[GB] Report on BBC's culture and practices in relation to serious sexual misconduct by celebrities

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The report of the review by Dame Janet Smith into the BBC's culture and practices during the Jimmy Saville and Stuart Hall years has now been published. Saville was a highly popular television presenter; it was revealed after his death that he had carried out a large number of acts of sexual abuse, especially against young girls, and many of these had been committed in relation to his work at the BBC. Hall was another popular TV presenter; he was imprisoned after admitting 14 charges of abuse against young girls aged between 9 and 17 years over a period of three decades, once more in connection with his BBC work and on BBC premises.

The report found that complaints had been made and concerns raised about Saville in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus some staff were aware of his inappropriate sexual conduct and this should have been reported. However, there was no evidence that any senior member of staff or the BBC as a corporate body were aware of the conduct. Similar findings were made in relation to abuse by Hall, though his misconduct was known to more senior staff. There were cultural factors within the BBC which militated against the reporting of sexual complaints or concerns, particularly when these related to television stars. These factors involved a culture of not complaining because of the possible effect on the complainant's career, deference and adulation accorded to celebrity stars and the lack of any suitable route for the making of complaints. There was also a failure to pass information between different BBC departments. In addition, there was a 'macho culture' in some BBC departments where few women worked and there was a reluctance to report sexual harassment. There was also a lack of concern for the welfare of under-age girls.

The report concluded that both Saville and Hall had over a long period of time engaged in inappropriate sexual conduct at the BBC and had taken advantage of their association with the BBC to further their contacts with young people for sexual purposes. The BBC's failings reflected general cultural attitudes of the time such as a failure to recognise child abuse and the need to protect young people from exploitation by older men; the BBC had at the time been 'a place of sexual discrimination and sexual harassment' as was common throughout business, industry and the professions. However, there were failings more specific to the BBC as well; the lack of an effective complaints procedure, the need for stronger

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information sharing, the lack of an effective investigations process; the need for stronger audience protection and the need for an effective human resources department providing proper support to employees.

Since the events described social attitudes have changed greatly; the BBC has also changed and now has a satisfactory child protection policy and proper grievance and complaint procedures. Thus, the major recommendation of the report is that the BBC needs to demonstrate that it has taken the complaints seriously and has made or is making the necessary changes; it should explain its current rules, policies and procedures in the areas covered to demonstrate that they apply current best practice. There should also be an independent audit of those rules, policies and procedures. The BBC should also consider other issues relating to its internal lack of cohesion, the hierarchical structure of its management and its attitude to behaviour by its stars.

BBC Trust, 'The Dame Janet Smith Review Report', 25 February 2016

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/dame_janet_smith

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