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Defence sex abuse: Rape and assault claims implicate serving ADF officers

Four Corners

By [Michael Brissenden](#) and Alex McDonald

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Photo: The Defence Abuse Response Taskforce is wrestling with a number of allegations that implicate serving officers. (Australian Defence Force)

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More cases of rape and sexual assault in the Defence Force have been unearthed where the alleged perpetrators are either serving officers or working for Defence.

The victims have not been contacted by the Government taskforce set up to compensate those who were abused in the military.

Len Roberts-Smith, the chairman of the Defence Abuse Response Taskforce (DART), says he is wrestling with a number of allegations that implicate serving officers.

"We've made a deliberate decision very early on that we would not chase down [victims] who did not come to the taskforce voluntarily," he said.

He concedes the issue of sexual abuse within the ADF is much larger than has ever been publicly acknowledged and expects the taskforce will identify hundreds of perpetrators.

DART has already assessed more than 2,400 complaints of abuse, paid \$28 million in compensation and referred 63 matters to police.

But Mr Roberts-Smith cannot confirm whether all the perpetrators identified by DART will be pursued by the ADF or civilian authorities.

"We need to grapple with that issue," he said.

"We do expect to have a lot of names that weren't identified previously."

One victim interviewed as part of a **Four Corners** investigation into abuse at the Defence Force Academy had a nasty reunion with a man she says raped her when she was a second-year ADFA cadet.

She is still a serving officer and **her alleged abuser, a senior member of the ADF,** arrived at the base where she is stationed earlier this year.

The woman, who cannot be named, told Four Corners: "It all just came flooding back, like it had happened the day before yesterday."

ALLEGED OFFENDERS PROMOTED TO SENIOR ROLES

She is one of the **ADFA 24, a group of about two dozen cadets who were sexually abused at the officer training college between 1994 and 1998.**

Most of those cases were never properly investigated and some of the alleged offenders have now been promoted to senior roles in the three arms of the Defence Force.

Getting to the bottom of the ADFA 24 cases became one of the primary objectives of DART after the DLA Piper Report into defence abuse warned in 2012: "It is possible that male cadets who raped female cadets at ADFA in the late 1990s ... may now be in middle to senior management positions in the ADF."

How can they have this whole taskforce, have this whole system set up for people who had been through what I'd been through and we weren't made aware of it?

Kellie Gunnis

Under its terms of reference, the taskforce must assess whether any ADFA 24 victims or perpetrators are still serving members of the ADF.

Victims had until the end of May last year to lodge a complaint with DART.

Another ADFA 24 victim, Kellie Gunnis, had no idea the compensation scheme existed until she was approached by Four Corners.

"When [DART] was mentioned to me for the very first time, I was in complete and utter shock," Ms Gunnis said.

"How can they have this whole taskforce, have this whole system set up for people who had been through what I'd been through, and we weren't made aware of it?"

VICTIM TRIED TO TAKE OWN LIFE AFTER 'BISHING' RITUAL

Ms Gunnis was sexually harassed during her first year at ADFA in 1996, and on her 18th birthday was tied down by a group of fellow officers, doused with food and water and thrown in a wheelie bin – a ritual known as bishing.

Others have described receiving similar treatment at the academy.

Ms Gunnis then tried to take her own life.

"I was calling out for help because I wasn't coping," she said.

When the ADF sent her to Brisbane's Enoggera Barracks to be closer to her family, **an officer who was supervising her recovery sexually assaulted her.**

"He was my superior. After it happened I felt wrong. Nothing felt right," she said.

Ms Gunnis reported the incident to Queensland Police but was persuaded not to take the matter further.

Come to me and I'll do something about it.

General David Hurley

Four Corners has established that **the soldier who allegedly assaulted her rose to a senior rank and is still employed by Defence.**

Only seven of the ADFA 24 victims have made submissions to the taskforce and the Gunnis case has not been considered because no formal complaint was made to DART.

The outgoing Chief of Defence, David Hurley, says he has the names of eight serving officers who are thought to have sexually abused ADFA cadets.

General Hurley has asked anyone with information about the ADFA 24 cases to contact him directly.

"Come to me and I'll do something about it," General Hurley said.

PLAN MILLENNIUM AIMS TO IDENTIFY ALLEGED RAPISTS

The ADF has amassed thousands of documents that could be used to identify many more alleged rapists, including former ADFA cadets.

The project, known as Plan Millennium, has brought together 63,000 service police records from across the ADF.

These documents have been digitised and made available to DART.

It is unclear how DART will use this information or whether other cases uncovered by Plan Millennium will be investigated.

Victims and military insiders interviewed by Four Corners say the DART compensation scheme is inadequate and question whether perpetrators will ever be brought to justice.

"They don't even contact people for simple things like they've had the taskforce," Ms Gunnis said.

"It's just another excuse."

Do you know more? Contact investigations@abc.net.au

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