

Knife Possession Sentencing Quarterly Brief October to December 2012 England and Wales

Ministry of Justice
Statistics Bulletin

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Introduction

This bulletin presents key statistics describing the trends in cautioning and sentencing, probation supervision and the prison population for possession of a knife or offensive weapon in England and Wales. This bulletin does not cover all knife crimes (offences involving a knife) as published by the Office for National Statistics¹. Details of other official statistics publications regarding knife related statistics can be found on page 25 of this bulletin.

The information presented combines both offences of possession of an article with a blade or point and offences of possession of an offensive weapon (which could be a knife). The detailed offence codes used in this bulletin are outlined in the glossary section.

Methodological change introduced in this bulletin

As indicated in the previous edition of this quarterly bulletin (published 6 December 2012), these statistics now include new estimates of the number and breakdown of disposals given for the possession of a knife or an offensive weapon in the most recent four quarters.

These estimates have been introduced following detailed analyses that tracked changes in the disposal figures from those initially published for each quarter to those released over the following year as data held on the Police National Computer (PNC) was updated with new information.

The analyses showed that the figures first published for each quarter will typically be a slight undercount, but that the number of immediate custodial sentences recorded on the PNC will increase significantly over time – in particular, as sentences passed by the Crown court became available on the system. The analyses also showed that the scale of change to these figures over time was very stable and therefore predictable.

The explanatory notes section provides full details of the methodology used to generate the estimates presented in this bulletin. This methodology will be kept under review and validated to ensure the estimates released for each quarter remain accurate.

This statistical brief, along with the full tables (including both current and estimated figures) are available from the Ministry of Justice Website at:

www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/criminal-justice/knife-possession

¹ www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-sept-2012/stb-crime-in-england-and-wales--year-ending-sept-2012.html#tab-Offences-involving-knives-and-sharp-instruments

The key events that might be expected to affect the statistics were:

- On 21 May 2008, the Court of Appeal issued the judgment in *Povey*² that said, because of prevalence, magistrates should normally sentence those convicted of knife crime possession offences at the top end of the range.
- The Sentencing Guidelines Council issued an update to the magistrates' courts guidelines, with effect from 4 August 2008, which set out the effect of the Court of Appeal judgment and made it clear that the starting point for the lowest level of knife possession amongst adults should be 12 weeks' custody.
- This applies in cases where a first time offender pleads not guilty to possession of a knife in non-dangerous circumstances. A guilty plea would attract a discount in the normal way, as would any personal mitigation, and could take the sentence below the custody threshold.
- Since September 2008 all probation areas have been able to provide intensive delivery of 300 hour Community Payback sentences for unemployed offenders convicted of knife crime offences, who are on the brink of custody. In January 2009 this offer of intensive delivery of a minimum of 18 hours per week over three days was extended to Community Payback sentences of any length imposed for an offence of knife crime, when an offender is unemployed.
- **From 3 December 2012 a new offence of aggravated knife possession came into force. Anyone who uses a knife or offensive weapon to threaten and endanger others will face a mandatory custodial sentence.**³

This publication has been prepared by Justice Statistics Analytical Services. If you have any feedback, questions or request for further information about these statistics, please direct them to the appropriate contact given at the end of this report.

² *Povey & Ors, R. v, Court of Appeal - Criminal Division, May 21, 2008, [2008] EWCA Crim 1261.*

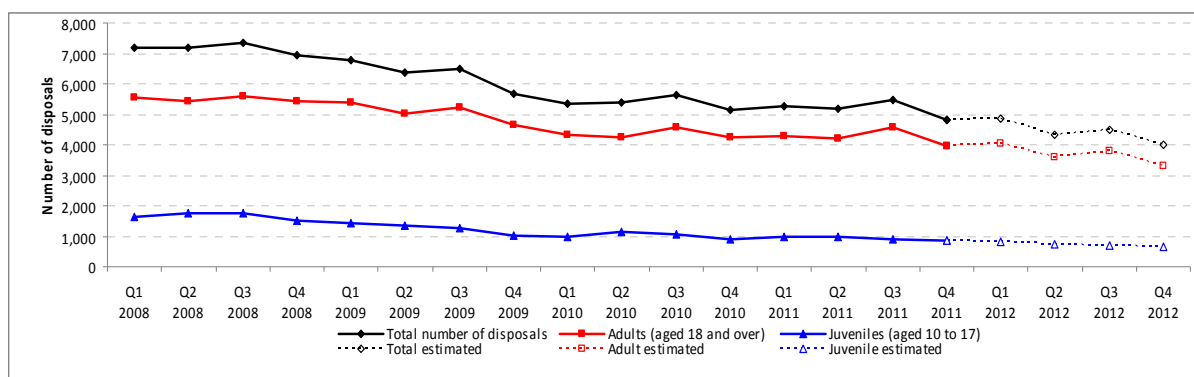
³ *As this offence has only come into effect part way through the current quarter of data, it has not been included in the tables presented in this publication.*

Key findings

Estimates indicate that the final disposal figures for Q4 2012 will show:

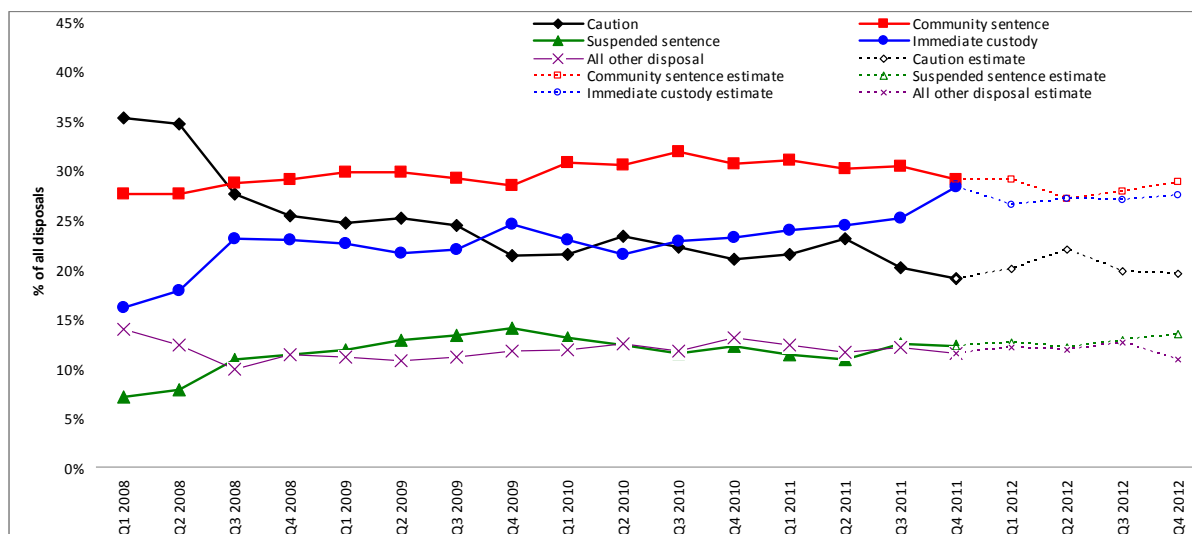
- 3,982 disposals were given for possession of a knife or an offensive weapon. This is down by 17 per cent from the number of cautions or convictions given for these offences in Q4 2011, and continues the generally falling trend in disposals given for these offences over the last 4 years.

Figure 1: Number of disposals given for knife and offensive weapon possession by age, in England and Wales, between Q1 2008 and Q4 2012



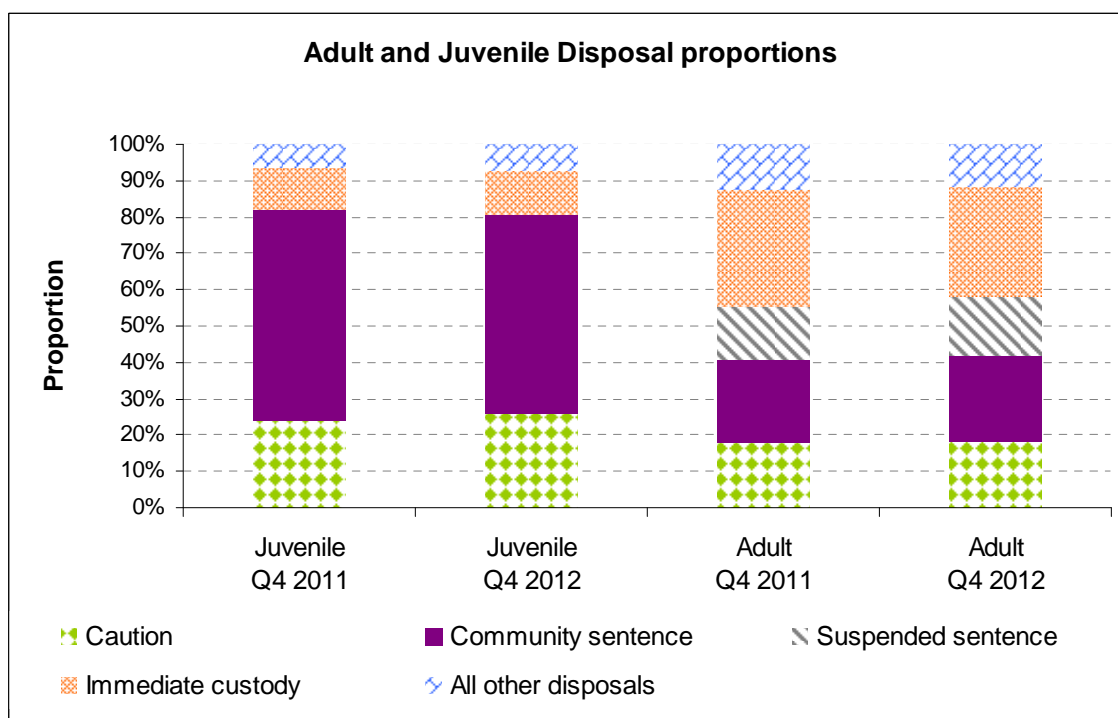
- The most common methods of disposal for possession of a knife or an offensive weapon were a community sentence (29 per cent in the latest quarter) or an immediate custodial sentence (27 per cent).
- The proportion of possession offences resulting in immediate custody reduced slightly since Q4 2011 (from 28 to 27 per cent), while suspended prison sentences and cautions increased slightly and other disposals showed no change. However, figures for the latest quarter are estimated so may change slightly once final outcomes are known.
- In addition, over the longer term, the proportion of possession offences resulting in immediate custody has increased since 2007 – particularly during 2008 when changes were made to the sentencing guidelines for knife possession as outlined earlier in this bulletin. Contrasting to this, the proportion of possession offences resulting in a police caution has fallen since the end of 2007.

Figure 2: Proportion of type of disposal given for knife and offensive weapon possession in England and Wales, between Q1 2008 and Q4 2012



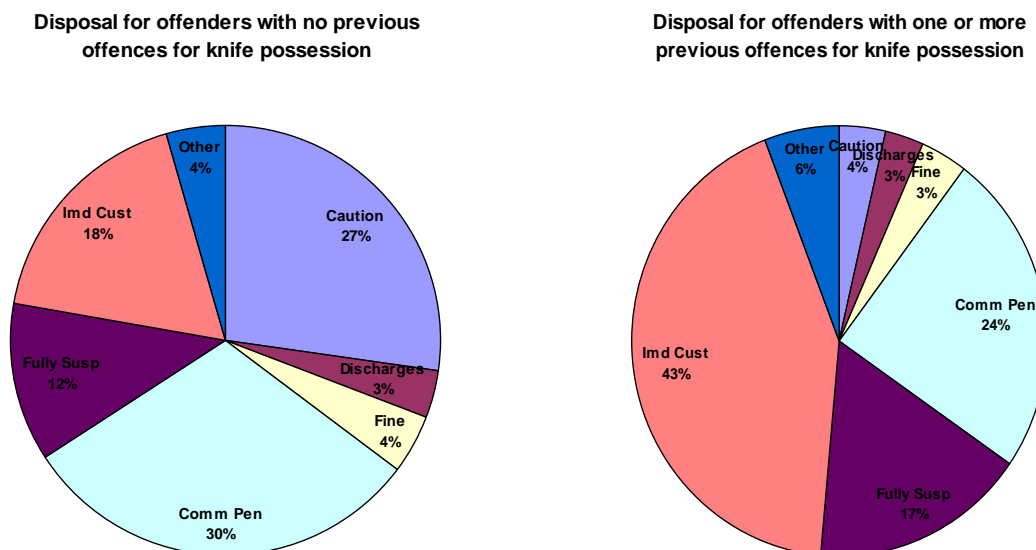
- Over 5 times as many adults (3,322) were cautioned or convicted for possession offences than juveniles (660) - a ratio that has generally been increasing over the last 4 years as the number of juveniles cautioned or convicted has fallen at a faster rate than for adults. Since Q4 2011, the number of disposals given to juveniles for possession offences dropped by 22 per cent while, for adults, the number fell by 16 per cent.
- Over half of all juveniles (55 per cent) receiving disposals for possession offences were given a community sentence, while a further quarter (26 per cent) were given a reprimand or a warning. 12 per cent were given an immediate custodial sentence, unchanged from Q4 2011 but up 3 percentage points since Q4 2010.
- Amongst adult offenders, just under a quarter (24 per cent) were given a community sentence, while 18 per cent were given a caution and 30 per cent were given an immediate custodial sentence. Custody rates for adults were down 2 percentage points since Q4 2011 but up 4 points since Q4 2010.

Figure 3: Proportion of type of disposal given for knife and offensive weapon possession for juveniles and adults, in England and Wales, Q4 2011 and Q4 2012



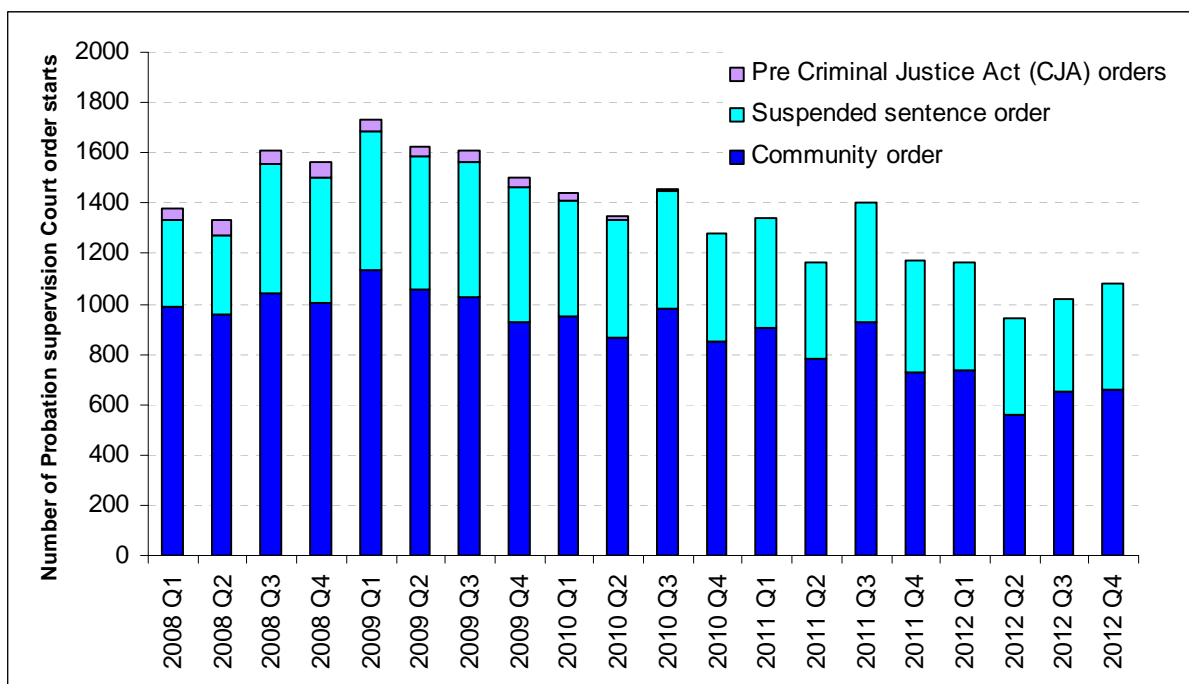
The types of disposal given for possession are correlated with the number of previous possession offences offenders have been convicted or cautioned for. For offenders with no previous offences for possession of a knife or offensive weapon, over a quarter received a caution in 2012 whereas 30 per cent received a community sentence and 18 per cent were given immediate custody. However, for offenders with at least one previous possession offence on their record, 43 per cent were sentenced to immediate custody in 2012, while only 4 per cent received a caution.

Figure 4: Number of previous convictions or cautions for the possession of a knife or offensive weapon for offenders convicted or cautioned for the possession offences, in England and Wales in 2012



- Immediate custodial sentences given for possession offences were for 226 days, or 7.4 months, on average. This is 4 per cent longer than average sentence lengths given in Q4 2011 and continues the increasing trend seen over the last 4 years. Average sentence lengths for possession offences are now around 70 per cent, or 3 months, longer than they were at the end of 2007.
- 1,084 offenders started a court order under probation supervision for possession offences. This is down 8 per cent from Q4 2011 and 15 per cent from Q4 2010, related primarily to the reductions in the number of possession offences dealt with over this period.

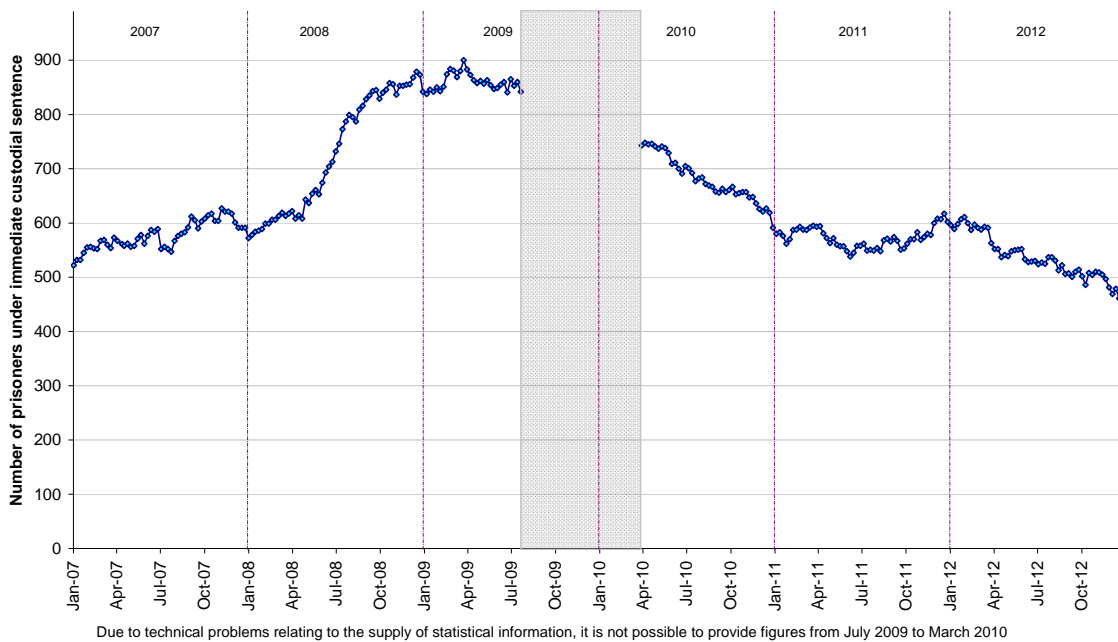
Figure 5: Number of offenders commencing a court order under probation supervision for possession of an offensive weapon, in England and Wales from Q1 2008 to Q4 2012



- The most common requirements placed on offenders starting court orders for possession offences were supervision - 36 per cent of suspended sentence orders (SSOs) and 33 per cent of community orders (COs) - and unpaid work - 25 per cent of SSOs and 32 per cent of COs. The use of unpaid work as a requirement has fallen over recent years – down 2 percentage points for SSOs since Q4 2010 and 3 points for COs over the same period.
- Where unpaid work requirements were placed upon those starting a community order for possession offences, 39 per cent were for less than 80 hours and 45 per cent were for 81 to 150 hours. For those starting suspended sentence orders, 25 per cent were for under 80 hours and 51 per cent were for 81 to 150 hours.

- 449 offenders were in prison serving a sentence for possession of an offensive weapon on 28 December 2012, down 25 per cent from 602 a year ago and continuing the reductions seen in the prison population for this offence since early 2009. This trend comes despite the generally increasing use and length of custodial sentences for possession offences, and is likely to be primarily related to the reductions in the total number of offences dealt with over the period.

Figure 6: Prison population under sentence for possession of an offensive weapon⁴ (excludes recalls) in England and Wales, between 2007 and 2012



⁴ Includes having an article with a blade or a point.

Appendix A: Statistical Tables

Table 1: Offences involving the possession of a knife or offensive weapon resulting in a caution or sentence, in England and Wales

Disposal Category	Number of offences and percentage change							% change, estimated Q4 2012 to Q4 2011
	Q4 2009	Q4 2010	Q4 2011	Q1 2012 ^E	Q2 2012 ^E	Q3 2012 ^E	Q4 2012 ^E	
England and Wales¹	5,688	5,156	4,811	4,875	4,322	4,487	3,982	-17%
Caution ²	1,217	1,083	914	976	949	887	778	-15%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	207	203	152	175	139	168	112	-26%
Fine	222	240	194	201	186	188	153	-21%
Community sentence	1,616	1,579	1,397	1,414	1,171	1,250	1,144	-18%
Suspended sentence	797	630	586	611	524	574	536	-9%
Immediate custody	1,391	1,194	1,363	1,288	1,169	1,210	1,092	-20%
Other disposal	238	227	205	210	184	210	167	-19%
	percentage of total offences							
Caution ²	21%	21%	19%	20%	22%	20%	20%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	4%	4%	3%	4%	3%	4%	3%	
Fine	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	
Community sentence	28%	31%	29%	29%	27%	28%	29%	
Suspended sentence	14%	12%	12%	13%	12%	13%	13%	
Immediate custody	24%	23%	28%	26%	27%	27%	27%	
Other disposal	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%	

¹ England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

² Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

^E Denotes where estimated figures have been used. The estimates are based on historical data changes. Please see explanatory notes of bulletin for further details.

Data Source and Quality

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.

Table 2: Offences involving the possession of a knife or offensive weapon resulting in a caution or sentence by age group, in England and Wales

Disposal Category	Number of offences and percentages							% change, estimated Q4 2012 to Q4 2011
	Q4 2009	Q4 2010	Q4 2011	Q1 2012 ^E	Q2 2012 ^E	Q3 2012 ^E	Q4 2012 ^E	
Aged 10 to 17	1,023	912	842	831	747	705	660	-22%
Reprimands & warnings	316	271	204	209	238	196	170	-17%
Absolute/conditional discharge	27	13	14	19	9	10	15	*
Fine	5	3	2	2	2	1	2	*
Community sentence	535	493	490	472	393	392	362	-26%
Immediate custody	89	81	97	95	69	75	80	-18%
Other disposal ²	51	51	35	34	36	31	31	*
Reprimands & warnings	31%	30%	24%	25%	32%	28%	26%	
Absolute/conditional discharge	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	
Fine	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	
Community sentence	52%	54%	58%	57%	53%	56%	55%	
Immediate custody	9%	9%	12%	11%	9%	11%	12%	
Other disposal ²	5%	6%	4%	4%	5%	4%	5%	
Aged 18 and over	4,665	4,243	3,967	4,044	3,575	3,782	3,322	-16%
Caution	901	812	709	767	711	691	608	-14%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	180	190	138	156	130	158	97	-30%
Fine	217	237	192	199	184	187	151	-21%
Community sentence	1,081	1,086	907	942	778	858	782	-14%
Suspended sentence	797	630	586	611	524	574	536	-9%
Immediate custody	1,302	1,112	1,266	1,193	1,100	1,135	1,012	-20%
Other disposal	187	176	169	176	148	179	136	-20%
Caution	19%	19%	18%	19%	20%	18%	18%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%	3%	
Fine	5%	6%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	
Community sentence	23%	26%	23%	23%	22%	23%	24%	
Suspended sentence	17%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	16%	
Immediate custody	28%	26%	32%	30%	31%	30%	30%	
Other disposal	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%	

¹ The difference between the totals in Table 1 and the adult/juvenile breakdowns is where there is no age recorded on the system. For Q4 2010 one person received a custodial sentence with no age recorded. In Q4 2011 there were two people with no age recorded, one for caution and one for an other disposal. In Q4 2009, there were no individuals with a missing age.

^E Denotes where estimated figures have been used. The estimates are based on historical data changes. Please see explanatory notes of bulletin for further details.

*Indicates that one or more of the comparative numbers are less than 50. For small numbers this could give misleading percentage changes.

Data Source and Quality

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Table 3: Offences involving the possession of a knife or offensive weapon resulting in a caution or sentence by type of offence, in England and Wales

Disposal Category	Number of offences and percentages							% change, estimated Q4 2012 to Q4 2011
	Q4 2009	Q4 2010	Q4 2011	Q1 2012 ^E	Q2 2012 ^E	Q3 2012 ^E	Q4 2012 ^E	
Possession of an article with a blade or point	2,897	2,757	2,613	2,726	2,424	2,525	2,294	-12%
Caution ¹	405	398	334	405	406	377	346	4%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	130	129	102	114	88	94	73	-28%
Fine	105	131	115	123	109	121	93	-19%
Community sentence	896	893	842	831	708	756	693	-18%
Suspended sentence	449	378	333	369	322	344	323	-3%
Immediate custody	795	696	766	763	702	715	667	-13%
Other disposal ²	117	132	121	121	89	118	99	-18%
Caution ¹	14%	14%	13%	15%	17%	15%	15%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	
Fine	4%	5%	4%	5%	4%	5%	4%	
Community sentence	31%	32%	32%	30%	29%	30%	30%	
Suspended sentence	15%	14%	13%	14%	13%	14%	14%	
Immediate custody	27%	25%	29%	28%	29%	28%	29%	
Other disposal ²	4%	5%	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%	
Possession of an offensive weapon	2,791	2,399	2,198	2,149	1,898	1,962	1,688	-23%
Caution ¹	812	685	580	571	543	510	432	-26%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	77	74	50	61	51	74	39	*
Fine	117	109	79	78	77	67	60	-24%
Community sentence	720	686	555	583	463	494	451	-19%
Suspended sentence	348	252	253	242	202	230	213	-16%
Immediate custody	596	498	597	525	467	495	425	-29%
Other disposal	121	95	84	89	95	92	68	-19%
Caution ¹	29%	29%	26%	27%	29%	26%	26%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	3%	3%	2%	3%	3%	4%	2%	
Fine	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	
Community sentence	26%	29%	25%	27%	24%	25%	27%	
Suspended sentence	12%	11%	12%	11%	11%	12%	13%	
Immediate custody	21%	21%	27%	24%	25%	25%	25%	
Other disposal	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	4%	

¹ Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

^E Denotes where estimated figures have been used. The estimates are based on historical data changes. Please see explanatory notes of bulletin for further details.

*Indicates that one or more of the comparative numbers are less than 50. For small numbers this could give misleading percentage changes.

Data Source and Quality

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.

Table 4: Custodial sentence proportions for knife and offensive weapon possession offences, by sentence length, in England and Wales

Sentence length	Proportion of sentence lengths						
	Q4 2009	Q4 2010	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012
	percentage of total offences						
Up to and including 3 months	38%	42%	35%	37%	37%	37%	30%
Over 3 months and up to and including 6 months	31%	29%	29%	29%	26%	26%	32%
Over 6 months	31%	29%	36%	34%	36%	37%	38%

¹ England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

² Please note that the above calculations are based on the current figures and not the estimates used in Tables 1 to 3. This table will be updated in future editions to match tables 1 to 3.

Data Source and Quality

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Table 5: Average sentence length of immediate custodial sentences for knife and offensive weapon possession offences, in England and Wales

	Average Sentence length							% change, Q4 2012 to Q4 2011
	Q4 2009	Q4 2010	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012	
	average sentence length (days)							
England and Wales¹	201	185	218	203	232	234	226	4%

¹ England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

² Please note that the above calculations are based on the current figures and not the estimates used in Tables 1 to 3. This table will be updated in future editions to match tables 1 to 3.

Data Source and Quality

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information becomes available.

Table 6: Offenders commencing a court order under probation supervision for possession of an offensive weapon¹, in England and Wales

Court order starts	Number of starts and percentages							Percentage change Q4 2011 to Q4 2012
	Q4 2009	Q4 2010	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012	
	number of starts							
England and Wales	1,500	1,278	1,172	1,168	940	1,018	1,084	-8%
Community order	924	853	727	735	563	648	662	-9%
Suspended sentence order	540	423	445	432	377	368	422	-5%
Pre CJA orders	36	2	0	1	0	2	0	*
	percentage of total starts							
Community order	62%	67%	62%	63%	60%	64%	61%	
Suspended sentence order	36%	33%	38%	37%	40%	36%	39%	
Pre CJA orders	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	

¹ Includes having an article with a blade or a point.

*Indicates that one or more of the comparative numbers are less than 50. For small numbers this could give misleading percentage changes.

Data Source and Quality

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. All data is provisional.

Table 7: Requirement starts for possession of offensive weapon¹, in England and Wales

Number of requirements and percentages								
	Q4 2009	Q4 2010	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012	Percentage change Q4 2011 to Q4 2012
number of requirements								
Community order	1,474	1,346	1246	1216	911	1065	1049	-16%
Unpaid Work	535	472	399	388	274	312	335	-16%
Supervision	466	450	415	389	308	381	345	-17%
Curfew	147	62	132	120	87	71	57	-57%
Accredited program	101	92	69	76	61	66	49	*
Specified activity	68	92	103	117	88	114	37	*
Drug treatment	52	92	38	29	29	39	95	*
Alcohol treatment	54	39	51	50	31	44	93	82%
Mental health	25	19	11	12	13	9	16	*
Exclusion	4	3	7	8	7	2	4	*
Residential	6	6	7	5	2	8	4	*
Attendance centre	8	16	8	17	10	13	10	*
Prohibited activity	8	3	6	5	1	6	4	*
percentage of total requirements								
Unpaid work	36%	35%	32%	32%	30%	29%	32%	
Supervision	32%	33%	33%	32%	34%	36%	33%	
Other requirements	32%	32%	35%	36%	36%	35%	35%	
number of requirements								
Suspended sentence order	978	782	768	757	672	659	768	0%
Unpaid work	254	211	205	210	170	157	193	-6%
Supervision	373	289	269	281	237	246	274	2%
Curfew	101	76	89	65	78	61	75	-16%
Accredited program	97	76	61	73	49	64	57	-7%
Specified activity	46	49	73	64	64	67	78	7%
Drug treatment	33	22	21	21	21	20	26	*
Alcohol treatment	43	33	25	24	31	33	35	*
Mental health	3	6	3	4	5	3	2	*
Exclusion	3	6	2	2	5	1	3	*
Residential	7	3	12	7	5	2	16	*
Attendance centre	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	*
Prohibited activity	15	8	5	3	4	2	6	*
percentage of total requirements								
Unpaid work	26%	27%	27%	28%	25%	24%	25%	
Supervision	38%	37%	35%	37%	35%	37%	36%	
Other requirements	36%	36%	38%	35%	39%	39%	39%	

¹ Includes having an article with a blade or a point.

*Indicates that one or more of the comparative numbers are less than 50. For small numbers this could give misleading percentage changes.

Data Source and Quality

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. All data is provisional.

Table 8: Unpaid work requirements started by length of requirement given for possession of offensive weapon¹, in England and Wales

	Number of requirements and percentages							Percentage change Q4 2011 to Q4 2012
	Q4 2009	Q4 2010	Q4 2011	Q1 2012	Q2 2012	Q3 2012	Q4 2012	
number of requirements								
Community order	591	503	440	426	300	323	368	-16%
0-80 hours	224	208	174	159	124	139	144	-17%
81-150 hours	221	188	191	176	116	128	165	-14%
151-199 hours	42	37	21	21	17	21	21	*
200-250 hours	98	64	48	67	42	34	36	*
251-300 hours	6	6	6	3	1	1	2	*
percentage of total requirements								
0-80 hours	38%	41%	40%	37%	41%	43%	39%	
81-150 hours	37%	37%	43%	41%	39%	40%	45%	
151-199 hours	7%	7%	5%	5%	6%	7%	6%	
200-250 hours	17%	13%	11%	16%	14%	11%	10%	
251-300 hours	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	
number of requirements								
Suspended sentence order	260	223	224	221	181	167	206	-8%
0-80 hours	49	53	49	56	64	36	51	*
81-150 hours	131	100	122	108	83	93	106	-13%
151-199 hours	20	12	17	15	14	10	8	*
200-250 hours	57	53	31	40	18	26	38	*
251-300 hours	3	5	5	2	2	2	3	*
percentage of total requirements								
0-80 hours	19%	24%	22%	25%	35%	22%	25%	
81-150 hours	50%	45%	54%	49%	46%	56%	51%	
151-199 hours	8%	5%	8%	7%	8%	6%	4%	
200-250 hours	22%	24%	14%	18%	10%	16%	18%	
251-300 hours	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	

¹ Includes having an article with a blade or a point.

*Indicates that one or more of the comparative numbers are less than 50. For small numbers this could give misleading percentage changes.

Data Source and Quality

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. All data is provisional.

Table 9: Number of previous convictions or cautions for the possession of a knife or offensive weapon for offenders convicted or cautioned for a possession offence in 2012, in England and Wales

Disposal Category	Number of previous convictions/cautions				Total
	0	1	2	3 or more	
	number of offenders				
England and Wales¹	12,290	2,464	815	612	16,181
Caution ²	3,357	118	19	6	3,500
Absolute/Conditional discharge	425	90	15	16	546
Fine	549	101	22	13	685
Community sentence	3,745	662	186	101	4,694
Suspended sentence	1,467	421	134	91	2,113
Immediate custody	2,212	941	387	343	3,883
Other disposal ³	535	131	52	42	760
	percentage				
Caution ²	27%	5%	2%	1%	
Absolute/Conditional discharge	3%	4%	2%	3%	
Fine	4%	4%	3%	2%	
Community sentence	30%	27%	23%	17%	
Suspended sentence	12%	17%	16%	15%	
Immediate custody	18%	38%	47%	56%	
Other disposal ³	4%	5%	6%	7%	

¹ England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

² Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

Data Source and Quality

These figures have been drawn from the police's administrative IT system which, as with any large scale recording system, is subject to possible errors with data entry and processing. The figures are provisional and subject to change as more information

Explanatory notes

Data quality and sources

Tables 1 to 5 and table 9

The statistics presented in tables 1 to 5 in this Bulletin are drawn from an extract of data held on the Police National Computer (PNC) as at 1 February 2013.

The PNC is a large administrative database containing information about police cautions and court convictions held by individual offenders in England and Wales. As an administrative system, the PNC is regularly updated as new information about particular individuals becomes available. For example, an offender with previous convictions may have recently been charged with another offence, appeared in court against this charge and then been subsequently convicted of this offence. This information would then be updated accordingly against that individual's record in the PNC.

As these updates involve some element of manual data entry alongside more automated systems, there can be delays in the database becoming updated with the latest information about an offender's convictions. As such, the number of cautions/convictions recorded in the PNC extract for knife possession offences in recent quarters, in particular for the most recent quarter included in this bulletin, are likely to be lower than the actual number of cautions/convictions given in the period.

In addition, the different disposals recorded in the PNC extract for knife possession offences in recent quarters are also subject to some change. This is partly due to the delays in updating recent court outcomes on the PNC, but is also due to the fact that, while some individuals will have been convicted of a knife possession offence in a magistrate's court during the quarter, information about the disposal they received is not yet available as the case has been passed to the Crown court for sentencing at a later date. These cases will be updated when information about the final sentence given for the offence becomes available.

As shown in the table below, these updates to the information held within the PNC about disposals for knife possession offences have the main effect of increasing the number/proportion of offences reported as having been dealt with through immediate custody, and reducing the number/proportion reported as other disposals.

Table A1: Change in the number of disposals reported for knife possession offences in Q4 2011 between the time of first publication (March 2012) and as updated in this bulletin

Disposal Category	Oct - Dec 2011 published 1 st March 2012	Oct - Dec 2011 revised, published 7 th March 2013	Difference	Percentage change
number of offences				
England and Wales¹	4,781	4,811	30	1%
Caution ²	902	914	12	1%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	142	152	10	7%
Fine	186	194	8	4%
Community sentence	1,420	1,397	-23	-2%
Suspended sentence	614	586	-28	-5%
Immediate custody	1,148	1,363	215	19%
Other disposal ³	369	205	-164	-44%
percentage				
England and Wales¹	100%	100%		
Caution ²	19%	19%		
Absolute/Conditional discharge	3%	3%		
Fine	4%	4%		
Community sentence	30%	29%		
Suspended sentence	13%	12%		
Immediate custody	24%	28%		
Other disposal ³	8%	4%		

¹ England and Wales includes all 43 police force areas and the British Transport Police.

² Cautions include juveniles receiving reprimands and warnings.

³ Includes deferred sentences.

In previous editions of this bulletin, comparisons were made of the most recent quarter's data with the same quarter in the previous year. However, in taking this approach, we were consistently reporting that the proportion of immediate custodial sentences had reduced, while once the final figures for the quarter became available, it was clear this was not the case. Therefore, in this bulletin, we have replaced the current disposal data as taken from the PNC for the last four quarters with estimates of what the final version of the figures for these particular quarters will be.

These estimates have been calculated by tracking the extent to which the historic published figures about cautions/convictions for knife possession offences changed after their initial release, and applying these changes proportionately to the latest information extracted from the PNC. For example, in order to generate the estimated disposal figures for the latest quarter (Q4 2012), data for Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 2011 were tracked from their first publication to the figures available for these quarters one year subsequently. Tests have shown that the vast majority of changes and updates to the PNC data occur within this one-year follow up period, extending the follow-up period beyond this would not increase the accuracy of the estimates significantly.

As an example of the workings and accuracy of this estimation process, the Q4 2011 figures for possession of a knife or offensive weapon were first published in March 2012 as shown in table A1, above. We now know that there were actually 30 more disposals given for possession offences in the quarter than originally suggested and that a much larger proportion of these were for immediate custody as shown in the same table. When the figures for Q4 2011 were initially published, this information

was obviously not yet available. However, it would have been possible to track data for Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 2010 through from their original published values to the version of the figures updated one year subsequently. This information is shown in the table below along with the average change when compared to the figures published a year later for all four quarters.

Table A2: Change between figures initially published for Q1 - Q4 2010 and revised figures published a year later

	Q1 2010	Q2 2010	Q3 2010	Q4 2010	Average
Caution	1.6%	0.7%	0.8%	1.4%	1.1%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	11.4%	9.0%	6.3%	2.6%	7.3%
Fine	3.3%	6.8%	5.2%	8.1%	5.8%
Community sentence	-0.2%	-1.8%	-3.9%	-1.6%	-1.9%
Suspended sentence	2.3%	-1.5%	-3.6%	-1.7%	-1.1%
Immediate custody	17.5%	20.0%	21.6%	15.9%	18.7%
Other disposal	-48.6%	-47.8%	-44.8%	-42.8%	-46.0%

Clearly the biggest impact seen was an increase in the figures for immediate custody and related decrease in the 'other disposal' category. The table also demonstrates that the direction and scale of change for each of the four quarters was consistent providing confidence that the figures would change similarly for the numbers initially available for Q4 2011.

Through applying these average change values for the previous four quarters to the Q4 2011 figures as at the time of their initial publication in March 2012, we could have estimated what the final figures for the quarter would be. These estimates are shown below along with the actual revised values as they have been published within this release.

Table A3: Difference between initial figures published for Q4 2011, the revised figures published within this bulletin and the figures that would have been estimated through the method described above

	Q4 2011 (initially published)	Q4 2011 (estimated)	Q4 2011 (revised in this bulletin)	% change - revised vs initial	% change revised vs estimated
Total	4,781	4796	4,811	1%	0%
Caution	902	906	914	1%	1%
Absolute/Conditional discharge	142	150	152	7%	1%
Fine	186	195	194	4%	-1%
Community sentence	1,420	1382	1,397	-2%	1%
Suspended sentence	614	597	586	-5%	-2%
Immediate custody	1,148	1368	1,363	19%	0%
Other disposal	369	198	205	-44%	4%

As can be seen from the above table, the figures that would have been estimated for Q4 2011 are substantially closer to the complete figures for the quarter as published in this bulletin. In particular, the projected number sentenced to immediate custody is much closer to the revised numbers – a difference of less than 1 per cent rather than

the 19 per cent undercount in the original figures. In addition, the 44 per cent over-estimate of the numbers in the 'other disposal' category would have been become a 4 per cent under-estimate in the projected figures. Through these comparisons and equivalent testing of other quarters, we have concluded that using this estimation method gives better estimates of the actual rates for disposals than using the unadjusted estimates as originally available from the PNC.

We will continue to monitor the method used to estimate final disposal outcomes in future editions of this bulletin to ensure that the estimated figures provided are realistic. We will also present a comparison table in future editions of this bulletin to show the accuracy of our estimates produced using this method with the actual final figures available for the quarters in question.

Tables 6 to 8 and Figure 3

The probation data has been processed from data collected and held centrally by the Ministry of Justice. The data are drawn from the local probation administrative IT systems from each of the 35 probation trusts in England and Wales. The figures showing the numbers starting court orders relate to the number of *offenders* starting probation supervision in a given period. The numbers drawn from the PNC data in tables 1 to 5 relate to the total number of *offences* committed by offenders given particular disposals, which are likely to be greater than the number of offenders. Also, the probation data shows offenders convicted of the more general offence of 'possession of an offensive weapon'. This will include possession of knives, as well the particular offence of 'possession of an article with a blade or point', but these cannot be separately distinguished in the probation data.

Prison population data presented in this brief are drawn from the prison administrative IT systems. The figures showing the numbers under sentence refer to the number of *offenders* serving a custodial sentence. Figures drawn from PNC data refer to the number of *offences* committed by offenders given particular disposals. Prison establishments routinely provide records of the numbers of persons held in custody at the end of each month, broadly subdivided according to age, sex, custody type and sentence length. The records are collated and processed centrally. However, data recorded by prisons only show the numbers serving a sentence for the general offence of "possession of an offensive weapon". This offence includes the possession of a knife but can also include possession of other dangerous weapons (excluding firearms).

Due to technical problems relating to the supply of data for statistical purposes it has not been possible to provide data relating to the prison population for specific offence types from July 2009 to March 2010.

Glossary

This glossary provides a brief description of the main terms used in the Commentary section of this report. For further information, please contact the Justice Statistics Analytical Services division using the details provided in the contacts section at the end of this bulletin.

Adult: An offender aged 18 and over.

Caution: A warning given to adults offenders who admit guilt and agree to be cautioned. They are issued on the instructions of a senior police officer where there is sufficient evidence for a conviction and it is not considered to be in the public interest to institute criminal proceedings.

Community sentence: An alternate to custodial sentence (sending offenders to prison) which allows offenders to make amends for their crimes. For juveniles the main community sentence used are the referral order and the Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO). With a community sentence there are specific things the offender can, can't and must do while serving their sentence. Elements of custodial sentence include;

- Supervision,
- Unpaid work,
- Specified activities,
- Prohibited activities,
- Accredited programmes,
- Curfew, exclusion,
- Residence,
- Mental health treatment,
- Drug rehabilitation,
- Alcohol treatment and attendance centre requirement for under 25s

England and Wales – Total figures for England and Wales now include all police forces in England and Wales and the British Transport Police (BTP). The Home Office is responsible for policing the 43 police forces in England and Wales. There are also other authorities who prosecute offenders such as:

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP),
- HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC),
- Ministry of Defence (MOD) and

- British Transport Police (BTP).

Previously only the 43 police forces governed by the Home Office were reported on, but now, as the BTP is part of TKAP, they are included in the total figures for England and Wales.

Immediate custody: Unsuspended imprisonment for adults aged 21 or over and detention in a young offender institution for those aged 18 to 20. The maximum sentence available is 4 years for possession of a bladed article in a public place or an offensive weapon. Juveniles aged 12 to 17 may receive a detention and training order of 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 18 or 24 months

Juvenile: An offender between the ages 10 and 17.

Offences included: The PNC data (tables 1 to 5) produced in this brief are the number of offences committed **not** the number of offenders. The offences relate to possession offences rather than offences where a knife was used. The offence codes included in the dataset are as follows:

- **00811** – Possession of offensive weapons without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. Prevention of Crime Act 1953 Section 1.
- **00828** – Possession of offensive weapons without lawful authority or reasonable excuse on school premises. Criminal Justice Act 1988 Section 139 A (2) as amended by Offensive Weapons Act 1996 Section 4 (1).
- **00826** – Having an article with a blade or a point in a public place. Criminal Justice Act 1988 Section 139 (1) as amended by Offensive Weapons Act 1996 Section 3 (1).
- **00827** – Having an article with a blade or a point on school premises. Criminal Justice Act 1988 Section 139 (2) as amended by Offensive Weapons Act 1996 Section 4 (1).

Offensive weapon: Any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to the person, or intended by the person having it with him for such. Examples includes: a swordstick, a hollow walking-stick or cane containing a blade.

Reprimand and warning: Issued to juvenile first time offenders for minor offences. Reprimands and warnings for juveniles are the equivalent of cautions for adults.

Suspended Sentence: A custody sentence of less than 12 months, suspended for a period ranging from six months to two years available for **adult** only.

Contact points for further information

Current and previous editions of this publication are available for download at www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/criminal-justice/knife-possession

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

Tel: 020 3334 3536

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to:

Ministry of Justice
Justice Statistics Analytical Services
7th floor
102 Petty France
London SW1H 9AJ

General enquiries about the statistical work of the Ministry of Justice can be e-mailed to: statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk

General information about the official statistics system of the UK is available from www.statistics.gov.uk

Other knife and sharp object related statistical releases

Other government departments also release statistics relating to knives and sharp objects. Below are some links and brief outlines of other available sources.

- The Home Office provide a guidance document regarding the law for knives and offensive weapons:

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/crime/knives-offensive-weapons-info

- The Home Office also publish statistics of offences involving knives and sharp instruments. This is contained within the *Crime in England and Wales* statistical bulletin and has a section called *Offences involving knives and sharp instruments*.

www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-sept-2012/stb-crime-in-england-and-wales--year-ending-sept-2012.html#tab-Offences-involving-knives-and-sharp-instruments

- The Department for Health release hospital admission data for assaults on an ad hoc basis. Within this data there is a category for X99 - *Assault by sharp object*. The link for the most recently released publication is listed below and the data can usually be found in the *Monthly HES data – Monthly topic of interest* section of the HES online website

www.hesonline.nhs.uk/Ease/servlet/ContentServer?siteID=1937&categoryID=1972

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statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk