

# Ashley Smith jail death likely accidental: report

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[CBC News](#)

The death of Ashley Smith, a 19-year-old woman from New Brunswick who died of asphyxia in an Ontario prison cell while guards watched, was likely an accident, not a suicide, according to a report from a psychologist retained by the Correctional Service of Canada.



*Ashley Smith, 19, of Moncton, N.B., strangled herself in an Ontario prison in 2007 as guards watched. (Smith family photo)*

Smith was in solitary confinement — and on suicide watch — when she strangled herself with a piece of cloth in October 2007 at the Grand Valley Institute for Women, a federal prison in Kitchener, Ont.

Smith had been transferred 17 times in the final year of her life, and spent most days in isolation, shackled and handcuffed.

The psychologist, Dr. Margo Rivera, who was hired by the CSC as part of a national board of inquiry into the death, said Smith's use of ligatures did not constitute suicide attempts. She said the behaviours met Smith's need for stimulation in a prison environment that was lacking even basic sensation.

Rivera also said that prison staff recalled Smith as saying she didn't intend to hurt herself and that it was the job of prison staff to save her.

Smith's family and prisoner rights advocates plan to introduce parts of the psychologist's report Monday at proceedings leading up to a coroner's inquest into Smith's death. They are expected to argue the report should be made public.

The family is also suing and Rivera's report was obtained in the course of that lawsuit. The report has never been made public.

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and Ontario's Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth are also seeking to have Rivera's report fully disclosed.

Lawyer Julian Falconer put the excerpts of the prison psychologist's report into a proposed amended statement of claim in the family's lawsuit.

"The excerpts we filed in court from Dr. Rivera make absolutely clear that she ... was not counting on killing herself, that the behaviour she was exhibiting was a reality of her state of mental crisis," Falconer said.

"Now to those who do not understand, that's why it is so important that the story be told in full — that this inquest embrace more than simply the day at Grand Valley or the hours leading up to the death," he said.

In late September, an Ontario coroner delayed an inquest into Smith's death from Nov. 1 until January 2011, and agreed to hear arguments from the family on whether to widen the scope of the probe.

The family wants the inquest to look at why she was transferred so many times across Canada and denied adequate mental health care in the final year of her life.