

Coroner rejects Ashley Smith drugging tapes

Videos of forced sedations ruled irrelevant in teen's death

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Ashley Smith of Moncton, N.B., strangled herself in an Ontario prison in 2007. (Canadian Press)

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Ontario's deputy chief coroner has rejected any probing of videotapes of forced drug injections by staff at Joliette Prison in Quebec in the upcoming inquest into the death of Ashley Smith.

The troubled Moncton, N.B., teen died in October 2007 from self-strangulation after she was transferred between federal prisons 17 times in the final 11 months of her life without access to mental health services.

Coroner Dr. Bonita Porter ruled the July 2007 videos of prison staff at Joliette forcibly giving the girl needles are [not relevant](#) to Smith's death three months later in her cell at Grand Valley Institution in Kitchener, Ont.

'I am not aware of any information ... that suggests a nexus between [the forced injections in July 2007] ... and the pattern of ligature use which eventually led to [Smith's] death.' —*Dr. Bonita Porter, coroner*

Porter states in her ruling, released publicly Monday: “I am not aware of any information ... that suggests a nexus between [the forced injections in July 2007] ... and the pattern of ligature use which eventually led to her death.”

But the Smith family, along with the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies and Ontario’s Public Advocate for Children and Youth, [argued the videos document abuse](#) by prison officials and are key to understanding the girl’s downward spiral into self-destruction.

In motion materials, they claim Smith gave up hope after a series of abuses, including undergoing forced injections of tranquillizing drugs administered by staff at Joliette in July 2007.

Exclusive footage

The Fifth Estate has obtained exclusive prison footage of Ashley Smith's final months in a federal prison in Kitchener, Ont. The footage is part of a documentary called *Behind the Wall*, which can be watched online on [The Fifth Estate website](#).

One psychiatrist hired by Canada’s correctional investigator determined the injections were illegal.

Smith was 19 years old when she choked herself to death on a piece of cloth. Guards looked on, ordered by Corrections Canada managers not to intervene until she had stopped breathing.

Prison officials originally declared the death a suicide.

However, one of Corrections Canada’s own psychologists, Dr. Margo Rivera, and the Smith family say it was an accident. They argue that Smith's self-strangulation behaviour was a desperate bid for attention to provoke guards to intervene and give her some stimulation in her isolation cell.

Smith was originally jailed in New Brunswick at age 15, caught for throwing a crab apple at a postal carrier. However, bad behaviour inside juvenile detention escalated and led to her lengthy incarceration. She was often in restraints and in isolation until her ultimate transfer into the adult federal prison system.

The inquest into her death is slated to begin April 4 in Toronto.