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Research into Defence Abuse 2018-2022

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VETERAN
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Mr Nick Kaldas APM
The Hon James Douglas QC
Dr Peggy Brown AO
Royal Commissioners
Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide
GPO Box 3273
Sydney NSW 2001

Dear Commissioners,

We are writing to submit the summary findings of an Australian Research Council supported study into physical, sexual and other abuse within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) from the 1950s-2021.

This submission is under embargo until January 2023, so that relevant publications can be produced. We are willing to provide more detail as needed.

This submission reports on defence abuse, some which led to suicide and some to attempted suicide, and all had mental health challenges from the abuse.

The research team conducted 73 interviews or collected written statements from victims/ survivors of defence abuse and stakeholders engaged in defence abuse matters. Sixty-seven were victims/survivors and/or family members of victims. Six were stakeholders. Family members were interviewed in cases where the victims are deceased. Other cases contributed to the study through publicly available material (eg. the suicide death of DIO officer Merv Jenkins).

Our study included interviews with families of ADF members who had committed suicide and former members who had attempted suicide.

Key Findings

- Our research confirms the existing academic findings on the causes of, and reasons for, suicide in the ADF and veteran community.
- We have found one additional core factor affecting ADF members and veterans that is not well studied in the literature: *Administrative Violence*
- Administrative Violence (AV) was identified as a secondary trauma by many of our survivors. AV is actions that are undertaken within institutional rules that are designed to further traumatise, belittle and/or restrict access to support and/or redress. Our survivors identified these patterns of abuse in

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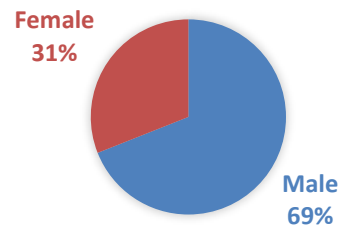
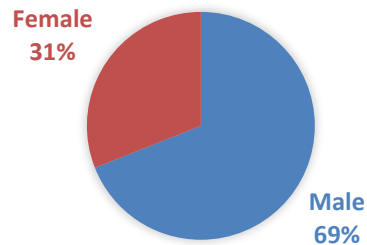
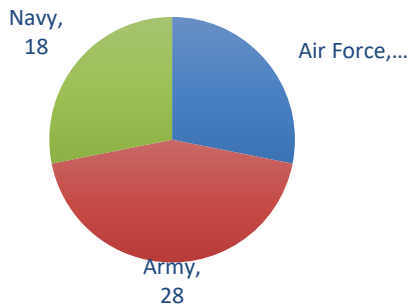
both the ADF and from DVA. AV typically followed the reporting of abusive incidents, where the survivor was then targeted, using administrative rules, to punish them for speaking out.

- Survivors found it very difficult to challenge AV as they were already traumatised, lacked institutional knowledge to argue their case and were often left with no or ineffective representation and/or support.
- The outcome of AV on the member was a complete break in trust of the ADF/DVA. This significantly impacted their ability to access or use support services.
- The trauma produced by AV is best described in terms of moral injury including betrayal, marginalisation, and a loss of trust and hope.

• **Breakdown of interviews**

• Service		
• Air Force	• Army	• Navy
• 18	• 28	• 18

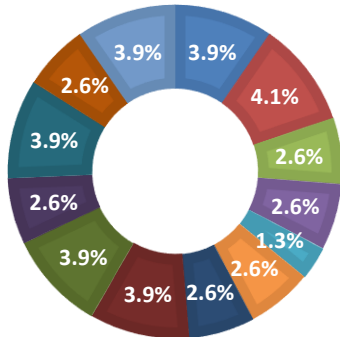
• Gender/sex	
• Male	• Female
• 44 victims of abuse were male	• 22 participants were female including 20 female victims and 2 transgender women



Rank and Number of Participants

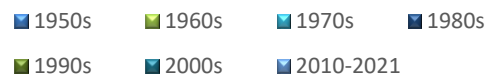
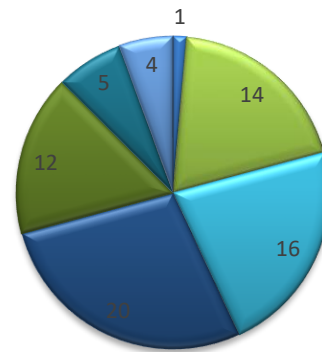
Rank	#	Rank	#	Rank	#
Able Seaman	3	Leading Aircraftman	1	Officer (demoted)	1
Air Vice Marshal (Two Star)	1	Leading Aircraft Woman (LACW)	2	Operator Command Post Grade 2	1
Apprentice	3	Leading Seaman	1	Ordinary Seaman	3
Apprentice Petty Officer	1	Leading Seaman (Killick)	3	Recruit	2
Apprentice Radio and Electronic Technician	1	Lieutenant	1	Seaman/Able Seaman	1
Brigadier	1	Lieutenant Colonel	1	Second Lieutenant	1
Cadet	1	Lieutenant General (Chief of Army)	1	Sergeant	1
Captain	1	Lieutenant (on entry)	1	Supply Officer/ Seaman(writer/ clerk)	1
Captain (demoted)	1	Major	2	Squadron Leader	1
Commissioned Officer	1	Midshipman (officer)	1	Trooper	1
Commissioned Officer's stepchild	1	Military Police	1	UAV Operator	1
Communicator of Signalmen	1	Not stated (Band)	1	Warrant Officer Second Class	1
Corporal	3	Patrolman	1	Wing Commander	3
Education Corps Officer	1	Private	4	Wran (equivalent Able Seaman)	1
Lance Corporal	3	Officer Cadet	2	Wran Stores Naval (SN)	1

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The time periods the abuse took place are reported below. These represent the date of service commencement. Some of the service periods are up to 30 or more years.

Decade	Number of people
1950s	1
1960s	14
1970s	16
1980s	20
1990s	12
2000s	5
2010-2021	4



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Types of Abuse

Administrative Violence (AV)

- Administrative violence/abuse was very common.
- Disciplinary charges were a principal modality for administrative abuse.
- The application of these charges varied considerably (those not in favour received charges for minor or made-up transgressions whereas the same offences were often overlooked for more favoured servicemen or servicewomen).
- When a participant became a target, they often accumulated many charges in a relatively small time, which sometimes resulted in a discharge.
- Sometimes, senior officers were quite clear and vocal about ‘wanting to break’ a particular serviceman or servicewoman or wanting them out of the service.
- Other ways of facilitating the discharge of a particular target included negative performance reviews and arranging for medical discharge and a psychologist/ psychiatrist or doctor’s examination.
- Negative performance reviews occurred in several situations. Two examples are:
 - A member had recently been awarded student of merit, or scored highly in a trades test, or received other recent positive reviews, which were then followed by one or more very negative reviews based on limited evidence.
 - A member’s performance had recently declined, in relation to illness or injury, concerted bullying, a family death, or another situation which might reasonably be expected to impact performance temporarily. Member was often earmarked as being a poor performer which often led to discharge.
- Members were often sent to defence force doctors or psychologists/ psychiatrists whose reports quite often conflicted with outside medical or psychological opinions. These reports were then used as a reason for special attention or discharge.
- Postings have been used as a form of administrative abuse – posting to a victim in close proximity to a perpetrator, posting away from family or not providing posting opportunities.
- Members mentioned being given a posting on a base far away from family, or being given a posting in an area outside of their expertise and below their capabilities (often in logistics or warehousing).
- One member reported that his most recent posting involved loading up trucks full of rocks and transporting them to a different location, which was below his level of training and expertise.

- These postings often took place after the participant had experienced bullying or abuse.
- Others reported being posted immediately after deployment, with limited downtime or time to see family, which they felt had impacted on their mental health.

Reputational Damage

- When members had negative experiences, they often counted on beginning anew at a new posting. However, they often found that it was difficult to leave behind negative perceptions or reputations. Often bullies would be posted to the next base or ship, and work on undermining them in the new context. Similarly, officers sometimes deliberately spread negative information to those in charge at the next posting.
- Rumours that were unsubstantiated or not relevant caused major career damage. One example is of an air force officer who was presented to be a terrorist due to a misreported rumour that he flew planes into buildings; he had told someone at his high school that he accidentally flew a model glider into a building once. He was eventually moved away from positions involving airplanes.
- Many women faced rumours that they slept around or were 'easy' which made them subject to predation by men who would regularly sexually harass them or try to sleep with them or undermine their authority as officers.

Sexual Violence/ Harassment and Sexual Assault

- Sexual violence was very common for men and women in this study, although slightly more common for women. This took place in highly sexualised environments, where the climate of harassment and repeated rape threats would also likely have contributed to poor mental health outcomes.
- Women's and men's rooms were frequently unsecured and broken into.
- Sexual harassment was often part of a concerted campaign to eliminate women from services, particularly in very male-dominated environments like trades, and for the women who joined the Navy in the earliest years that women were allowed to join.
- For men, sexualised hazing often resulted in sexual assault or rape. 'Games' such as greasing genitals involved restraining servicemen and touching their genitals. Substances such as toothpaste and Vegemite were also commonly used. Broom-bashing sometimes escalated to men being raped with broom handles.

Physical Assault

- Many participants experienced physical violence, including beatings, often by groups. Some participants were hospitalised following beatings. Beatings were particularly prevalent for cadets and apprentices and were often instigated by senior cadets or apprentices. NCOs would beat recruits or encourage others to beat recruits. This category includes beatings, kicking, knocking people over, but not physical harassment such as threats or mild shoving or pushing.

Sabotage

- Equipment sabotage was very common. Necessary equipment such as musical instruments (for band), uniforms, trade tools, or trades assessment materials, were regularly destroyed, hidden, or dirtied. This could be an attempt to induce official sanctions, for example during room and equipment inspections, or to impede performance (in one's trade or occupation).

Hazing, Bastardisation and Physical Bullying

- Hazing, bastardisation, and physical bullying are defined here as non-sexual forms of bullying (as sexual forms of bullying or bastardisation are included under the headings sexual harassment or sexual violence). Included here are forms of physical abuse or punishments that aim to intimidate, to instil hierarchy or to make subordinates compliant. Forms of bastardisation such as beatings are classified under physical violence.
- While some examples were said by participants to be 'in good fun', such as being soaped up and pushed down the hallway, other examples went beyond 'light-hearted pranks'. This often resulted in a system of targeted punishments and sanctions intended to create a climate of threat for either all new recruits, or for particular servicemen or servicewomen who were singled out for extra punishments. It is noted that bastardisation and hazing traditions and practices are often sexualised.

Extreme Endurance Training

- Extreme endurance training was particularly common in the Army but occurred across the three services. While endurance training is to be expected in preparing people for combat situations, some participants reported being forced to endure extreme training that resulted in injuries or was beyond the physical capacity of most servicemen or servicewomen. Examples given include:
 - being made to tread water for an hour
 - being deprived of sleep for five days while driving an armoured tank in a recreation of a previous battle which resulted in an injury and fear of driving tanks (DB)
 - being physically attacked by a senior officer for attempting to provide assistance to a colleague who passed out during a run
 - witnessed a broken leg on a high ropes course where recruits were pushed beyond their limits (DB)
 - being trapped in a flooded room during a test exercise where officers didn't terminate the exercise at the expected point and left recruits to fear they might drown
 - exercises where officers were given protective equipment such as masks to prevent smoke inhalation and recruits weren't
 - members collapsing during gym or during physical punishments



- In addition to officially sanctioned extreme endurance training, lower ranking servicemen and women and recruits were often assigned physical endurance tasks by senior recruits, either as punishments, or to instil a sense of hierarchy.
- Watch shifts during the night on top of regular shifts and duties often meant that there was very limited time for sleep. Recruits were given duties to perform late at night, to be done by the next morning, which meant they often had very limited sleep, resulting in lower grades in academic or trade work, or poor performance in training tasks. Response to training accidents such as placing members in holding platoons had deleterious effects upon members.

This is a summary of our research. Our research also records the post service response by DVA to claims and conditions, Defence Abuse Response Taskforce and Ombudsman complaints and civil litigation processes. We would like to contribute what we can to the Royal Commission and we will be making further submissions.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Ben Wadham'.

Ben Wadham (Associate Professor)
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work

James Connor (Associate Professor)
School of Business, UNSW Canberra

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Relevant Papers

- Andrews, D., Connor, J. and Wadham, B.A. (2021). The Military Scandal: Its Definition, Dynamics and Significance. *Armed Forces and Society*,
- Connor, J., Andrews, D. J., Noack-Lundberg, K., & Wadham, B. (2020). Military Loyalty as a Moral Emotion. *Armed Forces and Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X19880248>
- Bridges, D. and Wadham, B.A. (2019). Gender under Fire: Portrayals of Military Women in the Australian Print Media. *Feminist Media Studies*, pp. 1-19.
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- Wadham, B. and Goldsmith, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Criminologies of the Military: Militarism, National Security and Justice*. London, United Kingdom: Hart Publishing.
- Wadham, B. (2018). Techniques of Naturalisation: Crime, Camouflage and Institutional Accounts of Violence in the Military. In Ben Wadham & Andrew Goldsmith, ed. *Criminologies of the Military: Militarism, National Security and Justice*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Hart Publishing, pp. 133-150.
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- JM Connor (2013) [Military loyalty: a functional vice?](#) *Criminal Justice Ethics* 29 (3), 278-290
- Wadham, B 2004, 'Mogan Hunts and Pig Nights: Military Masculinities and the Making of the Arms-Corps Soldier', Paper presented at Revisioning Institutions: TASA Conference 2004, 1/01/04.

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