



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

## Main points

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

In the year ending September 2019 nearly 22,300 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 September 2019 38% of knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in an immediate custodial sentence compared with 23% in the year ending September 2009.

The average length of the custodial sentences received also increased over the same period, from 6.0 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 year ending September 2009 (80%).

**The average custodial sentence received by offenders sentenced under section 28 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 was 8.0 months in the year ending September 2019** ↑

This has risen from the first full year after the legislation was established, the year ending September 2017, where it was 7.2 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.

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

# 1. Knife and offensive weapon offences overview

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

In the year ending September 2019, 22,286 knife and offensive weapon offences were formally dealt with by the CJS. This is a 3% increase on the previous year and is the highest number of offences dealt with since the year ending September 2009 (26,364).

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 38,692 in the year ending June 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

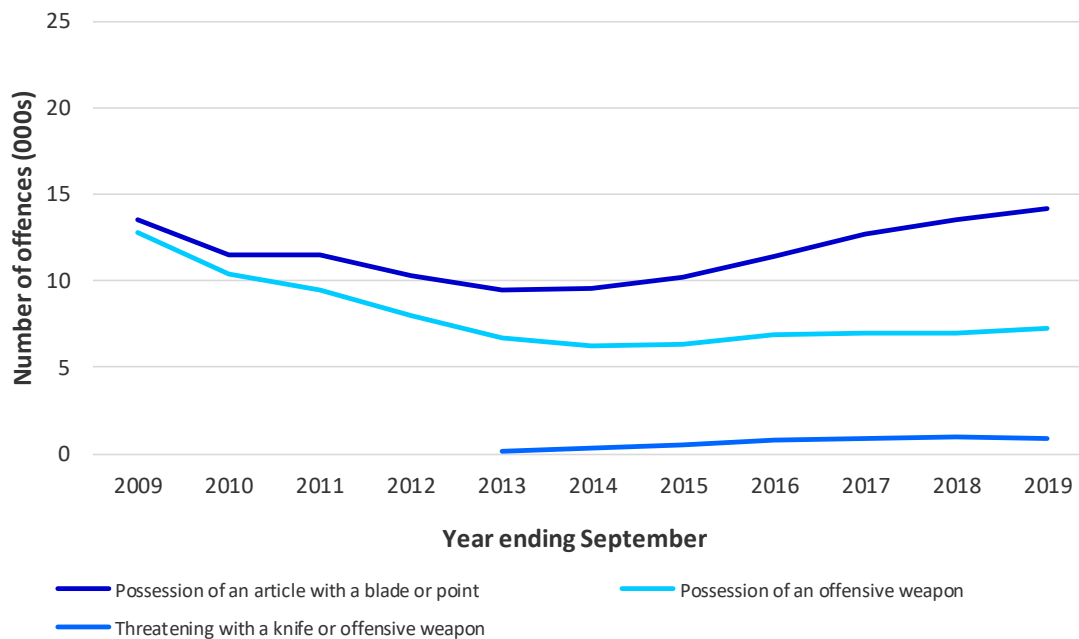


Figure 1 shows that this increase is driven by possession of an article with a blade or point offences. These offences have now increased to over 14,100 offences, the highest since the series began.

The number of adult offenders convicted or cautioned for a knife or offensive weapon offence has increased by 4% in the last year while the number of juveniles convicted or cautioned has increased by 1%.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingjune2019>, table A4

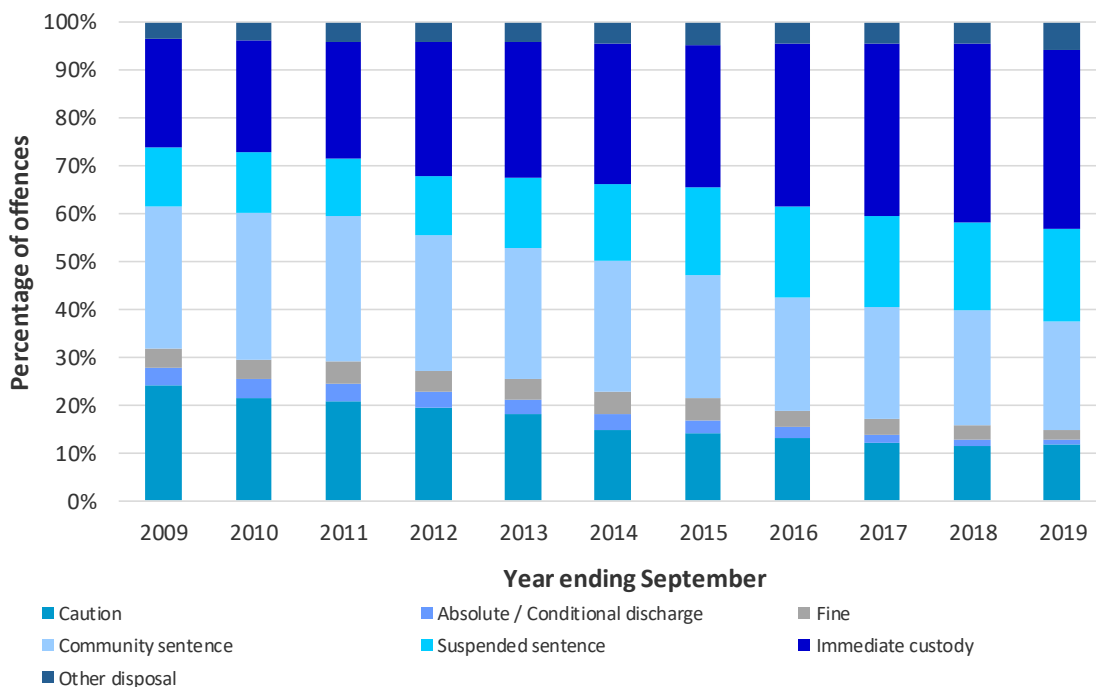
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2018-to-2019>

## 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 September 2019 38% of knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in an immediate custodial sentence compared with 23% in the year ending September 2009. The average length of the custodial sentences received also increased over the same period, from 6.0 months to 8.1 months.

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



Immediate custodial sentences are now at the highest level since the series began. In the year ending September 2019 over a third (38% or 8,384 offences) of all knife and offensive weapon offences resulted in immediate custody compared with just 5,938 offences or 23% in the year ending September 2009. This increase has been driven by adults, for whom there was a 45% increase in offenders receiving immediate custody in the period.

The increase in average custodial sentence length between the year ending September 2009 and the year ending September 2019 was seen in all age groups and offence types but particularly for adults, for whom it increased from 6.0 months to 8.1 months, and for possession of blade or point offences, where it increased from 5.3 months to 7.4 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 year ending September 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 September 2009 and the year ending September 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 September 2009 (Source: Interactive Pivot Table Tool)**

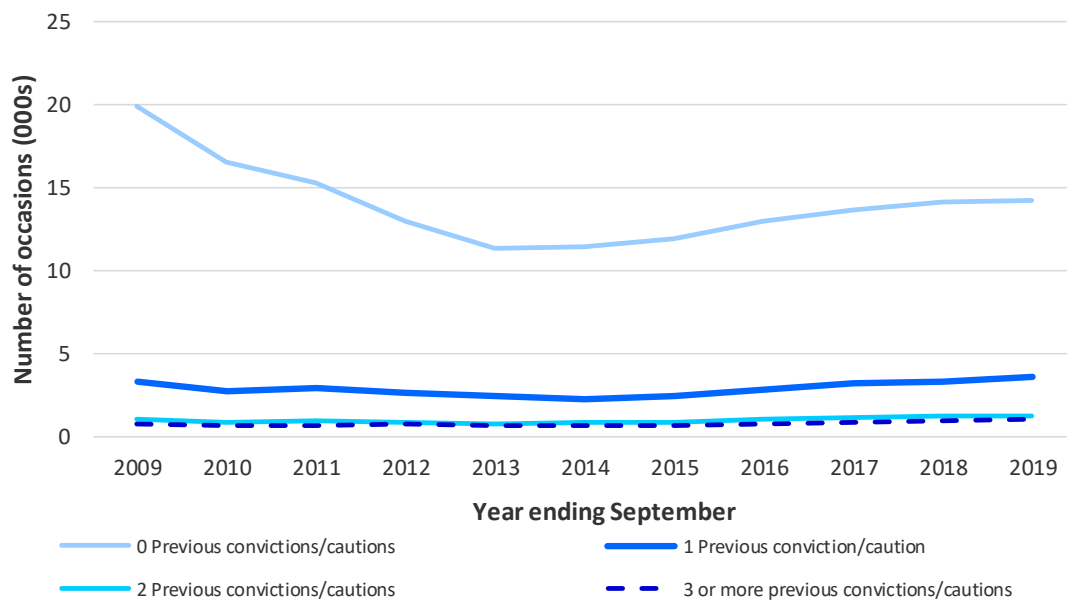


Figure 3 shows that whilst the proportion of first time offenders for this offence type has fallen there has been an increase in the number of offenders dealt with for their first knife and offensive weapons offence in each of the last 6 years – increasing from 11,377 occasions in the year ending September 2013 to 14,226 occasions in the year ending September 2019 (a 25% increase). This follows a 43% decrease in similar offenders dealt with between the year ending September 2009 and the year ending September 2013 (from 19,961 occasions to 11,377).

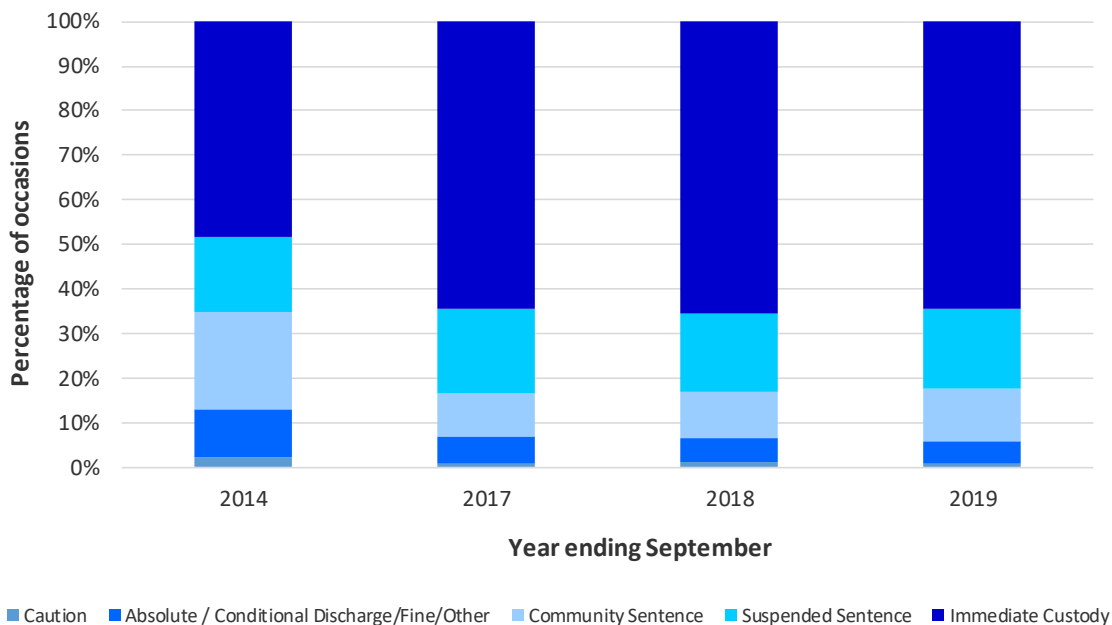
Since the year ending September 2014 both the number and proportion of offenders dealt with who had one or more previous knife and offensive weapons possession offences increased year on year, rising from 25% or 3,770 occasions to 29% or 5,819 occasions.

## 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 was 8.0 months in the year ending September 2019.

This has risen from the first full year after the legislation was established, the year ending September 2017, where it was 7.2 months. Over the same time period the average custodial sentence length has increased from 7.3 to 8.0 months for adults and 6.4 to 7.2 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 September 2014 and annually from year ending September 2017 (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 other years 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 the year ending September 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 possession offence received an immediate custodial sentence. In the year ending September 2019 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 the year ending September 2019 received some form of custodial sentence, either immediate custody or a suspended sentence, compared to 65% of offenders with at least one previous knife and offensive weapons offence in the year ending September 2014.

## 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>

Work was undertaken in the summer of 2019 to reconstruct and expand the Ministry of Justice's extract of the Police National Computer (PNC) to include additional information covering many years. This upgrade will allow our statisticians to improve the breadth of analysis going forward and quality assurance work carried out on the updated PNC dataset has not identified any concerns with these statistics.

## 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 September 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.

## 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/>

## Future publications

Our statisticians regularly review the content of publications. Development of new and improved statistical outputs is usually dependent on reallocating existing resources. As part of our continual review and prioritisation, we welcome user feedback on existing outputs including content, breadth, frequency and methodology. Please send any comments you have on this publication including suggestions for further developments or reductions in content.

## Contact

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**Next update:** 12 March 2020

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

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