Egypt 'torturing hundreds of children in mass crackdown'

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<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/03/23/egypt-torturing-hundreds-children-mass-crackdown/>

Egyptian security forces have detained and tortured hundreds of children in recent years, including electrocuting them on their tongues and genitals and making them stand on beds of nails, according to a new report.

[An investigation by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Belady](https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/03/23/no-one-cared-he-was-child/egyptian-security-forces-abuse-children-detention), an Egyptian children's charity, found that children as young as 12 were being regularly swept up in raids by Egyptian authorities and abused while in detention.

One boy, named only as Hamza, was arrested in 2016 for taking part in a protest as a 14-year-old.

"During the first two days of his interrogation, officers used electric shocks on his genitals, head, and tongue. On the third day he was suspended by his arms, which dislocated both his shoulders," a relative said.

He spent his 15th birthday with nails placed under his heels, forcing him to stand painfully on the tips of his toes to keep his weight from coming down on the spikes, according to the report.

The teenager was not allowed access to a lawyer until six weeks after his arrest and he has since been sentenced to 10 years in prison. His family is allowed to visit once a week for five minutes, HRW said.

The human rights group called on the US and European states to pressure Egypt into ending its torture policies.

"Children are describing being waterboarded and electrocuted on their tongues and genitals, and yet Egypt’s security forces are facing no consequences,” said Bill Van Esveld, associate children’s rights director at HRW.

"Governments that want to end these horrors should end support to Egyptian security services and condition any future agreements on there being real reforms.”"

Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Egypt’s president, came to power in a 2013 military coup and his since presided over a broad crackdown on any [dissent in the Arab world’s most populous country](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/09/21/egypts-hardline-president-el-sissi-faces-calls-quit-rare-protests/). Thousands of people have been arrested and prosecuted in mass trials. His forces killed around a thousand protesters in one day in August 2013.

The Egyptian embassy in London did not respond to request's for comment about the HRW report.

The report says the arrests of children are made by the police and the military but especially by the National Security Agency, an intelligence unit responsible for enforcing many of Mr Sisi’s most repressive policies.

One boy, Abdullah, was taken from his mother’s home in North Sinai when he was 12. Egypt has mounted a particularly brutal crackdown in the Sinai as it fights against a jihadist insurgency linked to the Islamic State.

Abdullah said he was beaten, electrocuted, and waterboarded because his brother had been a member of a jihadist group. His father was also arrested and tortured in front of his young son.

The boy was moved between prisons and police stations in North Sinai and Cairo for several months in 2018 before finally disappearing in January 2019. He has not been seen since and relatives fear he may have been quietly killed by authorities.

The report documents abuses against 20 children who were all between 12 and 17 when they were arrested. Seven of the children said they were tortured using electricity and a total of 15 said they faced some sort of physical abuse while in detention.

One boy, who was 16 when he was arrested, told a relative he was worried he might "never marry or be able to have children" because his genitals were so severely damaged by Egyptian security officials.

"The harrowing accounts of these children and their families reveal how Egypt’s machinery of repression has subjected children to grave abuses," said Aya Hijazi, co-director of Belady. "Egyptian authorities act as though they are above all laws when it comes to children in detention."

The report alleges that prosecutors helped cover up the abuse by falsifying records of when the children were arrested, making it appear that they had been in detention for far less time than they had.