

EUROPE

Draft of Inquiry Report on Jimmy Savile Cites Flaws in BBC Culture

By KIMIKO DE FREYTAS-TAMURA JAN. 21, 2016

LONDON — A culture of deference to “untouchable stars,” an “above the law” attitude among members of management and a climate of fear at the BBC allowed Jimmy Savile, the disgraced British television personality, to carry out sexual assaults on children for decades, according to a leaked draft of an inquiry published on Thursday.

The 500-page draft, which was published by the news website Exaro, said the inquiry had heard from many BBC employees who knew of Mr. Savile’s predatory behavior, called the broadcaster’s investigations “wholly inadequate” and raised the possibility that other pedophiles could still be at the BBC.

Dame Janet Smith, a retired judge who has been leading a three-year independent investigation on behalf of the BBC into the broadcaster’s practices during the years it employed Mr. Savile, from 1964 to 2007, said in the draft that the multiple rapes and sexual assaults committed by him were all “in some way associated with the BBC.”

The draft also said that the atmosphere regarding whistle-blowers at the BBC had worsened since the revelations about Mr. Savile, and that people were now even less likely to come forward.

In a statement, the inquiry said that the document was out of date and that “significant changes” had been made to its contents and conclusions. The final report is expected to be released within six weeks.

Mr. Savile was one of Britain’s most celebrated TV personalities until revelations emerged in 2012, a year after his death, that he had been a sexual predator who had abused hundreds of adults and children.

The draft confirmed 61 cases of sexual assault, including four rapes and one attempted rape, which took place in virtually every one of the BBC premises Mr. Savile worked in. Three of his victims were 9 years old, and two of the rapes involved girls under 16, the draft said.

“Savile would seize the opportunity for sexual contact, even in public places such as corridors, staircases and canteens,” it said.

The draft suggested that a climate of fear at the BBC had dissuaded victims from making complaints against Mr. Savile.

In one example, a 19-year-old woman was almost raped by Mr. Savile in his trailer. After discussing the matter with colleagues, she decided not to file a complaint to the police or to the BBC, fearing that taking action would ruin her career. The draft noted that the BBC’s culture discouraged young women from filing complaints in general, “and about sexual misconduct or harassment in particular.”

“Given the hierarchical structure, the impracticability of complaining to anyone other than a line manager and the weakness of the personnel department, the only option for a victim of inappropriate behavior during the Savile years was to put up with it or leave,” the draft said. “By and large, they chose to stay because, in many respects, the BBC was a wonderful place to work.”

In another case cited by the draft, Mr. Savile was said to have molested a

17-year-old on the set of the show “Top of the Pops” in 1976. When she complained to staff members, “her complaint was brushed aside with the explanation that it was ‘just Jimmy fooling about.’ ”

The draft said that the atmosphere for whistle-blowers at the BBC was “even worse” now than in Savile’s time, because so many more people are freelancers or on short-term contracts, with little or no job security.

Although the BBC has introduced a policy to protect whistle-blowers, the draft said, “it is clear from the evidence that there is still a widespread reluctance to complain about anything, or even for it to be known that one has complained to a third party.”

Employees were “extremely anxious” about remaining anonymous when making comments about the BBC during the inquiry that were even mildly critical, the draft said.

Mark Watts, the editor in chief of Exaro, said that the draft was more than a year old but that the criticisms made against the BBC were still relevant.

“It is the draft from which criticisms were passed to individuals as relevant, and indeed to the BBC as an institution,” he told the BBC’s “Today” program on Thursday. “It is quite important to realize that the BBC as an institution knew about these criticisms, and they are extensive, more than a year ago.”

Will Wyatt, a former BBC director general, said people struggled to see how senior management could have ignored allegations of Mr. Savile’s sexual misconduct.

“I honestly never heard anything,” he told the BBC, also on the “Today” program.

“If you had said, around the time, that pop stars and D.J.s exploited their position, one would not be surprised,” he said. “But the thought that it was

happening with young kids is just beyond belief. There's no argument. People should have known, and he should not have been employed."

In the draft's conclusion, Dame Janet cited the potential for similar abuse cases. "I wish to consider whether it is possible that a predatory child abuser could be lurking undiscovered in the BBC even today," she wrote. "The answer is that I think it is possible."

Nearly 400 witnesses in connection with Mr. Savile were interviewed in the investigation.

"What happened was a dark chapter in the history of the BBC," Tony Hall, the director general of the BBC, told the broadcaster. "The responsible thing must be to act on the final report which we have not received."

He added that it would be "invaluable in helping us understand what happened and to help ensure that we do everything possible to avoid it happening again."