

Teen recruits at Australian Defence Force were forced to rape each other, says counsel

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Sydney: Sexual abuse of teen recruits continues to surface in the Australian Defence Force (ADF). A Royal Commission investigating child abuse in the ADF was today told that teenage recruits were forced to rape each other, often as part of brutal initiation practices.

In his opening address to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, counsel assisting the commission Angus Stewart, said navy recruits were subjected to "ritualised practices of bastardisation that were designed to break in and humiliate new entrants".

Stewart said that he had been contacted by 111 people about child sexual abuse incidents within the ADF.

“In most cases, this public hearing will be the first time that they’ve told their experience of child sexual abuse publicly,” Stewart was quoted as saying by AFP. The comment came after hearing a lady (mother of a female teen recruit) describing the horrific sex acts done on her daughter which led the 15-year-old to commit suicide.

The Commission has already examined churches, sports bodies and the entertainment industry with its focus now on the ADF.

Of these, 50 cases are alleged to have taken place at HMAS Leeuwin from 1960 to 1980 and at the Balcombe Army Apprentice School between 1970 and 1980.

According to Stewart, many of those sexually abused during their first six months at Leeuwin were 15- and 16-year-olds.

"The Royal Commission will hear that most of the abuse was perpetrated by older recruits as part of an informal hierarchy in which older recruits physically and sexually abused more junior recruits as part of ritualised practices of 'bastardisation' that were designed to 'break in' and humiliate new entrants to the navy," he said.

This bullying included "blackballing" or "nuggeting" in which a junior recruit was held down as boot polish or toothpaste was smeared on his genitals, sometimes with a harsh brush, and "gotcha" in which a recruit's genitals were grabbed, usually while they showered.

Another practice was the "royal flush" in which junior recruits held the head of one of their number in a used toilet bowl and flushed.

"The survivors will give evidence that they were subjected to serious forms of sexual abuse," Stewart said.

Survivors rarely reported the crimes, overcome by shame and fear, while those who did have claimed they were not believed or were told such experiences were "a rite of passage", he said.

One survivor, known as CJA, "will give evidence that he was regularly forced to perform and receive oral and anal sex on other junior recruits during his first six months at Leeuwin".

CJA, who was 16 at the time in 1967, would tell the inquiry that his complaints went nowhere and he was described as a troublemaker, Stewart said.

Survivors from Balcombe, where apprentices were often as young as 15, were subject to similar practices as those at Leeuwin, the inquiry heard.

The Australian military has been subject to two major inquiries into abuse over the last five years, with complaints dating from the 1940s. The ADF has since embarked on cultural reforms.

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