

Sexual favours were a way of life at the BBC

The Corporation must launch a serious inquiry and ask key members of staff why they tolerated Jimmy Savile's behaviour for so long

Starstruck: Jimmy Savile joked with Pan's People on air, but his off-screen habits were unsavoury

Why has it taken so long for those who Jimmy Savile assaulted to come forward? Would anyone have believed them while he was alive? I doubt it. When a male hairdresser molested me, as a 10-year-old, my mother's reaction was a swift slap and an order to stop fibbing. Savile, like all paedophiles, was interested only in people who had no power to resist or complain, unlikely to cause trouble. Some of the girls who tried to speak out were punished by those meant to be protecting them. As more and more women come forward every day to tell their stories, we are outraged – how could sustained systematic abuse by such a high-profile entertainer remain a secret for decades?

Jimmy got away with his nasty secret because, if anyone at the BBC knew about his behaviour, they ignored it. The many charities and hospitals who took the extremely large contributions Savile tirelessly raised did not look closely enough at their patron's weird ways. They are tainted by what they must now acknowledge as dirty money. Special schools, flattered by the attention of big star, failed to discern when his visits and all the "interaction" with their young charges had a sinister purpose. The second reason Jimmy got away with it until the day he died was because his behaviour was just an extreme version of the inappropriate behaviour commonplace in the entertainment industry in the 1970s and 80s. Jimmy wasn't the only pervert working in showbiz by any means. A lot of people will be feeling anxious, dreading their names creeping into the frame. We have been told that other men visited Jimmy Savile's dressing room, one of whom was Gary Glitter. One of the victims alleges that on another occasion Freddie Starr was present, but Starr has vehemently denied this. It's clear, though, that a circle of men did know what went on behind that door. In the entertainment industry, quite a few people think that sex with fans is an acceptable perk – and sometimes those fans will be under the age of consent. Savile was known as a sleazeball, with a penchant for young boys and girls, and every time newspapers got close to exposing him, his charitable work would be used to buy silence. "Shop me and needy causes will suffer," was the implication.

At the start of my career in newspapers, two young female reporters were sent to talk to Jimmy and both were asked to get into bed with him to conduct their interviews. Why did nobody complain, you might ask? Go back to the 1970s: Fleet Street, radio, and television were male dominated. All our editors were blokes, and they were routinely appallingly sexist. To get on in our chosen career, we had to ignore the leering and the innuendo in the office. In these blokes' minds, sex sold newspapers. In 1975, I started work as a presenter for London Weekend Television in my late twenties. I was amazed at what went on behind the scenes. I have no doubt that sexual favours were offered (by record companies and the like) to get acts on certain music shows at the BBC and ITV. On one series, a young female secretary would service an elderly male presenter in his dressing room in the tea break. Other men drilled a hole in a dressing-room wall to spy on a glamour star as she undressed. When a celebrated singer appeared on one show, he demanded two girls be sent to his dressing room to help him "freshen up", ie give him oral sex. Another household name, still alive, was famous for dropping his trousers and waving his bits at the make-up ladies. They never complained, the assumption being that the ratings-hungry executives wanted their expensive stars to be happy at all costs, and sod the women in the workforce. A team of very attractive male school-leavers were chosen to "deliver post" to certain entertainment shows, many of whom eventually joined the staff of the shows as assistants. That was a well-known way to get started in television, particularly if one major record company boss (a flamboyant elderly gay American, now dead) took a fancy to you. I made a documentary about underage rent boys, and one mentioned that a well-known BBC sports presenter was one of his clients. The name was removed by the lawyers. I arrived at the BBC in the late 1980s as a junior executive attached to the male-dominated Light Entertainment department. To my mind, the culture of turning a blind eye to sexually inappropriate behaviour was entrenched. Why did I not complain about Jimmy Savile? I did not work directly with him, except to interview him a couple of times, when I found him extremely creepy. As a colleague, you can't report something you haven't seen with your own eyes, no matter how strong the rumours. The guilty men today are those in authority who must have heard the rumours but not investigated them, or thought that big stars were entitled to their "perks".

I worked differently. My department employed plenty of women, and everyone knew sexual harassment would not be tolerated. Gradually, women started directing and producing major entertainment shows, and things changed. I would not work with one director whose very young girlfriend was a presenter, or with a male presenter whose sexual proclivities (a taste for young boys) I found unacceptable. As an executive, I could choose exactly who I worked with, and I did. Now, the BBC must mount a serious inquiry and ask why key members of staff tolerated Savile's behaviour for so long. It must put in place checks so it can't happen again. The police must interview colleagues, charity administrators and school heads, and establish what they knew. They all need to account for their actions to a public inquiry or a parliamentary committee. Finally, the victims themselves should be entitled to compensation from Jimmy Savile's estate. On Thursday, the head of children's services in Rochdale was allowed to resign without facing any disciplinary action after a shocking report revealed 50 young girls in the area had been groomed for sex over a five-year period. When they were referred to local social services, the professionals did nothing, because they considered the girls, some as young as 10, were "making their own choices". Once again, no one in a position of authority has been punished for dereliction of duty, and the victims have been treated as liars. So much for society having "moved on".