

## Case Study 4: Media articles

Article one - The Age, 1 September 2005

### Brogden's breakdown sparks reflection — and fierce debate

By DAMIEN MURPHY,  
ANNIE LAWSON  
and MEAGHAN SHAW

JOHN Brogden's cry for help from his electoral office in the northern Sydney beach suburb of Mona Vale on Tuesday night was a personal tragedy that exposed a brutality peculiar to NSW politics and shocked the state.

It also shattered the lives of his wife, Lucy, their son and their families — Mrs Brogden's grief magnified by the knowledge, as she

tended his wounds, that her husband's apparent suicide attempt was a victory of punitive justice over restorative justice.

Mr Brogden was released from Royal North Shore Hospital yesterday afternoon and admitted to a psychiatric clinic.

Yesterday became a time for reflection and regret as people pondered who or what had pushed him over the edge.

There were many opinions, but no answers. Liberal MPs deferred electing

Peter Debeaux as Mr Brogden's successor as a sign of respect. Messages of sympathy flooded in from political leaders across the country.

Prime Minister John Howard said he was distressed by Mr Brogden's actions. "I want to say to Lucy, the thoughts of the Liberal family are very much with her and with her husband," he said.

"There are a lot of people, myself included, who not only want to see John restored to health and peaceful in himself, but also resuming an active public life."

On Monday, after a weekend of media stories about his behaviour, Mr Brogden resigned as Liberal leader, admitting that he had propositioned female journalists and called Helena Carr, the Malaysian-born wife of former NSW premier Rob Carr, a mail-order bride.

On Tuesday evening after Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* contacted Brogden staffers with allegations of predatory sexual behaviour, Mr Brogden left his Bilgola home, called briefly at Sacred Heart Church in Mona Vale, and then

locked himself in his nearby office. Later, when a staffer was unable to enter the office, Mrs Brogden called police and they found Mr Brogden unconscious with what they called self-inflicted wounds.

Talkback radio yesterday was jammed with calls expressing shock, sadness and disgust with a political system and media that could be so callous. Lisa's email to Sydney radio ABC702 was indicative: "I don't think his comments

#### INSIDE

THE BROGDEN AFFAIR NEWS 2

■ Comment: fragile egos, dirty tricks

FOCUS NEWS 13

■ A man on the edge

OPINION NEWS 14

■ Letters

ONLINE

■ Has the media gone too far? Vote

in our online poll at

[theage.com.au](http://theage.com.au)

CONTINUED NEWS 2

"John Brogden's cry for help from his electoral office... was a personal tragedy..."

"Mrs Brogden's grief magnified by the knowledge, as she tended his wounds, that her husband's apparent suicide attempt was a victory of punitive justice..."

"...they found Mr Brogden unconscious with what they called self-inflicted wounds."

## Breakdown sparks reflection, debate

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

about Carr's wife deserved this amount of attention . . . I hope everyone who helped this poor man into the position he's in feels really badly about themselves."

On Monday, after learning of the slur on his wife, Mr Carr said Mr Brogden had no character and was "a featherweight mediocrity who ought to be voted out of the leadership".

Yesterday he urged Mr Brogden to put the past behind him. "We're a forgiving society," Mr Carr said. "Bob and Helena Carr forgive what was said about Helena."

Mr Debnam, who will be elected state Liberal leader today, said Mr Brogden should have been given credit for doing the honourable thing. "Instead, he has suffered another devastating front page yesterday, Tuesday, and was about to suffer another devastating front page this morning," Mr Debnam said.

News Ltd spokesman Greg Baxter defended yesterday's *Telegraph* story, which was recast for the second edition after Mr Brogden's attempted suicide. He said the fresh allegations were of "legitimate public interest" given that Mr Brogden had indicated he would remain an MP, and that he had

claimed the incidents that forced his resignation were isolated.

A prominent academic blamed Mr Brogden's demise on sensationalist reporting that he said came from commercial pressures on media outlets. "There is a hysteria element to the media that unfortunately has human consequences," said Glenn Withers, professor of public policy at Australian National University.

Media ethicist Denis Muller said much of the coverage was justified until the *Telegraph's* shame file was published. "I don't think there was any public interest justification for it and its effect on Brogden and his family can only have been hurtful."

Australian Press Council chairman Colin McKinnon supported the high level of media attention. "I think such an extraordinarily racist and sexist comment deserves the kind of analysis and utter repugnance that it generated," he said.

News Ltd coverage of the story sparked the resignation of *The Australian's* state political reporter, Andrew West. According to the journalists' union, the MEAA, Mr West objected to his name being placed on a story that he did not write and which contained unsubstantiated material about Mr Brogden's alleged indiscretions.

"A prominent academic blamed Mr Brogden's demise on sensationalist reporting . . ."

## Fragile egos and dirty tricks make heady brew

By DAVID WROE  
CANBERRA

POLITICS equals long hours, separation from family, backstabbing and constant media scrutiny.

The feeling of failure, or even a daunting setback, can be crushing for an ambitious politician, especially when it is played out in humiliating detail as it was for John Brogden.

Politicians agreed yesterday that running a political business that could dent the hardest heads, yet none were under the illusion that that would change.

Democrat Andrew Bartlett, himself the subject of a public grilling after he abused another senator while he was drunk, said politicians were conditioned to attack, not defend each other.

Politics was seen as a "combat sport", which was bad for the country, he said.

"It's not just about the people who buckle under the pressure. The difficulty is as much what it does to the people who survive. You actually get people who are literally sociopaths," he said.

Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott, whose life became news when he found his long-lost son, who turned out not to be his, said: "Politicians give each other no quarter, the media are relentless, ruthless ... and frankly the public are very judgemental."

In 2000, Victorian federal



The stress was showing on the face of John Brogden when he resigned.

PICTURE: STEVEN BEWERT

Labor MP Greg Wilton killed himself after his family broke up. Labor finance spokesman Nick Sherry attempted suicide in 1997 amid claims he had rotted the public service.

Former Liberal staffer Greg Barns said such a frequency of mental health problems showed politics needed to change.

"People who go into politics tend to be highly strung in any event and they are also people

who often have mood swings and ... their mental state is probably accentuated because of the high-stress nature of the occupation," he said. "This is a workplace where there is high stress and where there ought to be much more regard given to people's mental health and that means at times the media backing off."

Former Liberal staffer Greg Barns, now chairman of the national

depression initiative beyondblue, said Mr Brogden should have been left alone once he'd resigned.

"I simply ask the question: do you have to make an attempt to take your life before the community will accept an apology?" he said.

Those needing assistance can reach Suicide Helpline Victoria on 1800 651 251 or Lifeline on 131 114.

"The feeling of failure, or even a daunting setback, can be crushing for an ambitious politician, especially when it is played out in humiliating detail as it was for John Brogden."

"Former Liberal staffer Greg Barns said such a frequency of mental health problems showed politics needed to change."

"This a workplace where there is high stress and where there ought to be much more regard given to peoples mental health, and that means at times the media backing off."



Article three - The Daily Telegraph, 31 August 2005

# BROGDEN IN SUICIDE BID



John Brogden is taken away from his office on a stretcher last night. Photo: DRAG O'BRIEN/PA

## Disgraced Liberal leader collapses at electoral office

**BREAKING NEWS**

By JOSH MASSON  
and FRONZIE JENSON

JOHN Brogden was rushed to hospital last night after an apparent suicide attempt.

The disgraced former state leader of the Liberal Party collapsed at the electoral office in Room North, State Hospital, in Perth, Western Australia, last night.

It was believed the 50-year-old was unresponsive, had lapsed consciousness and emergency services were unable to revive him.

People last night said Mr Brogden was in a state of confusion in Room North, State Hospital, in Perth, Western Australia.

Only four hours before the drama, he had been warmly welcomed home with a kiss from his wife Lucy — with whom he has a son — before he headed back to work, he was said to be.

According to reports in the news, allegations that he had had an affair with another woman, he had rushed into the office at the rear of the building, opened the door and refused to emerge.



Together... John Brogden and wife Lucy at home.

People arrived at the premises about 10pm.

The Daily Telegraph saw a Liberal Party spokesman who said Mr Brogden's chief secretary, who was in the office, was not present.

She raised her hands to her face and refused to emerge.

Continued Page 4

"John Brogden was rushed to hospital last night after an apparent suicide attempt."

"...Mr Brogden was found lying on the floor in the shower at the rear of the premises. It is understood he had been drinking heavily from a bottle of gin."