



ABCNews

Images emerge of alleged mistreatment at Townsville's Cleveland Youth Detention Centre

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Images of alleged mistreatment at Townsville's Cleveland Youth Detention Centre have emerged, prompting calls for the royal commission into Northern Territory juvenile detention to be extended to Queensland.

One series of CCTV images obtained exclusively by 7.30 shows a boy, 17, being held face down by five adults. He was handcuffed, ankle-cuffed, stripped naked then left alone in isolation for more than an hour.

The incident was prompted by the boy refusing to have a shower.

Images from another incident caught on CCTV footage show a girl in a swimming pool being threatened by security guards with an un-muzzled dog.

The disturbing images are contained within internal Government reports written in 2013 and 2015 by the Queensland Government's own Youth Detention Inspectorate.

Amnesty International received the reports under Freedom of Information laws.

The allegations are part of a joint investigation by the ABC's 7.30 and Lateline programs into the Cleveland detention centre.

The investigation follows the Four Corners report that exposed abuse at Darwin's Don Dale detention centre and prompted a royal commission into youth detention in the Northern Territory.

"It's clear that this is a national issue, children in detention are being mistreated and they are predominantly Indigenous children," Roxanne Moore, Amnesty's Indigenous rights campaigner, said.

"Amnesty International has documented the use of dogs to instil fear and intimidation into prisoners as a method of torture around the world. It is completely unacceptable that this is being used on children.

"Successive Queensland governments have continued to fail children and predominantly Indigenous children to allow these human rights abuses to continue."

'This type of practice is humiliating'

The incident involving the boy occurred in January, 2013. He had been placed on high suicide alert and had an extra youth worker allocated to support him after attempting suicide five days earlier.

Guard 'spat in inmate's food'



Russell Johnston, 17, says he was the victim of regular violent "takedowns", as well as mental abuse, while inside the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre.

The boy was asked to go to his room and have a shower and refused. A staff member radioed for assistance from other staff, and at least 14 staff members responded.

The report said the boy, who was sitting on a table with his arms folded, did not appear to be abusive or physically threatening, but there was no audio on the CCTV recording.

Staff used physical force to move the boy from the table to the floor, the report said. He was held face down, his hands placed in handcuffs behind his back and his feet in ankle cuffs.

The report said policy states "ankle cuffs are to be used only during a medical emergency leave of absence (ie escort outside of the centre) where handcuffs cannot be applied".

The after-hours on-call manager said the boy "was extremely aggressive". The manager advised that staff should "place him in separation, remove his clothes and leave him with his SR [tear resistant] shorts."



PHOTO: When the boy refused to have a shower a staff member radioed for assistance and at least 14 staff members responded.

The video footage shows that while being restrained a "centre-issued Hoffman Rescue knife" was used to cut his T-shirt, shorts and underpants off, leaving him naked on the floor. The report said his clothing was removed as it was considered there was a risk he might harm himself with it.

He was left naked for more than an hour in isolation.

"This type of practice is humiliating and has the potential to cause emotional, psychological as well as physical harm to the young person," the Government report said.



PHOTO: The boy is placed in a separation cell. Moments later his clothes are removed.

The Queensland inspectorate found the force applied to the 17-year-old was a potential breach of the law and could have caused psychological harm to a teenager who was already at high risk of suicide.

It demanded Cleveland conduct an investigation of the incident, but that review never happened because the detention centre said it did not have enough staff to conduct it.

'It's disgusting'

Shayleen Solomon, who knows the boy well, said, "No kid deserves to be treated like that at all, it's disgusting."

She worked at Cleveland Youth Detention Centre and claims she witnessed the same young person being treated with excessive force a year earlier in 2012.

"They had him face down on the ground, trying to put handcuffs on him. You could not move for men. I was kneeling on floor in front of him with my hands underneath his forehead, because he was headbutting the ground, asking them to stop because they were hurting him, and they didn't stop," she said.

"Everybody knew that he was very, very ... he suffered a lot of mental illness. The child came to the detention centre with a lot of trauma, and obviously he was trying to hurt himself as way of speaking out."

Dog used to threaten children

A 2015 Youth Detention Inspectorate report raised major concerns about the use of private security and guard dogs.

Three Aboriginal girls ran away from staff and jumped into a swimming pool when they were not meant to. One girl refused to get out of the pool.



PHOTO: A security dog barks at girls in the swimming pool.

Two private security guards attended the pool with an un-muzzled dog on a long leash. When she wanted to leave the swimming pool, the dog handler released a sufficient length of leash to allow the dog to closely approach the girl "in what would be perceived an aggressive manner and stopped her from withdrawing from the swimming pool", the report said.

At least eight staff were around the pool. The dog was up on its hind legs and barking aggressively at the young girl.



PHOTO: The girl is confronted by the unmuzzled dog.

"This type of response is concerning as the security officers have no legal authority to physically touch or restrain a young person who is in the legal custody of the department," the report said.

"There is also a real risk that such security strategies have an adverse effect on staff efforts to build rapport with the children."

A spokesperson for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General told 7.30 that "private security dogs were used initially while new buildings were being erected at the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre".

"The contract with the security provider was to maintain security around the building site but not to interact with young people," the spokesperson said.

"When centre management became aware that private security dogs had been used in an incident relating to young people in a pool in August 2015, a direction was issued by centre management that they were no longer to use the security dogs."

'Australians will be horrified'

Nurse Professor Gracelyn Smallwood said people would be horrified by the images.

She used to work at Cleveland and is calling for Queensland to be added to the Royal Commission into Youth Detention in the Northern Territory.



PHOTO: Professor Gracelyn Smallwood looks at the images of alleged mistreatment of juvenile offenders.

"It's just like normal behaviour for this brutal treatment ... Australians were horrified at Don Dale, they will be doubly horrified at some of the images that 7.30 report showed me today," she said.

Asked if she thinks Queensland should to be added to the Royal Commission, Ms Smallwood said "without a doubt".

"If you would have asked me this question last week I would have said no.

"This has been a mass conspiracy of silence and people at the top who have just shelved these reports need to be dealt with. They need to be taken to task and sacked."

Queensland Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath said in a statement: "All the allegations that have been put to the department over a number of years have been thoroughly investigated and referred to police or other investigative bodies where appropriate.

"Incidents have been detailed in reports, and recommendations have been made for reform and been put into action.

"When problems have been identified over the years, those problems have been addressed through changes to policies and procedures.

"This has also seen dismissal of staff where inappropriate behaviour was identified."