



Knife and Offensive Weapon Sentencing Statistics, England and Wales – Year ending June 2019

Main points

The highest number of knife and offensive weapon offences since 2010 were formally dealt with by the Criminal Justice System (CJS) 

In the year ending June 2019 over 22,000 knife and offensive weapon offences were formally dealt with by the CJS. This is driven by possession of an article with a blade or point offences.

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

In the year ending June 2019 38% of knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in an immediate custodial sentence compared with 23% in the year ending June 2009.

The average length of the custodial sentences received also increased over the same period, from 5.9 months to 8.1 months.

For just under three quarters (71%) 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 the year ending June 2009 (80%).

The average custodial sentence received by offenders sentenced under section 28 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 was 7.9 months in the year ending June 2019. 

This has risen from the first full year after the legislation was introduced, the year ending June 2017, where it was 7.1 months.

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.

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1. Knife and offensive weapon offences overview

The highest number of knife and offensive weapon offences since the year ending June 2010 were formally dealt with by the Criminal Justice System (CJS)

In the year ending June 2019 22,306 knife and offensive weapon offences were formally dealt with by the CJS. This is a 5% increase on the same period the previous year and is the highest number of offences dealt with since the year ending June 2010 (22,689).

Recent police recorded crime figures published by the ONS¹ 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 37,729 in the year ending March 2019. Furthermore, information published by the Home Office on “Crime outcomes in England and Wales” show that 51% of these offences resulted in a charge or police caution in the year ending March 2019.²

Figure 1: Knife and offensive weapon offences by offence type, England and Wales, annually from year ending June 2009 (Source: Table 1a)

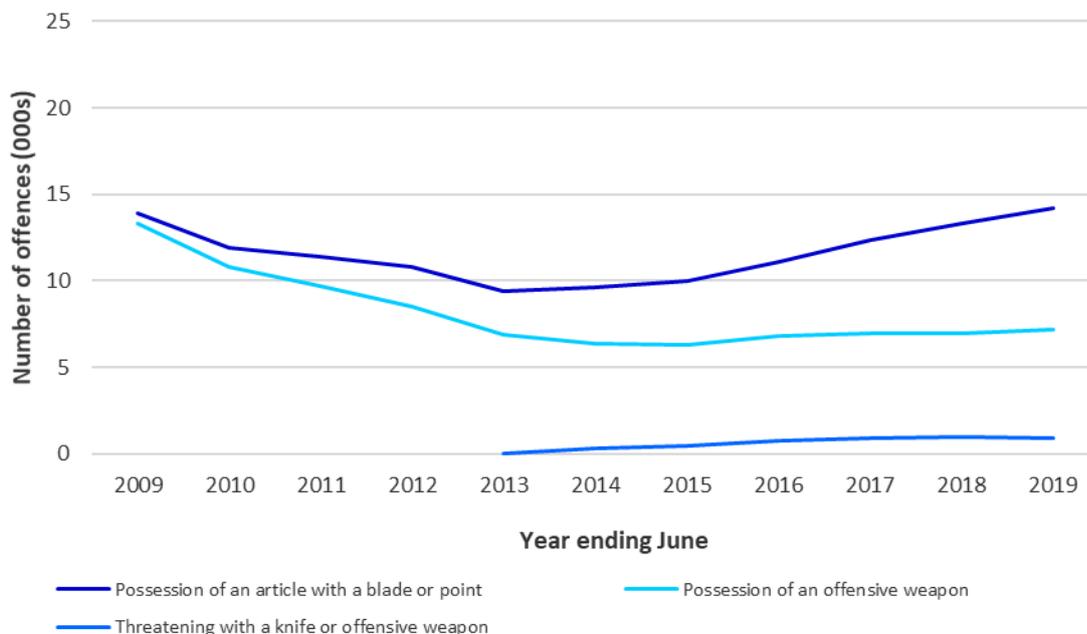


Figure 1 shows that this increase is driven by possession of an article with a blade or point offences. These offences have now increased to over 14,000 offences, the highest since the series began.

The number of adult offenders convicted or cautioned for a knife or offensive weapon offence has increased by 6% in the last year and the number of juveniles convicted or cautioned has remained stable.

¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2019>, table A4

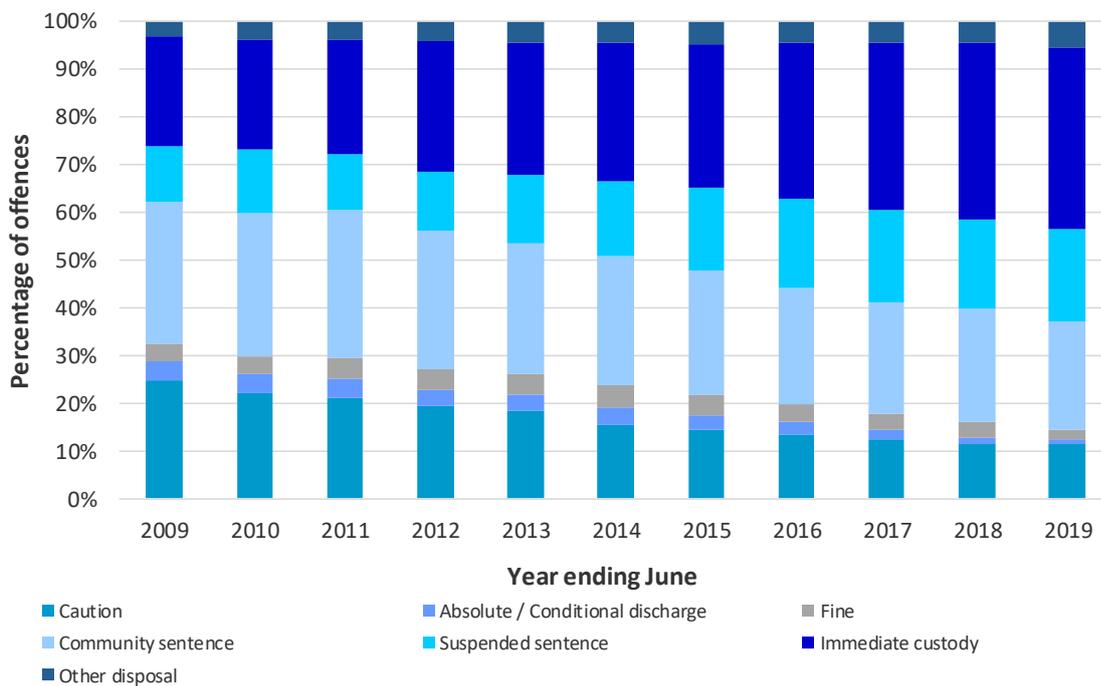
² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2018-to-2019>

2. Sentencing

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

In the year ending June 2019 38% of knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in an immediate custodial sentence compared with 23% when the series began in the year ending June 2009. The average length of the custodial sentences received also increased over the same period, from 5.9 months to 8.1 months.

Figure 2: Knife and offensive weapon offences by disposal type, England and Wales, annually from year ending June 2009 (Source: Table 1)



Immediate custodial sentences are now at the highest level since the series began. In the year ending June 2019 over a third (38% or 8,446 offences) of all knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in immediate custody compared with just 6,212 offences or 23% in the year ending June 2009. This increase has been driven by adults, for whom there was a 39% increase in offenders receiving immediate custody in the period.

The increase in average custodial sentence length between the year ending June 2009 and the year ending June 2019 was seen in all age groups and offence types but particularly for adults, for whom it increased from 5.8 months to 8.1 months, and for possession of blade or point offences, where it increased from 5.1 months to 7.5 months.

3. Offending History

For 71% 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 the year ending June 2009 (80%).

The decrease in the proportion of first time knife and offensive weapon offenders has been seen for both adults and juveniles, with the proportion for adults decreasing from 77% to 68% between the year ending June 2009 and the year ending June 2019 and the proportion for juveniles decreasing from 92% to 83% over the same period.

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 year ending June 2009 (Source: Interactive Pivot Table Tool)

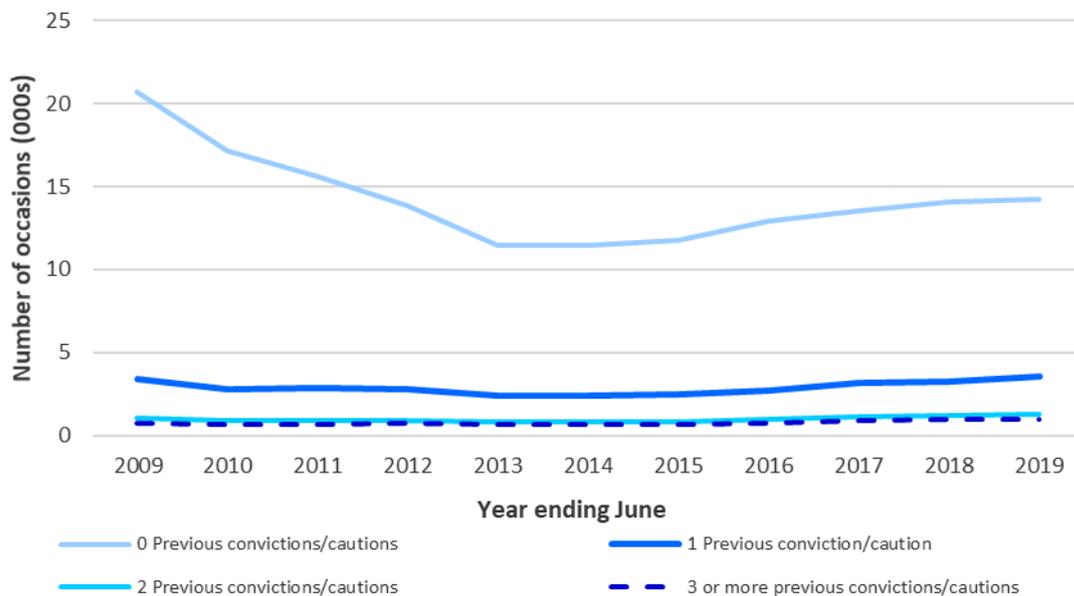


Figure 3 shows that whilst the proportion of first time offenders for this offence type has fallen there has been an increase in the number of offenders dealt with for their first knife and offensive weapons offence in each of the last 5 years – increasing from 11,429 occasions in the year ending June 2014 to 14,235 occasions in the year ending June 2019 (a 25% increase). This follows a 45% decrease in similar offenders dealt with between the year ending June 2009 and the year ending June 2014 (from 20,707 occasions to 11,429).

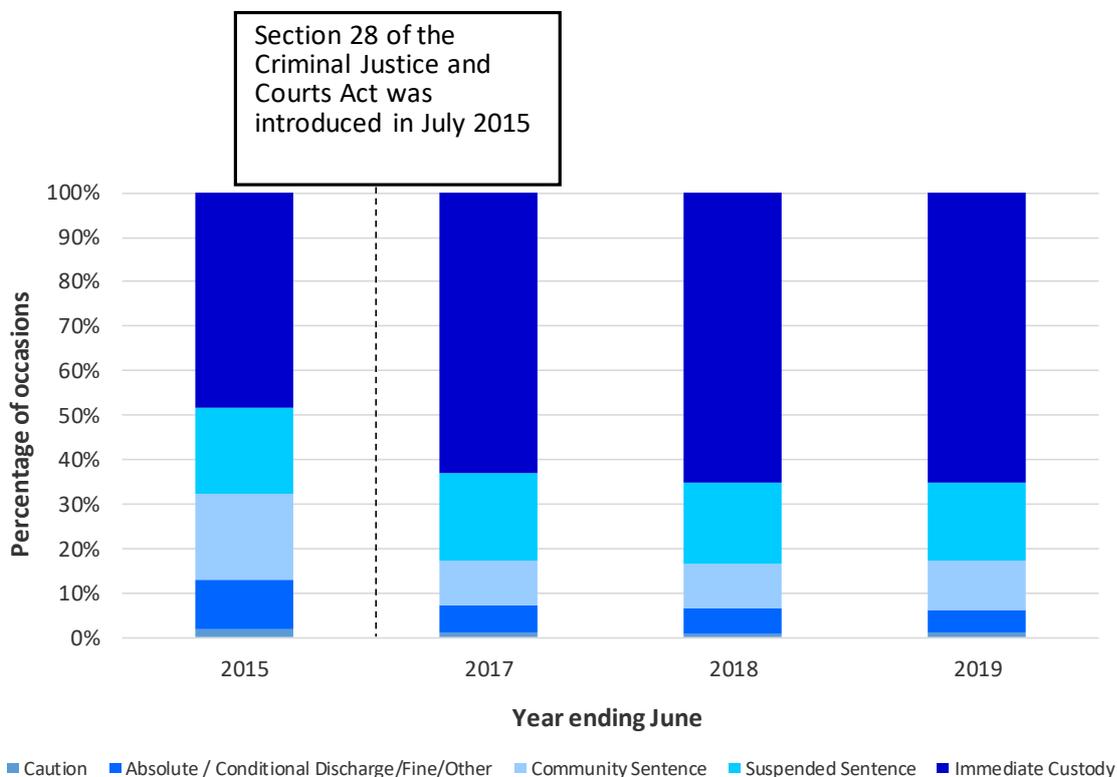
Since the year ending June 2013 both the number and proportion of offenders dealt with who had one or more previous knife and offensive weapons possession offences increased year on year, rising from 25% or 3,873 occasions to 29% or 5,774 occasions.

4. Sentencing under section 28 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act (CJCA) 2015³

The average custodial sentence received by offenders sentenced under section 28 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 was 7.9 months in the year ending June 2019.

This has risen from the first full year after the legislation was introduced, the year ending June 2017, where it was 7.1 months. Over the same time period the average custodial sentence length has increased from 7.2 to 7.9 months for adults and 6.1 to 7.5 months for 16 and 17 year olds.

Figure 4: Knife and offensive weapons possession sentencing and cautioning occasions for repeat offenders, by disposal type, year ending June 2015 and annually from year ending June 2017 (Source: Interactive Pivot Table Tool and Table 7)⁴



Following the commencement of section 28 of the CJCA 2015, a court must impose a minimum custodial sentence⁵ 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.

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

⁴ Figures for 2015 have been taken from the Interactive Pivot Table tool while the figures for other years have been taken from Table 7.

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

In the year ending June 2015, 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 possession offence received an immediate custodial sentence. In the year ending June 2019 around two thirds (65%) of offenders sentenced under section 28 of the CJCA 2015 received an immediate custodial sentence. Overall 83% of offenders sentenced under section 28 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 in the year ending June 2019 received some form of custodial sentence, either immediate custody or a suspended sentence, compared to 68% of offenders with at least one previous knife and offensive weapons offence in the year ending June 2015.

Further information

The data presented in this publication are provisional and updated in each publication. 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 June 2019
- 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.

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

Future publications

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Contact

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office:

Tel: 020 3334 3536 Email: newsdesk@justice.gsi.gov.uk

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to the Justice Statistics Analytical Services division of the Ministry of Justice:

Chandni Lakhani, Ministry of Justice, 102 Petty France, London, SW1H 9AJ
Email: statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk

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