



# Knife and Offensive Weapon Sentencing Statistics, England and Wales - 2018

## Main points

**The highest number of knife and offensive weapon offences since 2009 were formally dealt with by the Criminal Justice System (CJS)**

↑ In 2018 21,484 knife and offensive weapon offences were formally dealt with by the CJS. This is the highest number of offences dealt with since 2009 (25,103).

**Offenders are now more likely to receive an immediate custodial sentence for a knife and offensive weapon offence.**

↑ In 2018 37% of knife and offensive weapon offences ended in an immediate custodial sentence compared with 20% in 2008. The average length of the custodial sentences received also increased over the same period, from 5.3 months to 8.1 months.

**For just under three quarters (72%) of offenders this was their first knife or offensive weapon possession offence**

↓ The proportion of offenders for whom this is their first knife or offensive weapon possession offence has been decreasing and is now at its lowest level since the series began in 2008 (80%).

**The average custodial sentence received by offenders sentenced under section 28 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 rose from 7.1 months in 2016, the first full year after the legislation was introduced, to 7.8 months in 2018.**

↑ The increase was seen for both adults and 16 and 17 year olds. The average custodial sentence received by adults increased from 7.2 months in 2016 to 7.8 months in 2018. While the average custodial sentence received by 16 and 17 year olds increased from 5.8 months in 2016 to 8.0 months in 2018.

This publication presents key statistics describing the trends in the number of offenders receiving cautions and convictions for possession of a knife or offensive weapon offence in England and Wales. This also includes offences involving threatening with one of these types of weapons. It should be noted that figures for the latest year have been estimated and should be treated as provisional, please refer to the technical guide for further details.

For any feedback related to the content of this publication, please let us know at [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

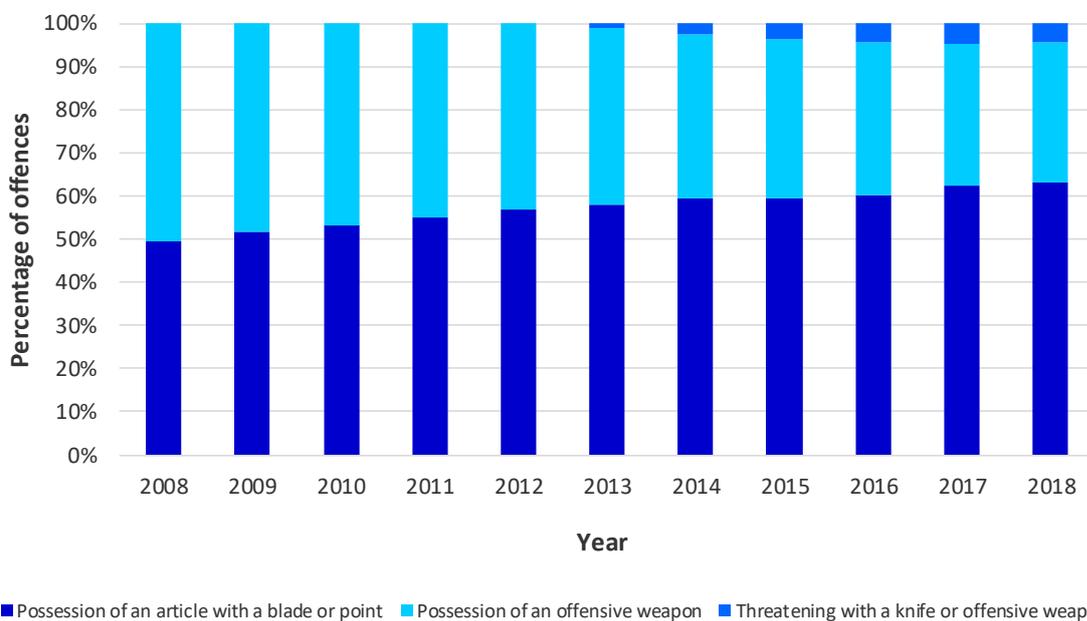
# 1. Knife and offensive weapon offences overview

## The highest number of knife and offensive weapon offences since 2009 were formally dealt with by the Criminal Justice System (CJS)

In 2018 21,484 knife and offensive weapon offences were formally dealt with by the CJS. This is the highest number of offences dealt with since 2009 (25,103).

Recent police recorded crime figures published by the ONS<sup>1</sup> also showed an increase in the number of knife and offensive weapon offences recorded. In the year ending March 2013 15,699 offences were recorded compared with 34,138 recorded in the year ending September 2018. Furthermore, information published by the Home Office on “Crime outcomes in England and Wales” show that around 55% of these offences resulted in a charge or police caution in the year ending March 2018.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1: Knife and offensive weapon offences by offence type, England and Wales, annually from 2008 (Source: Table 1a)**



Just under two thirds (63%) of all knife and offensive weapon offences are now possession of an article with a blade or point offences, compared with just half (50%) in 2008.

The proportion of offences involving the possession of an article with a blade or point or the possession of an offensive weapon committed by an adult has remained at around 80% since 2008. However, since 2013 there has been a 8 percentage point increase in the proportion of offenders convicted or cautioned for a threatening with a knife or offensive weapon offence who were adults; increasing from 75% in 2013 to 83% in 2018.

1

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2018>

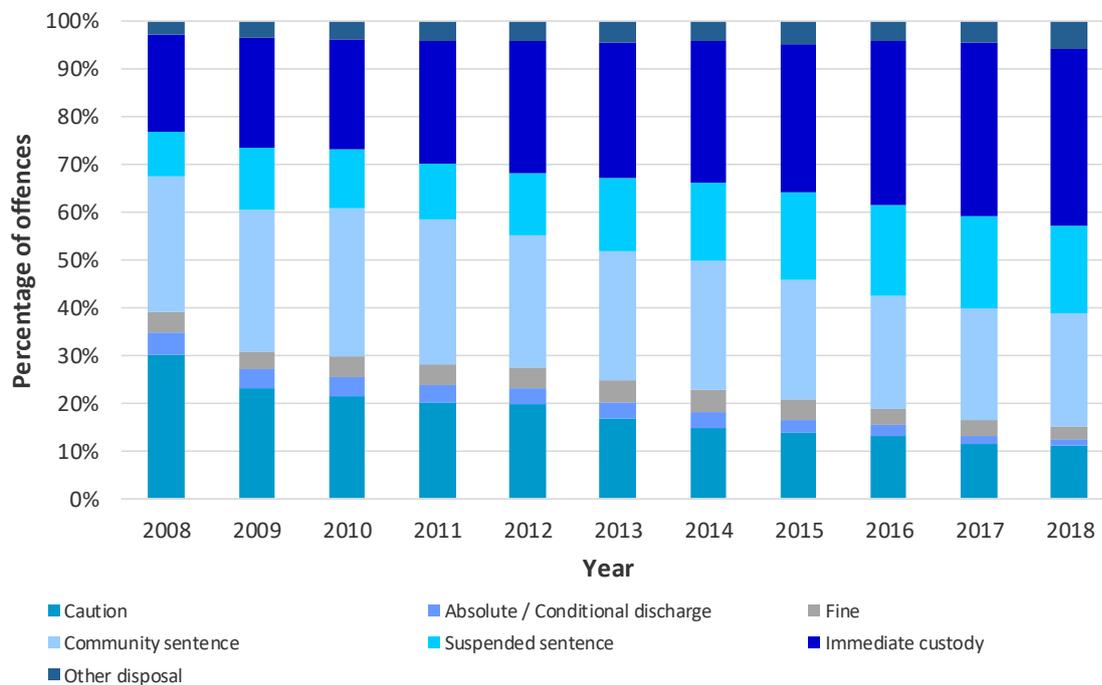
2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2017-to-2018>

## 2. Sentencing

### Offenders are now more likely to receive an immediate custodial sentence for a knife and offensive weapon offence.

In 2018 37% of knife and offensive weapon offences ended in an immediate custodial sentence compared with 20% in 2008. The average length of the custodial sentences received also increased over the same period, from 5.3 months to 8.1 months.

**Figure 2: Knife and offensive weapon offences by disposal type, England and Wales, annually from 2008 (Source: Table 1)**



Custodial sentences are now at the highest level since the series began. In 2018 over a third (37% or 7,943 offences) of all knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in immediate custody compared with just 5,734 offences or 20% in 2008.

However, the proportion of offences resulting in a caution is at the lowest level it has ever been since the series began – 30% (8,523) of offences resulted in a caution during 2008, falling to just 11% (2,410) in 2018.

The average length of immediate custodial sentences received also increased over the period, from 5.3 months in 2008 to 8.1 months in 2018. This is the highest average custodial sentence length since the series began.

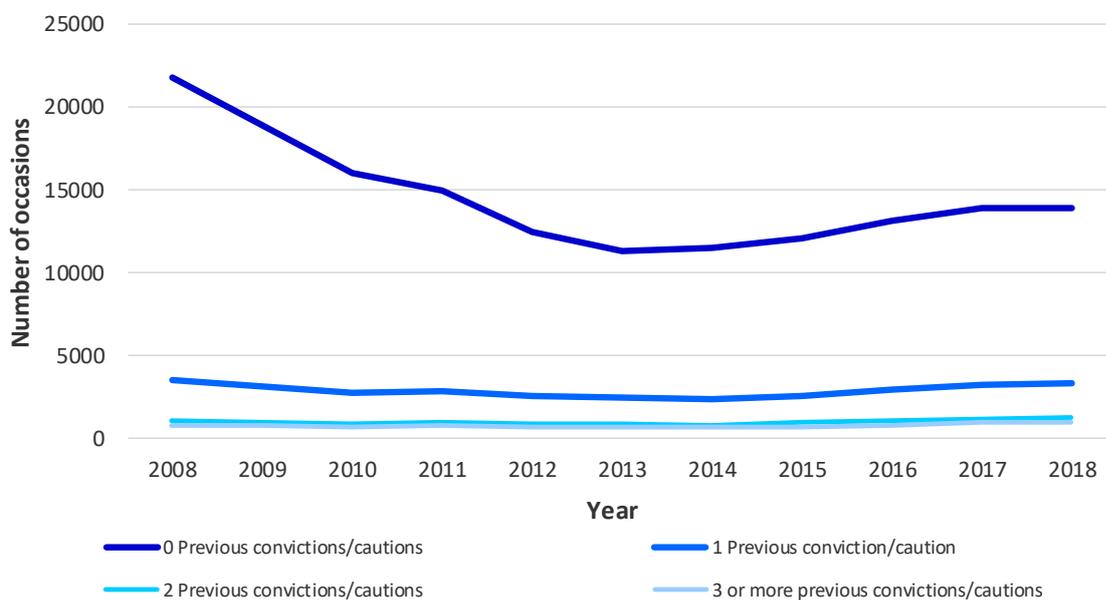
The increase in average custodial length was seen in all age groups and offence types but particularly for adults, for whom it increased from 5.2 months in 2008 to 8.1 months in 2018, and for possession of blade or point offences, where it increased from 4.5 months in 2008 to 7.4 months in 2018.

### 3. Offending History

#### For just under three quarters (72%) of offenders this was their first possession of a knife or offensive weapon offence

The proportion of offenders for whom this is their first possession of knife or offensive weapon offence has been decreasing and is now at its lowest level since the series began in 2008 (80%).

**Figure 3: Number of previous cautions or convictions for the possession of a knife or offensive weapon offence for offenders cautioned or convicted for a knife or offensive weapon offence, England and Wales, annually from 2008 (Source: Interactive Pivot Table Tool)**



Whilst, as mentioned above, the proportion of first time offenders for this offence type has fallen there has been an increase in the number of offenders dealt with for their first knife and offensive weapons offence in each of the last 5 years – increasing from 11,341 occasions in 2013 to 13,903 occasions in 2018. This follows a 48% decrease in similar offenders dealt with between 2008 and 2013 (from 21,812 occasions to 11,341).

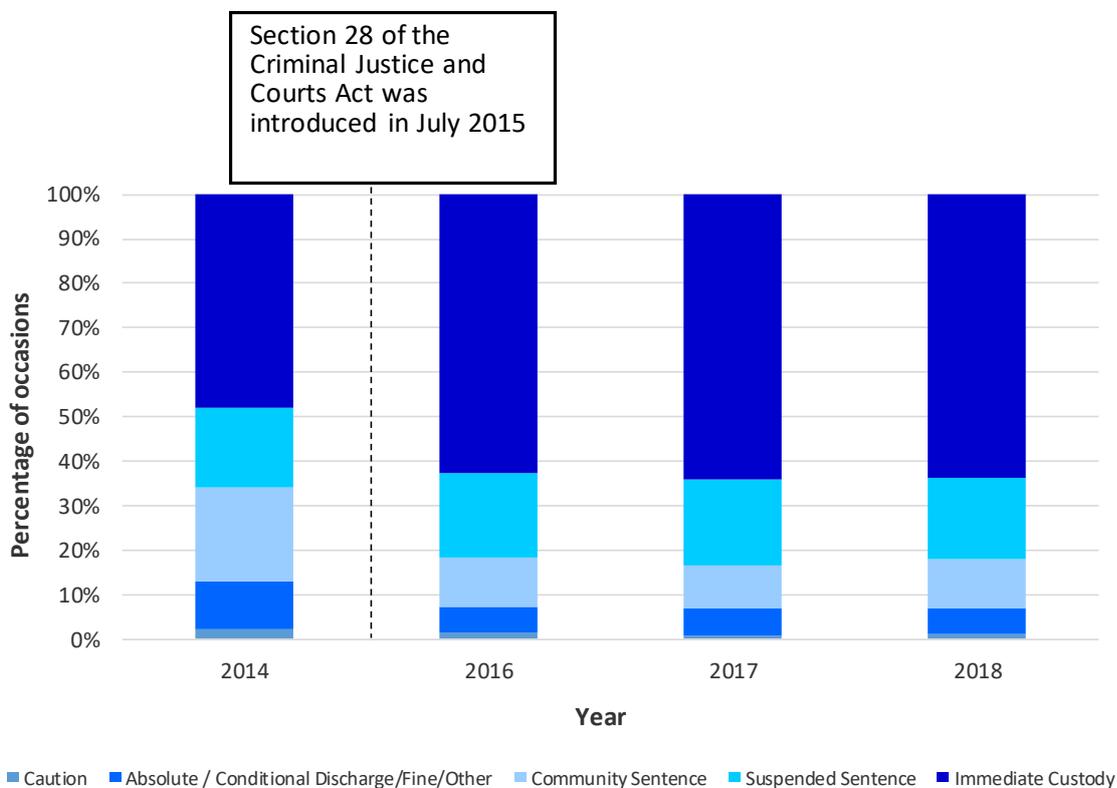
Since 2014 both the number and proportion of offenders dealt with who had one or more previous knife and offensive weapons offences increased year on year, rising from 25% or 3,755 occasions in 2014 to 28% or 5,497 occasions in 2018.

## 4. Sentencing under section 28 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act (CJCA) 2015<sup>3</sup>

The average custodial sentence received by offenders sentenced under section 28 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 rose from 7.1 months in 2016, the first full year after the legislation was introduced, to 7.8 months in 2018.

The increase was seen for both adults and 16 and 17 year olds. The average custodial sentence received by adults increased from 7.2 months in 2016 to 7.8 months in 2018, while the average custodial sentence received by 16 and 17 year olds increased from 5.8 months in 2016 to 8.0 months in 2018.

**Figure 4: Knife and offensive weapons possession sentencing and cautioning occasions, by disposal type, 2014, 2017 and 2018 for repeat offenders (Source: Interactive Pivot Table Tool and Table 7)<sup>4</sup>**



Following the commencement of section 28 of the CJCA 2015, a court must impose a minimum custodial sentence<sup>5</sup> on an offender who has been convicted of a second or subsequent offence involving possession of a knife or offensive weapon. The court must impose the minimum sentence unless it would not be in the interest of justice to do so.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/2/part/1/crossheading/repeat-offences-involving-offensive-weapons-etc>

<sup>4</sup> Figures for 2014 have been taken from the Interactive Pivot Table tool while the figures for 2017 and 2018 have been taken from Table 7.

<sup>5</sup> At least 6 months for adults and at least 4 months for juveniles aged 16 or 17.

In 2014, prior to the introduction of this legislation, around half (48%) of knife and offensive weapons possession offenders with at least one previous knife and offensive weapons offence received an immediate custodial sentence. In 2018 around two thirds (64%) of offenders sentenced under section 28 of the CJCA 2015 received an immediate custodial sentence. Overall 82% of offenders sentenced under section 28 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 in 2018 received some form of custodial sentence compared to 66% of offenders with at least one previous knife and offensive weapons offence in 2014.

## Further information

The data presented in this publication are provisional. Figures provided for more recent quarters are subject to change in future publications as ongoing cases pass through the Criminal Justice System.

A technical guide providing further information on how the data is collected and processed, as well as information on the revisions policy and legislation relevant to knife and offensive weapon sentencing can be found at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/knife-possession-sentencing-quarterly>

## Accompanying files

As well as this bulletin, the following products are published as part of this release:

- ODS format tables containing data on knife or offensive weapon offences up to 2018
- An interactive table tool to look at previous offences involving possession of a blade, point or offensive weapon. The tool provides further breakdowns by gender, police identified ethnicity and prosecuting police force area.
- A Sankey diagram looking at outcomes of those offenders sentenced for knife or offensive weapon offences. The diagram provides further breakdowns by gender and offence type.

## Official Statistics status

Official statistics are produced under the remit of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are produced impartially and are free from political influence. More information can be found on the UK Statistics Authority website, accessible via the link below.

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/code-of-practice/>

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/knife-possession-sentencing-quarterly>

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