



Ad Standards Community Panel
PO Box 5110, Braddon ACT 2612
P (02) 6173 1500 | F (02) 6262 9833

AdStandards.com.au

Advertising Standards Bureau Limited
ACN 084 452 666

Case Report

1	Case Number	0027/19
2	Advertiser	BetterHelp
3	Product	Professional Service
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV - Free to air
5	Date of Determination	06/02/2019
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.3 - Violence Causes alarm and distress

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

This television advertisement features scenes of a woman hurrying into a house, appearing distressed. The next scene shows her running into a bathroom, and then in a car crying. Between the three scenes, the woman opens her shirt and reveals a zipper in her chest. As she unzips the zipper, words like “panic” and “anxiety” tumble to the ground making a clanging sound like metal. The advertisement then shows the woman using her phone to type a message stating “I’ve been feeling panicked and anxious again”. A response is shown to come in stating “I’m here for you. Let’s have a video session tonight.” The woman is shown to smile.

THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

I felt attacked when they specifically said that the viewer was suffering from anxiety and I feel this may be distressing for not only myself but particularly people suffering from real depression and anxiety.



It is inappropriate to use a frequently aired advertisement that actually triggers anxiety. There is little choice in the audience about seeing it as well as it is not a scheduled program. It is also wrong to use anxiety inducing effects where trying to advertise professional services for a client group experiencing poor mental health.

It is an add portraying panic/anxiety attack. I believe this add could be triggering for people who experience panic/anxiety attacks and depression. My daughter has had ongoing mental health issues and this add is highly triggering for her panic/anxiety/depression. It is intense and disturbing, depicts very well the emotions of a panic attack. But it also feels like the actor may be considering taking her life. There are some parts which are very loud. For those who have unstable mental health and intense feelings in these areas it is triggering. There is no warning before the add to let you know to turn it off or leave the room. Not sure if this falls under any categories but I wanted to highlight the fact that this add has caused some extra mental health issues in our house and it comes on without warning during normal tv programs. The clawing at her chest and then the unzipping of her chest and being over the toilet / sink could possibly indicate self harm - which I dont believe should be shown on television.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complainant/s regarding this advertisement include the following:

Please see scripts attached. These TVCs are not currently on air.

There is no violent content in these TVCs (2.3).

It is reasonable for an advertiser to use relatable scenarios which every day people may be experiencing and for us to highlight that if you are experiencing these feelings, that the advertiser may be able to help you. Even if the Panel were to consider that the advertising contained depictions of violence (which is denied), BetterHelp submits that it is for a purpose justified by the community safety message propounded. The message is for a viewer to reach out and seek help if they or a loved one are experiencing emotional or mental health difficulties.

The TVCs are not portraying violence in any way.

Whilst some consumers may find that these ads cause distress or alarm, this is justifiable in the context of the service being advertised.

Throughout the ad there is no reference to self-harm. The depiction of unzipping is to show release of emotions within.



The TVCs do not imply that the viewer has depression or anxiety. However it offers help to consumers who may be watching the TVCs if they feel the TVC is relatable to their current situation.

The advertisement does not feature self-harm or violence and we believe it communicates the service with respect, as per Section 2.3 of the Code of Ethics

THE DETERMINATION

The Ad Standards Community Panel ("Panel") considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the AANA Code of Ethics (the "Code").

The Panel considered the complainants' concerns that the advertisement depicts distressing imagery.

The Panel viewed the advertisement and noted the advertiser's response.

The Panel considered whether the advertisement was in breach of Section 2.3 of the Code. Section 2.3 states: "Advertising or Marketing Communications shall not present or portray violence unless it is justifiable in the context of the product or service advertised".

The Panel noted this television advertisement depicts a woman appearing to have a panic attack in various settings.

The Panel noted the advertisement had been rated 'W' by CAD which means it can be broadcast at any time of the day except during, or adjacent to, Preschool and Children's programs.

The Panel noted that this advertisement is for a for-profit business which provides access to counselling services. The Panel noted the advertiser's response that it is reasonable for an advertiser to use relatable scenarios which every day people may be experiencing.

The Panel considered the content of the advertisement, particularly the heavy uneven breathing that is heard and the scenes of the woman which imply that she is unzipping her chest and words representing emotions falling out. The Panel considered that this content is distressing, however noted that the advertisement does provide a resolution in the form of the woman contacting the service for help and receiving a response.

The Panel considered that while the content creates a strong impression of reacting to anxiety, in the Panel's view this is unfortunately a scenario that people dealing with anxiety do experience and therefore it is not unreasonable for the advertiser to



highlight this in their advertising material.

The Panel noted that this advertisement is for a commercial service, rather than a community or public service announcement, however considered that the advertisement does include a call to action for people suffering anxiety and so overall the impact is justified by the service advertised.

The Panel considered that the advertisement did present or portray violence in a manner that is justifiable in the context of the product or service being advertised and determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.3 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Panel dismissed the complaints.

