

# UK: Inquest rules Rashan Charles died “accidentally” following attack by Metropolitan Police

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An inquest at St. Pancras Coroner’s Court in London into the death of 20-year-old Rashan Charles—who was killed last year following his violent restraint by a police officer—has ruled his death to be an “accident.”

Just like many previous inquests into police killings in the UK and around the world, this verdict exposes it as yet another cover-up of police brutality.

Rashan Charles, father to a young daughter, died on July 22 last year in Hackney, East London, after police stopped a car in which he was a passenger. After Charles exited the car, police chased the young man into a nearby local convenience store. CCTV footage of the incident, widely shared on social media, showed one of the officers tackling Charles from behind and throwing him to the ground.

The officer continued to hold him in a headlock while rotating his body on the floor, still gripping Charles tightly around the neck. Another man is seen to intervene and pinned Charles’ legs to the ground with his own legs. While this is taking place, the uniformed police officer handcuffed Charles’ arms behind his back; the officer can then be seen elbowing him in the head, with Charles offering no resistance.

At one point in the footage, Charles is seen to grasp towards his face, presumably to place something in his mouth. According to medical expert Dr. Jasmeet Soar, who testified at the inquest, it was at this point that purposeful movement from Charles stopped as he possibly stopped breathing or started choking.

Following the incident, paramedics were called and Charles was taken to Royal London Hospital. Paramedics removed a “golf ball-sized” package from his throat, which was later found to contain a mixture of paracetamol and caffeine. He was confirmed dead around an hour later, at 2:55 a.m.

However, the inquest, which concluded on June 20, found that this brutal and unnecessary assault on Charles, who was unarmed and unknown to the police, was a “justified use of

force” and that his tragic death was nothing more than an “accident.”

Reading the jury’s conclusions, senior coroner Mary Hassell said, “Rashan’s death was an accident, which occurred by virtue of deliberate human actions on the part of Rashan, the police officer who chased him and a civilian bystander, which unexpectedly and inadvertently led to the death of Rashan.”

The inquest was engineered to be a whitewash from the beginning. After Charles’ death, the officer responsible for restraining him was not even suspended from duty, merely being put on “restricted duties”, meaning he would be consigned to office work and have no direct contact with members of the public.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) also refused to charge the police officer with any criminal charges, such as manslaughter. After six months’ deliberation, the CPS rejected even the minor charge of common assault, under the spurious pretext, “It would not be possible to prove to the required standard (so that the magistrates were sure) that the force used by the officer on Rashan was unlawful.”

Hassell specifically told the jury to consider whether Charles’ death was an accident, refusing to leave open the option for the jury to come to a more critical verdict, such as neglect or unlawful killing. Declaring that she did not believe a “reasonable jury could see this,” [that Charles’ death could be anything more than an accident] Hassell also ordered the jury not to use words such as “careless,” “negligence,” “foolish” or “reckless.”

Terms such as “failure,” “inadequate” or “inappropriate” could be used, she said, but only if the jury were able to demonstrate a direct causal link between any failures and the subsequent death, or how any failures could have altered the course of events.

While acknowledging multiple failings in the police restraint of Charles—including the officer’s failure to follow police protocol when someone is not breathing and is

suspected of swallowing drugs—and his failure to call an ambulance using the override button on his police radio, the jury concluded, extraordinarily, that none of these failings contributed to the death of Charles.

The family of Charles condemned the organisation and outcome of the inquest, rightly labelling it a “farce.” Rod Charles, the victim’s great uncle, told the Press Association the jury had been “shackled” by the coroner, who had eliminated any “pejorative” options. In a statement, Charles’ family declared that the inquest “was flawed from the outset.”

The statement continues, “We were left out of key decisions, evidence was excluded, police-worn video [was] missing and time frames manipulated. This felt to be a predetermined process by the IOPC [Independent Office for Police Conduct, formerly the Independent Police Complaints Commission], the Metropolitan Police and the CPS.”

The statement is referring to the fact that two pieces of police bodycam footage are missing. The video footage from the bodycam of the officer standing guard outside the convenience store where Charles was arrested mysteriously disappeared in the wake of Rashan’s death. Apparently, this footage was “accidentally” deleted by the officer. However, this was dismissed by the IOPC, which claimed that the footage was not significant as evidence, as the officer in question was outside the shop at the time.

The other missing video clip was from the bodycam of the officer who restrained Charles, as he apparently failed to activate it until after he had thrown Charles to the floor.

Both police officers involved in Charles’ arrest, as well as both members of the public who witnessed it, were granted anonymity by the coroner, with the officer who restrained Charles known only as BX47.

Further evidence of a lack of impartiality demonstrates that the inquest verdict was effectively a foregone conclusion. Two supposedly “independent” expert witnesses, Ian Read and Martin Graves, were in fact former police officers, with one continuing to work for the Met. Charles’ family condemned the inclusion of these, stating that their evidence was “neither objective, independent or impartial” and declaring that they “still have an umbilical cord to the Met.”

At the inquest, the coroner also allowed police lawyers to introduce evidence about Charles’ teenage convictions for possession of drugs such as cannabis, even though, on the night in question, BX47 and his colleagues had no knowledge or intelligence on Charles or the other men in the vehicle.

These petty teenage convictions had no bearing on the case, merely being introduced to smear Rashan Charles’ name and paint him as a criminal—thereby attempting to make the police officer’s actions appear justified. In an

article on the website of the charity INQUEST, which monitors UK police killings, its director, Deborah Coles, stated:

“It is difficult to reconcile the harrowing footage of Rashan’s death, and the outcome of this inquest. The Coroner and lawyers representing the police were keen to highlight the context of gangs, drugs and violence in Hackney, in order to deflect attention away from the conduct of the police. Yet Rashan was completely unknown to these officers. It is clear the officer lost sight of Rashan’s safety and humanity, and of the well-known dangers of restraint.

“This death occurred in the context of a systemic pattern of disproportionate use of force against young black men, along with over policing and criminalisation. This process has not delivered the accountability that this family and the public need.”

Figures compiled by INQUEST demonstrate that regardless of the specific details of the case, officers involved in police killings are almost never held accountable. Police officers are often put on administrative leave and an inquest held, but the overwhelming majority are not charged with any crime. Those who do get charged are almost never convicted.

In fact, since 1990, when INQUEST began its records, not a single successful manslaughter or murder charge has been pressed against the police in the UK, despite 1,660 people having their lives cut short as a result of police action. Furthermore, only 10 verdicts of “unlawful killing” were recorded in the same period, and none since 2013.

What is clear from these figures and from the inquest into the death of Rashan Charles, is that the police, whether in the UK, the United States or elsewhere in the world, are free to kill, maim and abuse with complete impunity.



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