

British police Taser 11-year-old boy and 93-year-old man with dementia

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A series of harrowing episodes have shone light on the routine use of tasers by Britain's police, including against the aged and children.

In March an 11-year-old boy was Tasered by a 50,000-volt stun gun, even though he was only holding a butter knife. Police were called to reports of a disturbance at the Haven Craig Tara Caravan Park near Ayr, Scotland. Last week video footage obtained by the *Scottish Sun* newspaper of the tasing went viral. In it the boy can be heard saying “stay back” before the taser is discharged by a police officer, with the child collapsing to the ground.

The unnamed child's mother has received no apology from Police Scotland and is in contact with a lawyer. Speaking to *MailOnline*, she said the boy was holding a butter knife when he was tasered, adding, “My son didn't speak for about two weeks because he was so traumatised...

“He was terrified and was no danger to them at all. Why on earth did they Taser him? You can see in our video how frightened he was... I don't understand why there were so many of them surrounding him”.

The boy is reported to have global developmental delay, meaning it has taken him longer to reach certain developmental milestones. This can include learning new things or interacting with others socially and emotionally.

Describing how her son came to be Tasered, the mother said, “He had kicked off because his cousin got a Burger King and he couldn't get one because it was closed by then. And then he ran off.

“I had to phone the police because he was somewhere he doesn't know and I couldn't find him myself and I was panicking—he wouldn't feel confident to ask someone to help him find his way back.

“When the police arrived and as they were

approaching, he grabbed a butter knife and just ran with it.

“The police all came at him with their Tasers. It was like something out of a film or a video game.”

In January last year a Metropolitan Police officer tasered a 10-year-old girl after reports that she was threatening a family with garden shears and a hammer. Four day after the event the Metropolitan carried out a review of the case and the officer was cleared of any wrongdoing. In February a complaint was received and passed on to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) who have said that the officer in question should face a gross misconduct hearing. The girl was the youngest person in the UK to have been Tasered by police.

The deployment of a Taser on an 11-year-old child with learning difficulties comes on top of incidents where the use of a Taser led to a person being killed.

Two Metropolitan Police officers have been placed under criminal investigation following an event in April this year where a man was shot with a taser and then fell to his death from a balcony.

The IOPC commented, “Evidence at this stage indicates that an officer discharged their Taser, shortly before the man fell from the balcony railing at around 3.20 a.m. The man fell five floors to the ground and was transported to hospital with critical injuries. He sadly later died that day”.

Prior to the incident a neighbour, Mohamed Bah, reported seeing and hearing the man shouting about wanting to jump from the balcony where they lived. He had been shouting “for the whole day. I came three or four times in and out of the house. He was up there the whole day, until the night. There was a banging on the door. I don't know if it was the police or him, but he was saying ‘if you come closer, I am going to jump’.”

Deborah Coles, the director of the Inquest human rights charity, said, “Once again we see the fatal consequences of the police being first responders to people in mental health crisis and the use of force against black men. It is clear from previous deaths that the use of Tasers and force is prioritised over the care and compassion needed.”

Police were investigated for manslaughter last year after Donald Burgess, a 93-year-old man with one leg and suffering with dementia, died following police violence, culminating in the deployment of a Taser at a care home in St Leotards-on-Sea, Sussex.

Burgess had been threatening staff with a knife when police were called. One of the officers who arrived on the scene had deployed an incapacitating spray and a baton before another officer fired a Taser. Burgess was handcuffed and taken to hospital where he later died on July 13.

Coles said of the death, “It’s almost unconscionable to think of a highly vulnerable old man with dementia in a care home being subjected to such a use of force at the hands of the police.”

The increased use of Tasers against the elderly is not confined to the UK. Clare Nowland, a frail 95-year-old woman suffering with dementia and living in a care home in Cooma, New South Wales, Australia was recently hospitalised following the deployment of a Taser by police officers. Nowland, weighing just 43kg (95 pounds) had been walking towards the officers at a slow pace using a walking frame, while holding a steak knife. The police deemed this a threat so grave it required the most serious use of force, other than drawing firearms.

Nowland fell back, hitting her head, and leaving her with critical injuries. She was sent to Cooma hospital, with family at her side slipping in and out of consciousness. The police’s brutal response: “She had a walking frame. But she had a knife.”

In an incident in east London earlier this year, a man was Tasered and his two dogs shot dead at the scene. Footage posted on social media showed Louie Turnbull with his two dogs on a short lead, being pursued by several police officers alongside a canal next to a residential housing block. At that stage no-one had been hurt or harmed by the man or his dogs. The situation escalated leading to the officers using the Taser and shooting dead his two dogs.

A witness *Mirror* speaking *Online* recorded the incident said, “It didn’t seem proportionate. It is beyond belief. I’ve never seen anything like that....”

“Some of the other neighbours were shouting ‘it’s disgusting and ‘we’re not in America’.”

Last year then Home Secretary Priti Patel announced that the use of Tasers would be extended to volunteer police officers across just over 8,000 officers in England and Wales. It meant that 25,000 out of 123,000 cops—one in five—are now armed. Amnesty International described the move as “a dangerous expansion.”

An August 2021 *Sky News* investigation that included freedom of information requests to police forces across England revealed other incidents where Tasers had been used on minors and elderly people.

Gloucestershire police said it had used a Taser on a 10-year-old boy after he approached officers with a large knife. Humberside police used a Taser on an 83-year-old man who had barricaded himself in a kitchen armed with weapons and was throwing items at officers. West Yorkshire Police Tasered a 79-year-old man armed with a knife, even after he threatened to take his own life. The same force Tasered a 14-year-old boy after he was found inside a property.

Louise King, director of the Children's Rights Alliance for England told *Sky News* that Tasers “inflict intolerable pain.”

Home Office data from 2020/21 showed that police drew a Taser on those perceived to be under 18 a staggering 2,591 times, including discharging the Taser 123 times.



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