[GB] Soap Scene Ruled too Violent for the Time it was Broadcast; Research Commissioned

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On 27 August 2013, Ofcom found the long-running soap on UK TV, Hollyoaks, which is broadcast on Channel 4 each weekday evening, in breach of its Code. The cast contains characters who are mainly between 16 and 35 years old and the principal target audience is teenagers and young adults.

There was a complaint from one viewer about one scene. It depicted one of the main characters being killed, having been being pushed into the path of a fast train. The concern was raised that this scene was unsuitable for viewing before the watershed, in particular because it would have been expected to have been watched by children.

Ofcom considered that the nature of the characters' behaviour, the time broadcast and the likely audience, raised concerns under the following Rules of the Broadcast Code, namely, Rule 1.3: "Children must...be protected by appropriate scheduling from material that is unsuitable for them" and Rule 1.11: "Violence, its after-effects and descriptions of violence, whether verbal or physical, must be appropriately limited in programmes broadcast before the watershed...and must also be justified by context."

Ofcom concluded that the episode was in breach of Rule 1.3 because 'cumulatively the violent content in this sequence exceeded viewers' expectations for a drama transmitted long before the watershed when young children were available to view and in this case were watching in large numbers'. In addition Ofcom concluded that the episode was in breach of Rule 1.11 because 'the cumulative effect of the violence in the final scene was not sufficiently limited for this time of the evening, nor was it justified by context given that a significant number of younger children were viewing and available to view.'

Finally, Ofcom issued a Note to Broadcasters: Violence in pre-watershed programmes, reminding all television broadcasters of the 'need to ensure that all material broadcast pre-watershed which features violent scenes is appropriately limited.' Because Ofcom feels that there has been a lack recently of detailed studies into 'viewer's attitudes to violence on television' it has commissioned new, independent research on the subject. The results will be published 'as soon as possible' in 2014.

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http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/enforcement/broadcast-bulletins/obb236/obb236.pdf

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