

## Trauma and poverty behind suicide of 13 Indigenous youth, inquest finds

*Coroner said it was increasingly accepted colonisation had a damaging effect on an ancient culture*

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*Some of the young Indigenous people who had taken their own lives had suffered unreported sexual abuse. Photograph: Ian Waldie/Getty Images*

A spate of suicides among young Aboriginal people in Western Australia's northernmost region was shaped by the crushing effect of intergenerational trauma and poverty, a coroner says.

Of the 13 Indigenous people who took their own lives over a three-and-a-half year period in the Kimberley, five were aged between 10 and 13.

Coroner Ros Fogliani handed down her findings from a lengthy 2017 inquest on Thursday, saying it was increasingly being accepted colonisation had a deleterious effect on an ancient and traditional culture.

The youths often lived in dysfunctional homes, and the alcohol abuse and domestic violence they were exposed to had a lasting effect.

Some had gone on to suffer domestic violence in their own relationships towards the end of their short lives.

Some had experienced sexual abuse, which was often not reported.

Several had siblings or relatives who had also taken their own lives.

The case of the 10-year-old girl was particularly distressing, with the inquest court hearing her death in the remote community of Looma came three years after her sister took her own life.

Other common themes included poor nutrition, preventable medical conditions, low school attendance and a lack of opportunities.

Most of the youths had no contact with mental health services and while none had been diagnosed with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, there was sufficient evidence that some had suffered from the condition.

“The deaths are profoundly tragic, collectively and individually,” Fogliani said.

She handed down 42 recommendations, including suggestions relating to FASD and inclusive cultural healing programs such as taking youths out on country to reconnect with their culture and family.