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## 24 Hours in Police Custody, review: unmissable knife crime episode was an urgent, unnervingly close look at street violence



A stabbing in Luton was captured on CCTV CREDIT: CHANNEL 4

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What viewer didn't feel a visceral sense of fear while watching the latest episode of **24 Hours in Police Custody**? Channel 4's long-running police documentary series gave a close-up view of two violent incidents in Luton, and laid bare the grim truth about the wave of knife attacks that has engulfed Britain.

This is a country where children routinely walk around with weapons; where there is “no fear of stabbing people in broad daylight”; where teenagers die because they look at someone the wrong way – “that’s all it takes, one little look”; where attackers sit in police interview rooms being advised by their solicitors to say “no comment” to every question asked; where saying anything, even if you are the victim, makes you a snitch. This is a dangerous country to be young, where justice is hard to come by.

**24 Hours in Police Custody** took the viewer into the presence of death. As a companion piece to Duwayne Brooks's emotionally charged BBC documentary *Stabbed*, which focused to a great extent on the families of victims, it was stark and shocking. Both featured the murder of 18-year-old Azaan Kaleem: targeted by a group of four youths he'd never met in March last year, when they got out of a BMW and began immediately to stab him. The programme showed him being attacked, bringing us beside him in the street as paramedics fought to save his life and his desperate mother tried to get to him. It took us into the hospital where he died.

Azaan's girlfriend Shannon told a police officer that he, too, had been carrying a knife, which he had moved his coat aside to reveal in a brief confrontation with another youth minutes earlier. Shannon said that Azaan hadn't felt safe after being badly beaten up the year before; CCTV footage showed he hadn't even tried to draw the weapon in self-defence during the attack. It proved, whatever people believe about knife crime, that nice, ordinary kids, who are not in gangs, carry knives and get stabbed, too.



DS Tom Hamm CREDIT: CHANNEL 4

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Azaan's mother Roseann Taylor's pain was as visceral as the images of blades being thrust into flesh. She described seeing all her hopes and dreams for her son wiped away as if by a blackboard rubber, at the moment when his heart stopped. This agony, it was clear, will visit other mothers, other girlfriends, other friends.

The difference between Azaan's death and the other attack shown – which CCTV footage showed to have equally vicious intent, with copious blood spilt, but no fatalities – was perhaps only in the unwillingness of any of the participants, all interviewed, to give any information. One of the youths involved in the attack on Azaan explained what happened. It led to three of them being convicted of murder.

24 Hours in Police Custody has been around for nearly five years now. It's never less than fascinating, but this was an episode that felt urgent and important. The sight of frustrated, demoralised officers dealing with something that "we can't arrest our way out of" showed that no one in the police force thinks this is about to get better soon. Our politicians need to come up with a strategy, and fast.