shotgun to blast his partner in the head and neck and their daughters aged four and two in the head and chest before turning the firearm on himself at their £600,000 West Sussex home, inquest hears

- Robert Needham, 42, shot daughter Ava, four, in chest and Lexi, two, in the head
- He also shot his partner Kelly Fitzgibbon, 40, in the head and neck at their home
- Mr Needham is then believed to have turned the gun on himself in West Sussex

Man accused of killing wife in her bed ‘said she was sleeping’

Chilling CCTV footage shows how he crept into lover’s home to kill her before stabbing her to death in her bed and then throwing her on the floor before taking a driving lesson hours later.

- Aaron McKenzie crept into Kelly Mary Fauville’s bedroom on June 29 last year
- He then stabbed her 21 times in jealous rage
- He said she was sleeping

Woman found dead in front of crashed car next to dad had been stabbed to death

When ex-drug dealer Petrit Lekaj, from Adelaide, Australia, discovered his 20-year-old daughter Sabrina’s party lifestyle, he took extreme action to control her.

**Briefing:**

FATAL DOMESTIC ABUSE REPORTING IN THE PRESS
A SNAPSHOT INTO HOW FATAL DOMESTIC ABUSE IS COVERED IN THE PRESS

This briefing is a snapshot of how poor fatal domestic abuse reporting is in parts of the press. Five examples are set out which are illustrative of some of the ways that coverage has fallen short.

It is followed by a proposed change to the Editors’ Code, which has been so far resisted by IPSO and the Editors’ Code Committee.

“We know how serious the consequences of unethical, sexist and inaccurate press portrayals of fatal domestic abuse are, leading wider society to dismiss warning signs and underestimate the danger posed by men who go on to carry out these horrific murders.

“Since the introduction of the guidelines, this dangerous reporting has not stopped and that is why we support Hacked Off’s call for an effective and enforceable clause to be added to the Editor’s Code so that there is a responsible and appropriate approach to reporting.”

Lisa King, Director of Communications, Refuge

“Press reporting that promotes myths around fatal domestic abuse demeans victims and, by reinforcing commonly held beliefs, puts people in danger. As an organisation that looks to change the cultures that can lead to violence against women we call on the press to implement code change urgently”

Anthea Sully, Chief Executive, White Ribbon
For too long, reporting of domestic violence in the press has been seriously inadequate.

Coverage has sought to justify the actions of perpetrators. The conduct of victims has been questioned, and victims have been blamed. The dignity of women who have lost their lives has been ignored for the sake of gorier, more compelling stories.

New guidelines

In 2018, anti-domestic violence campaigners “Level Up” acted to address press misreporting in this area. They produced guidelines, “to support journalists to accurately and sensitively cover fatal domestic abuse”.

These guidelines were created in consultation with experts, campaigners and victims themselves. They are the gold standard for press reporting of such abuse.

While IPSO, the press complaints-handler controlled by the corporate press agreed to publish the guidelines on their website, they have not been enshrined in the press standards code they claim to enforce – the Editors’ Code of Practice.

This means that, while the guidelines are now accessible to journalists, there is no requirement for the press to follow them and no sanction can be enforced against them when they do not.

This briefing highlights the ways those guidelines have been ignored.

We have set out five examples of domestic violence reporting since the introduction of the guidelines which contravene them in different ways.

Until domestic violence reporting guidelines are reflected in a standards code which is properly enforced, press reporting will not improve to the detriment of future victims and society as a whole.
“1. ACCOUNTABILITY: PLACE THE RESPONSIBILITY ON THE KILLER.”

Various, 5th April 2020

“Accountability” is the first point in Level Up’s guidelines, yet it was disregarded in several stories about the alleged murder of an elderly woman by her husband in April 2020.

Instead of labelling the incident as domestic violence, headlines looked for justifications for the killing. In suggesting the stress of lockdown was to blame, the effect was to take accountability away from the perpetrator.

These quotes from a neighbour, which feature in one of the stories, serve to further deflect accountability away from the killer.

Neighbours are unlikely to have a detailed understanding of a relationship, with abuse in relationships often occurring behind closed doors.

Dennis Kingsley, 76, who lives two doors away said last week: ‘They were a nice couple who had been here for ages. I saw them last Monday as they were going out to the shops and I said ‘hello’ to them, but I didn’t see them coming back.

‘I had heard that they were worried about getting what they wanted in the shops because of things selling out. They never used to get food delivered, so they had to go out and get things that they needed. It would have been difficult for them.”
“2. ACCURACY: NAME THE CRIME AS DOMESTIC ABUSE OR VIOLENCE”

The Mirror, 3rd May 2020

Woman found dead in front of crashed car next to dad had been stabbed to death

When ex-drug dealer Petrit Lekaj, from Adelaide, Australia, discovered his 20-year-old daughter Sabrina’s party lifestyle, he took extreme action to control her.

The headline of this article gives little indication of the reality of these events: a woman, unarmed, was stabbed to death by her father.

The article goes on to apparently praise the perpetrator.

Most fathers want the very best for their daughters and Petrit Lekaj seemed no different.

Everyone thought Sabrina, 20, was the apple of his eye. Beautiful, intelligent and kind, she was popular but also hardworking and had a bright future ahead of her.

Daily Mail, 9th December 2020

Chilling CCTV shows jilted boyfriend stalking the streets moments before he crept into his heavily pregnant ex lover’s home as she slept and stabbed her to death in jealous rage - killing his unborn baby - before taking a driving lesson hours later

- Aaron McKenzie crept into Kelly Mary Fauvelle’s bedroom on June 29 last year
- The 26-year-old stabbed heavily pregnant ex-girlfriend 21 times in jealous rage

This report does not name the crime as domestic violence and is needlessly graphic.

In breach of other parts of the guidelines, the report fails to include details of domestic violence support organisations for readers who need help, and has no comment from a domestic violence expert.
“3. IMAGES: CENTER THE IMAGE OF THE DECEASED WOMAN”

The Oxford Mail, 5th December 2019

Man accused of killing wife in her bed 'said she was sleeping'

A MAN who 'almost decapitated' his wife in a 'truly savage' attack sobbed with his head in hands as he was handed a life sentence for her murder.

Fatos Xheta rocked back and forth in the dock throughout his sentencing hearing at Oxford Crown Court today.

The 46-year-old repeatedly stabbed Safie Xheta at the home the couple shared in Lytton Road, Oxford, on June 17 this year before placing a gag in his mouth and turning the knife on himself.

This description of the murder is gratuitously graphic, and violates the dignity of the victim, Safie.

Despite the brutality of the attack and pattern of controlling behaviour mentioned in other reports, quotations are included describing the couple as “happy”.

Mrs Dedia was also asked today how she thought Fatos and Safie seemed together to which she answered: “[They got on] very well, very happy.

"Every time I saw them and had a coffee with them or when they came over they were a happy couple.

Guideline (3) calls for the image of the woman who has died to be the centre of reports about alleged domestic violence deaths, yet here the perpetrator's image is more prominent.

The woman appears only partially, in a display of affection which risks giving a damaging perception of abusive relationships.
Father, 42, used shotgun to blast his partner in the head and neck and their daughters aged four and two in the head and chest before turning the firearm on himself at their £600,000 West Sussex home, inquest hears

- Robert Needham, 42, shot daughter Ava, four, in chest and Lexi, two, in the head
- He also shot his partner Kelly Fitzgibbons, 40, in the head and neck at their home
- Mr Needham is then believed to have turned the gun on himself in West Sussex

By FAITH RIDLER FOR MAILONLINE
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Images used in the report, as is so often the case in domestic violence reporting, appear to show a happy and loving couple. This perpetuates myths about the nature of domestic violence, such as that attacks are usually one off, random acts committed by good men, whereas the reality is that most attacks are pre-meditated and follow a pattern of abuse.

There was no expert advice in the report and no links to resources for women trapped in similar situations.

Newspapers are encouraged to withhold unnecessary, graphic details from domestic violence reports. This is to protect the dignity of the deceased woman, as well as to avoid intruding on the grief of surviving family members.

Instead, this report is detailed, graphic and sensationalised.
Campaigners called for Level Up’s guidelines to be made enforceable under the Editors’ Code. But the committee of newspaper editors which controls the code refused to do so.

As these cases show (all of which were published since the introduction of the guidelines), without changes to the standards code, unenforceable guidelines alone are insufficient.

This kind of reporting only adds to the trauma of loved ones dealing with the aftermath of appalling crimes.

Despite the expertise which informed the guidelines, and the ease with which they could be followed, it is left to victims and campaigners to be proactive over incidents of poor reporting.

Newspaper accounts of fatal domestic abuse matter.

Refuge warn that unethical reporting of domestic violence can lead society to “dismiss warning signs” and “underestimate the danger” posed by perpetrators.

IPSO is not an independent or effective body, and it consistently fails to uphold the standards it claims to enforce. But the first step to improving domestic violence reporting is the introduction of an enforceable code clause.

Hacked Off, working from Level Up’s guidelines and in consultation with other campaigners, have produced a draft standards clause to improve domestic violence reporting set out in this report.

We urge IPSO and the editors which control its standards code to adopt this clause as a matter of urgency.

This proposed new code clause is supported by leading domestic violence & women’s advocacy experts & campaigners:
A BETTER WAY TO REPORT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: PROPOSED CLAUSE

REPORTING INCIDENTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

1) IN CASES WHERE A WOMAN HAS BEEN KILLED BY A PARTNER, FORMER PARTNER OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBER, LANGUAGE WHICH APPEARS TO JUSTIFY THE MURDER OR OTHERWISE BLAME THE VICTIM FOR HER DEATH SHOULD BE AVOIDED.

2) SPECULATIVE REFERENCES TO FACTORS WHICH MAY HAVE MOTIVATED THE KILLING SHOULD BE AVOIDED, FOR EXAMPLE “REASONS” OR “TRIGGERS” OR DESCRIBING THE CRIME AS AN UNCHARACTERISTIC OR RANDOM EVENT.

3) CRIMES INVOLVING DEATH OR INJURY PERPETRATED BY A PARTNER, FORMER PARTNER OR FAMILY MEMBER SHOULD BE REFERRED TO AS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

4) REFRAIN FROM TRIVIALISING LANGUAGE, AND INVASIVE OR GRAPHIC DETAILS THAT COMPROMISE THE DIGNITY OF THE DECEASED WOMAN OR HER SURVIVING FAMILY MEMBERS.

5) REFRAIN FROM SPECULATION ABOUT THE SEXUAL HISTORIES OF THE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.