

Compendium

Offences involving the use of weapons



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1 . Main points

- In the year ending March 2015, there were 7,866 offences in which firearms were involved, a 2% increase compared with the previous year. This is the first increase in offences involving firearms in 10 years. Offences involving knives or sharp instruments also rose by 2% over the same period (to 26,374).
- There were 19 fatalities resulting from offences involving firearms in the year ending March 2015; 10 fewer than the previous year and the lowest since the series began in 1969.
- People aged between 15 and 34 made up a disproportionate number of those seriously or fatally injured from offences involving firearms (70% of the total, while constituting just 26% of the population).
- Of the 26,374 offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, 10,270 (39%) were used in a robbery and 13,488 (51%) as part of assault with injury or assault with intent to cause serious harm offences.
- Findings from year ending March 2015 CSEW show that 5.8% of 10 to 15 year olds and 4.5% of 16 to 29 year olds said they knew someone who carried a knife for their own protection.

2 . Summary

This chapter presents analyses of offences involving weapons recorded by the police in the year ending March 2015, specifically of firearms and knives or other sharp instruments. The firearms data collection covers any notifiable offence involving firearms while coverage of the knives or sharp instruments data is limited to 7 of the most serious violent and sexual offences. Analysis is also carried out on knife carrying by young people, using data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

The data in this section are for the year ending March 2015. [Figures for the year ending September 2015](#) show that the number of offences involving weapons, especially knives or sharp instruments, has increased. These increases will be analysed in subsequent publications.

3 . Offences involving the use of firearms: Introduction

Information is available from the police on whether a firearm is used during any recorded notifiable offence¹. If a firearm had been used, the Home Office receive additional data about the circumstances of that offence².

'Offences involving firearms' encompass any notifiable offence recorded by the police where a firearm has been fired, used as a blunt instrument or been used as a threat. Firearm possession offences, where the firearm has not been used in the course of another offence, are not included in this analysis. These offences are published in [Appendix Table A4 in the Crime in England and Wales quarterly release](#).

The different types of firearms included in this section mirror those covered by the [Firearms Act 1968](#) and the associated amendments to the Act. These are:

- firearms that use a controlled explosion to fire a projectile - this category includes handguns, shotguns and rifles -these types of weapon are often used in more serious offences, and tend to account for most of the fatalities and more serious injuries that arise
- imitation firearms - this category includes replica weapons, as well as low-powered weapons which fire small plastic pellets, such as BB guns and soft air weapons - while injuries can occur from offences involving these weapons, they are less common and tend to be less serious
- air weapons- the majority of offences which involve air weapons relate to criminal damage - while air weapons can cause serious injury (and sometimes fatalities), by their nature they are less likely to do so than firearms that use a controlled explosion

Firearms that use a controlled explosion and imitation firearms are combined for the purposes of some analyses in this section, creating 2 broad categories: non-air weapons and air weapons.

Although information is collected on the type of weapon used in an offence, it is not always possible to identify the firearm. For example, some imitation weapons are so realistic that they are indistinguishable from a real firearm. The police will record which type of weapon has been used in an offence given the evidence available. The categorisation of the weapon may also depend on descriptions given by victims or witnesses. If the police do not have sufficient information about the type of firearm used in the offence (for example, if the weapon was not recovered, or if the firearm was concealed during the offence), then the police will record the weapon as an “unidentified firearm”.

In accordance with the [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#), statistics based on police recorded crime data have been assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and found not to meet the required standard for designation as National Statistics. The full assessment report can be found on the [UK Statistics Authority website](#).

Notes for offences involving the use of firearms: Introduction

1. Notifiable offences cover those that could possibly be tried by a jury (these include some less serious offences, such as minor theft that would not usually be dealt with in this way) plus a few additional closely related offences, such as assault without injury.
2. The overall firearm offence figures reported here differ from those in the Crime in England and Wales quarterly releases for 2 reasons; firstly because these data contain air weapon offences, whereas the quarterly releases exclude these offences, and secondly because data in the quarterly releases are provisional and are not reconciled with police forces before publication.

4 . Offences involving the use of firearms - Prevalence and trends

Offences involving firearms make up a small proportion of overall recorded crime. In the year ending March 2015, they were used in approximately 0.2% of all police recorded offences, the same proportion seen for the last 4 years ([Appendix Table 3.01](#)). Ten years ago, in the year ending March 2005, firearms were used in approximately 0.4% of all police recorded offences. More detail on the use of firearms as a proportion of selected offence types is included in the ‘Types of offences where firearms are used’ section later in this chapter.

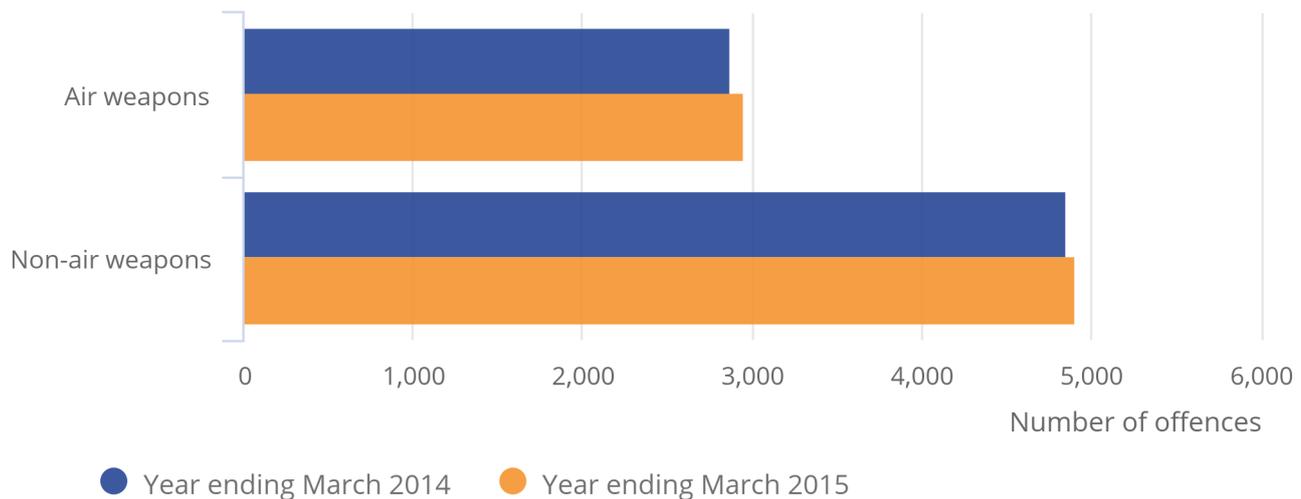
In the year ending March 2015, the police recorded 7,866 offences involving a firearm, an increase of 2% compared with the previous year (7,729 offences). This is the first increase in offences involving firearms in 10 years. There were increases in both air weapon (3%) and non-air-weapon (1%) offences over the last year (Figure 3.1; [Appendix Table 3.02](#)).

Figure 3.1 Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used, year ending March 2014 and year ending March 2015

England and Wales

Figure 3.1 Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used, year ending March 2014 and year ending March 2015

England and Wales



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Air weapon percentage change = 3%, Non-air weapons percentage change = 1%.

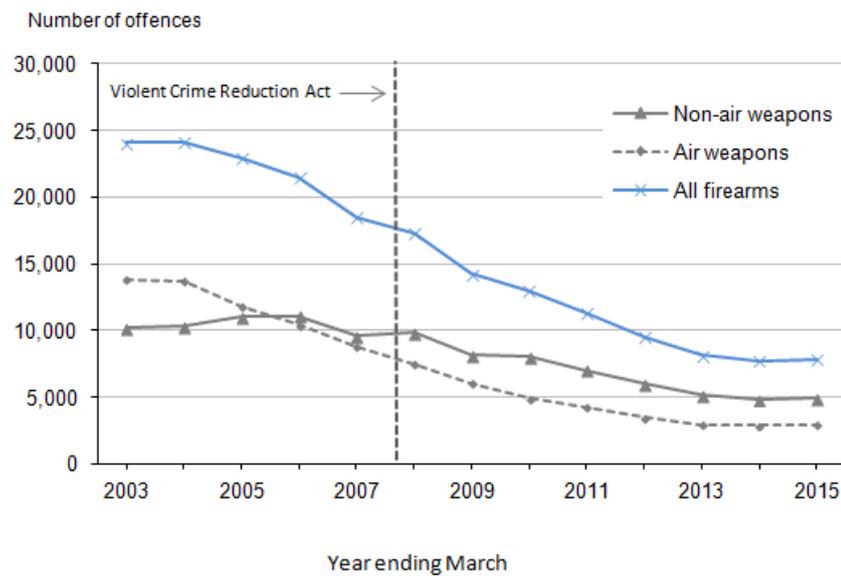
Up until the recent 2% rise, the number of offences involving firearms has been falling year-on-year since its peak in the year ending March 2004 (when 24,094 offences were recorded). The latest figure of 7,866 offences represents a fall of two-thirds (67%) since then (Figure 3.2):

- the number of offences involving air weapons has fallen by 10,868 offences (79%) since the year ending March 2003, when the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) was introduced, from 13,822 to 2,954 offences
- non-air weapon offences have fallen by more than half since the year ending March 2003 (a decrease of 5,336 offences) to 4,912 offences - non-air weapon offences peaked later (at 11,088 offences in the year ending March 2006) than those involving air weapons

The small percentage increase in offences involving firearms this year could in part be due to improvements in the police recording of crime. This follows the inspections of forces by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), the [Public Administration Select Committee \(PASC\)](#) inquiry into crime statistics, and the UK Statistics Authority's decision to remove the National Statistics designation from recorded crime. This renewed focus has led to improved compliance with the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS), contributing to the increase in overall police recorded violence. However, offences involving firearms are likely to have been less affected by changes in recording practices than overall police recorded crime, so part of the increase could be due to a genuine increase in crime. While there is an increase seen in overall offences involving firearms over the last year, offences involving the more serious types of weapon (handguns, shotguns and rifles combined) has fallen slightly, by 1%, with increases seen in offences involving less serious firearms, such as air weapons, imitation firearms and unidentified firearms. For more information on these recording changes see the Overview chapter of this release.

Figure 3.2: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used, year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2015

England and Wales



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. The Violent Crime Reduction Act, introduced in October 2007, made it illegal to import firearms and tightened the rules for the manufacture and sale of certain types of weapons.

The type of weapon used in offences involving firearms has changed over the last decade. In the year ending March 2005, non-air weapons constituted 48% of offences involving firearms while 52% were air weapons. By the year ending March 2010, the proportion of offences involving non-air weapons had increased to 62%, with a corresponding fall in air weapons to 38%. Since the year ending March 2010, the proportions have remained similar. This reflects the relatively steeper fall in air weapon offences over this time period compared with non-air weapons ([Appendix Table 3.03](#)).

5 . Individual weapon types: Non air-weapons

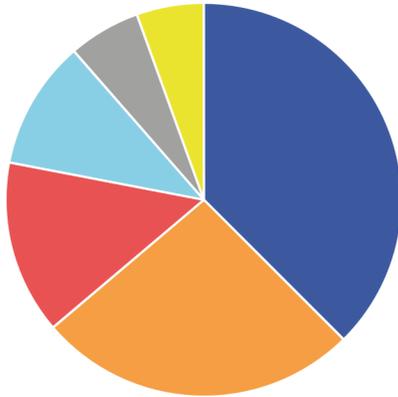
In the year ending March 2015, handguns were used in 26% (2,062) of offences involving firearms, making them the most commonly used firearm after air weapons (Figure 3.3). Imitation weapons were used in 14% (1,123) of offences involving firearms, while in 11% (833) of offences the type of firearm used was unidentified.

Figure 3.3: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used, by type of principal weapon, year ending March 2015

England and Wales

Figure 3.3: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used, by type of principal weapon, year ending March 2015

England and Wales



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

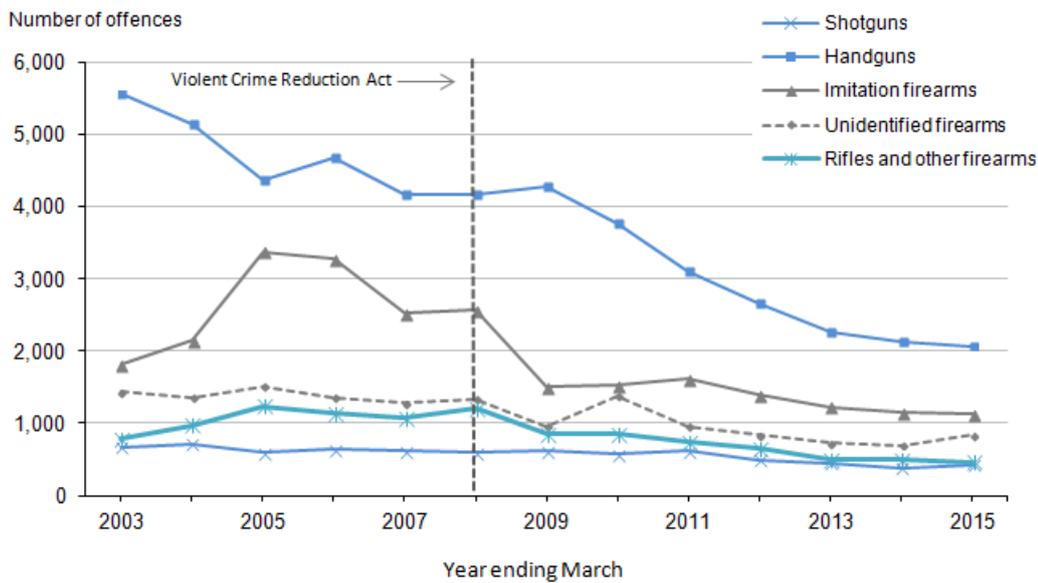
1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.

Over the longer-term, there have been steep falls in all of these weapon types (Figure 3.4). Offences involving handguns have fallen from a peak of 5,549 in the year ending March 2003 to 2,062 in the year ending March 2015, a fall of almost two-thirds (63%). The number of imitation weapon offences peaked later, at 3,373 in the year ending March 2005, but have since fallen by two-thirds (67%) to 1,123 in the year ending March 2015. The number of offences involving unidentified firearms also peaked in the year ending March 2005 (1,500 offences) and has fallen by 44% since then, to 833 in the year ending March 2015.

In the year ending March 2015, shotguns were used in 5% (431) of offences involving firearms recorded by police. The trend in shotgun offences differs to that for other non-air weapons, with falls not seen until recent years (Figure 3.4). Between the year ending March 2005 and year ending March 2011, there were around 600 shotgun offences per year. From the year ending March 2011 to the year ending March 2014, the number of shotgun offences fell each year, falling by 37% overall in this period to 387. The number of these type of offences increased by 11% in the most recent year, to 431.

Figure 3.4: Offences recorded by the police in which non-air weapons were reported to have been used, by type of principal weapon, year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2015

England and Wales



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. More explicit guidelines for the classification of weapons introduced on 1 April 2004 may have affected the recording of firearm offences committed using handguns, imitation weapons, and other weapons.
3. The Violent Crime Reduction Act introduced in October 2007 made it illegal to import or sell imitation firearms and tightened the rules for the manufacture and sale of certain types of air weapon.
4. Imitation firearms include weapons such as BB guns and soft air weapons, which can fire small plastic pellets at low velocity.
5. Rifles and other firearms includes starting guns, prohibited firearms (including CS gas) and other firearms.

In contrast to the national picture, where handguns are used in 26% of offences involving firearms, the proportion of offences involving handguns is higher in some of the major metropolitan areas. For example, handguns were used in over 50% of offences involving a firearm recorded by the Merseyside and West Midlands police forces. Air weapons were used in a small minority of offences recorded by these forces (less than 10% in each force, data not shown).

6 . How firearms were used

The data collection on offences involving firearms includes information on how the weapon was used; either being fired, used as a threat or as a blunt instrument. In the year ending March 2015, of the 7,866 offences recorded by the police, the firearm was ([Appendix Table 3.03](#)):

- fired in 55% of cases (4,302 offences) - this has fallen from 70% in the year ending March 2005
- used as a threat in 43% of cases (3,357 offences) - this has increased since the year ending March 2005, when firearms were used as a threat in 27% of all offences involving a firearm
- used as a blunt instrument in 3% of cases (207 offences) - this is the same proportion as in the year ending March 2005

The likelihood of a weapon being fired varied considerably by weapon type (Figure 3.5; [Appendix Table 3.03](#)):

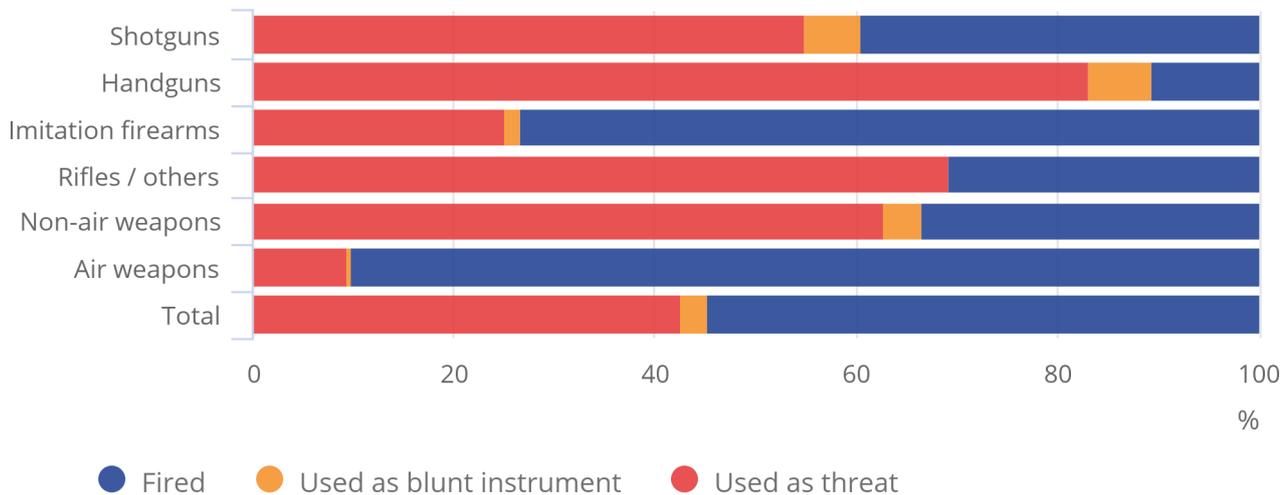
- air weapons were fired in 90% of the 2,954 offences in which they were involved (2,665 offences) and were therefore the most likely weapon to be fired of the main firearm categories - this may reflect that air weapon offences largely do not come to the attention of police unless the weapon is fired and that air weapons are less likely to be used in more serious offences compared with some other weapon types - almost three quarters (74%) of offences involving air weapons were criminal damage offences, compared with just 7% of non-air weapon offences ([Appendix Table 3.08](#)):
- in contrast, handguns were fired in just 10% of the 2,062 offences in which they were used (216 offences) - in 83% of offences they were used as a threat and in 6% as a blunt instrument
- shotguns were used in 431 recorded offences and, of these, in 39% of offences they were fired and in 55% were used to threaten

Figure 3.5: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used, by type of principal weapon and weapon usage, year ending March 2015

England and Wales

Figure 3.5: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used, by type of principal weapon and weapon usage, year ending March 2015

England and Wales



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Imitation firearms include weapons such as BB guns and soft air weapons, which can fire small plastic pellets at low velocity.
3. Rifles/others includes starting guns, supposed/type unknown, prohibited firearms (including CS gas) and other firearms.

In the year ending March 2005, firearms were fired in 70% of offences in which they were involved; by the year ending March 2009 the proportion had fallen to 56%. The proportion has remained relatively stable since the year ending March 2009 to the year ending March 2015 ([Appendix Table 3.03](#)). This change is largely due to the fall in offences involving air weapons, which have fallen by a greater percentage than offences involving non-air weapons. Air weapons have consistently been more likely to be fired in an offence in which they were involved (in around 90% of offences) compared with non-air weapons.

7 . Injuries sustained in offences involving firearms

In the year ending March 2015, there were 1,340 injuries as a result of offences involving firearms ([Appendix Table 3.05](#)). This represents a 6% fall on the previous year (1,433 offences) and is the lowest number of injuries sustained due to offences involving firearms since 1972, when there were 1,130 injuries¹.

Severity of injuries sustained

Injuries sustained as a result of offences involving firearms are graded as being “slight”, “serious” (that is, requiring a stay in hospital or involving fractures, concussion, severe general shock, penetration by a bullet or multiple shot wounds) or “fatal”. In line with the large falls in the number of offences involving firearms recorded by the police since the year ending March 2003, there have been substantial decreases in all types of injury sustained resulting from these offences over this period:

- there were 19 fatalities resulting from firearms offences in the year ending March 2015, this compares with 29 recorded in the previous year and is the lowest annual number since the series began in 1969 - as in previous years, fatal injuries continue to constitute less than 1% of the total number of firearm offences
- serious and slight injuries have both fallen by approximately two-thirds between the year ending March 2003 and the year ending March 2015 (serious injuries from 572 to 183; slight injuries from 3,903 to 1,138) - serious injuries have remained at 2% to 3% of total firearm offences, and are currently at their lowest level since the year ending March 2003. Slight injuries have fluctuated between 14% and 21% since the year ending March 2003 - hence, while firearm offences have increased by 2% over the last year, the proportion of offences resulting in a serious injury are at a historically low level

Injuries by severity and weapon used

The seriousness of injuries sustained from offences involving firearms varies according to the type of weapon used. This is to be expected given the range of mechanisms and projectiles associated with individual weapons (for example, air propulsion/controlled explosion; bullet/pellet) and variations in the circumstances and offences in which they are used (Table 3.1, [Appendix Table 3.04](#)).

As expected, the use of non-air weapons was much more likely to result in injury than air weapons. Overall, 52% of offences in which these weapons were fired resulted in an injury (1% were fatal, 8% were serious and 43% were slight). In contrast, air weapons were the least likely weapon to cause a fatal or serious injury. In the year ending March 2015, there were no fatalities resulting from the use of air weapons and only 1% of offences in which the weapon was fired resulted in serious injury (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used, by type of firearm and injury sustained when weapon was fired, year ending March 2015 [1]

England and Wales

| Weapon type | Number of offences | Fired | Percentages ² | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-----------|
| | | | % of those fired: | | | |
| | | | Fatal injury | Serious injury ³ | Slight injury | No injury |
| Shotguns | 431 | 39 | 5 | 23 | 12 | 61 |
| Handguns | 2,062 | 10 | 5 | 16 | 18 | 62 |
| Imitation firearms ⁴ | 1,123 | 73 | 0 | 2 | 54 | 44 |
| Rifles/others ⁵ | 1,296 | 33 | 0 | 9 | 46 | 45 |
| Non-air weapons | 4,912 | 33 | 1 | 8 | 43 | 48 |
| Air weapons | 2,954 | 95 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 90 |
| Total | 7,866 | 56 | 0 | 4 | 21 | 74 |

Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Percentages may not sum due to rounding.
3. A serious injury is one which necessitated a stay in hospital or involves fractures, concussion, severe general shock, penetration by a bullet or multiple shot wounds.
4. Imitation firearms include weapons such as BB guns and soft air weapons, which can fire small plastic pellets at low velocity.
5. Includes starting guns, supposed/type unknown, prohibited firearms (including CS gas) and other firearms.

Injuries to police officers

It is possible to identify how many victims of injuries sustained as a result of firearms offences were on-duty police officers. In the year ending March 2015, there were 5 injuries sustained by on-duty police officers, of which 1 was a serious injury and 4 were slight injuries. In general, the number of injuries sustained by police officers as a result of offences involving firearms is lower now than that seen 10 years ago (Table 3.2).

Since the year ending March 2005, 54% of offences where a police officer sustained a serious or slight injury were committed with CS gas or pepper spray. This reflects the fact that police officers in an operational role carry CS gas spray and in some offences this has been used against the officer.

Table 3.2: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used, in which a police officer on duty was injured by a firearm (excluding air weapons), by type of injury, year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2015 [1]

England and Wales

| Year | Total | Fatal injury | Number of offences | |
|--------------------|-------|--------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| | | | Serious injury ² | Slight injury |
| Apr '02 to Mar '03 | 12 | 0 | 1 | 11 |
| Apr '03 to Mar '04 | 14 | 1 | 3 | 10 |
| Apr '04 to Mar '05 | 23 | 0 | 2 | 21 |
| Apr '05 to Mar '06 | 23 | 1 | 6 | 16 |
| Apr '06 to Mar '07 | 21 | 0 | 3 | 18 |
| Apr '07 to Mar '08 | 24 | 1 | 3 | 20 |
| Apr '08 to Mar '09 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 8 |
| Apr '09 to Mar '10 | 17 | 0 | 1 | 16 |
| Apr '10 to Mar '11 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 8 |
| Apr '11 to Mar '12 | 8 | 0 | 1 | 7 |
| Apr '12 to Mar '13 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Apr '13 to Mar '14 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Apr '14 to Mar '15 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 4 |

Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. A serious injury is one which necessitated a stay in hospital or involves fractures, concussion, severe general shock, penetration by a bullet or multiple shot wounds.

Notes for injuries sustained in offences involving firearms

1. There have been a number of changes to how offences involving firearms have been recorded by the police between 1972 and the present, so these figures are not directly comparable. However, changes in recording have tended to increase the number of offences recorded.

8 . Types of offences where firearms are used

The most common offence types in which firearms are used are violence against the person, robbery and criminal damage, accounting for 78% of firearms offences in the year ending March 2015. Overall, the numbers of these offences involving firearms have decreased between the year ending March 2005 and the year ending March 2015 (Figure 3.6, [Appendix Table 3.08](#)):

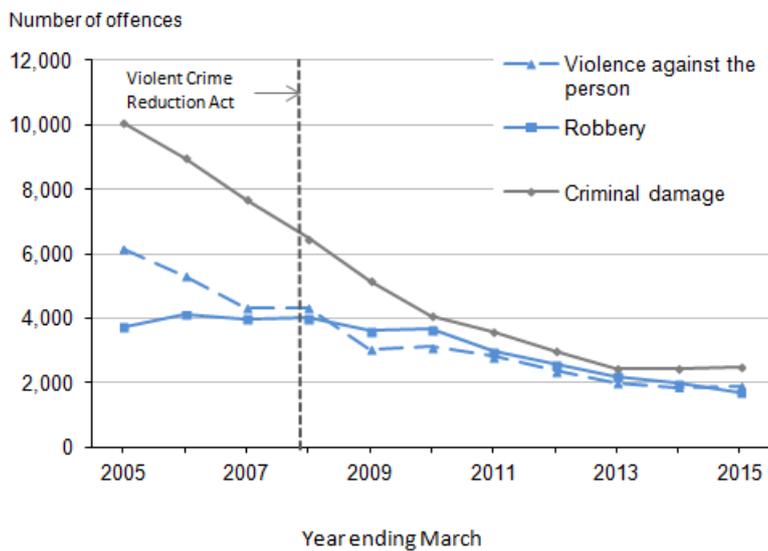
Violence against the person offences involving firearms have decreased by over two thirds (69%) between the year ending March 2005 (when they peaked) and the year ending March 2015 (from 6,139 to 1,908 offences). In the last year, violence against the person offences involving firearms increased by 2%. Over the same period, overall police recorded violence against the person increased by 23%¹.

Between the year ending March 2014 and the year ending March 2015 there was a 13% fall in robbery offences involving firearms, mirroring the 13% fall in overall police recorded robbery. The number of robberies involving a firearm remained steady between the year ending March 2004 and the year ending March 2008 at around 4,000 offences a year, before beginning to decline. Since the year ending March 2010, the rate of decline has increased and between the year ending March 2010 and the year ending March 2015 there was a 53% fall in the number of robberies involving a firearm (from 3,663 offences to 1,716)

Criminal damage offences involving firearms have shown the greatest fall over the last decade. Between the year ending March 2003 and the year ending March 2013 the number of recorded offences fell by 78%. However, from the year ending March 2013 to the year ending March 2015, the figures increased by 4% due to an increase in criminal damage offences involving air weapons. The increase in the year ending March 2014 was the first time the number of criminal damage offences had not decreased since the introduction of the NCRS and contrasts with the continued falls in overall criminal damage recorded by police over the same period ([Crime in England and Wales, Year ending March 2015](#)).

Figure 3.6: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used by selected offence type, year ending March 2005 to year ending March 2015

England and Wales



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Prior to the year ending March 2005 air weapon offences were recorded as homicide, attempted murder, other violence against the person, robbery, burglary, criminal damage or other offences. Unlike non-air weapons, data on the specific offences that constitute these groups is not held therefore the correction relating to 'other violence against the person' offences can only be applied to air weapon data from the year ending March 2005 onwards.
3. The Violent Crime Reduction Act introduced in October 2007 made it illegal to import or sell imitation firearms and tightened the rules for the manufacture and sale of certain types of air weapon.

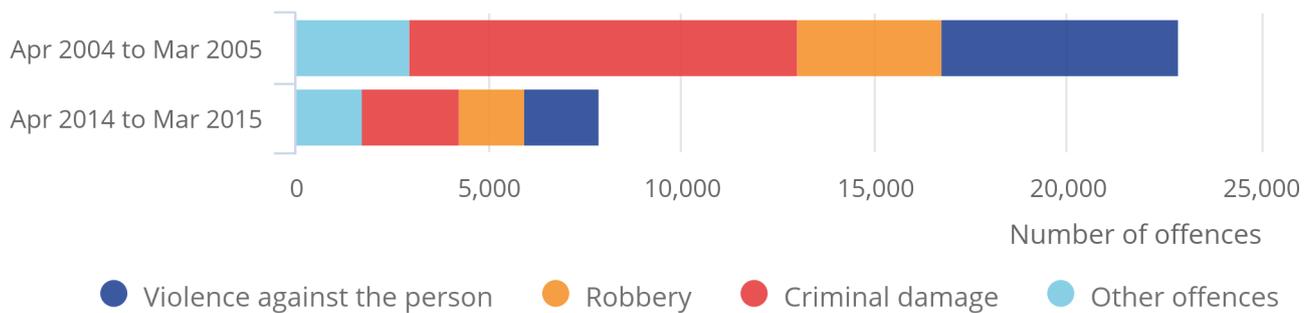
There has also been a change in the types of offences that have involved a firearm since the year ending March 2005. While there have been falls in firearm offences for all crime types, there has been an increase in the proportion of firearm offences which were robberies (16% to 22%) and a corresponding decrease in criminal damage offences (44% to 32%) (Figure 3.7, [Appendix Table 3.09](#)).

Figure 3.7: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used by selected offence type, year ending March 2005 and year ending March 2015

England and Wales

Figure 3.7: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used by selected offence type, year ending March 2005 and year ending March 2015

England and Wales



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.

Notes for types of offences where firearms are used

1. See the 'Overview' chapter of this publication for more detail on the increase in overall police recorded violence.

9 . Robberies involving a firearm

According to police recorded crime figures for the year ending March 2015, 89% of all robberies were of personal property and the remaining 11% were of business property ([Appendix Table A4: Crime in England and Wales, Year ending March 2015 \(623 Kb Excel sheet\)](#)). However, among robberies involving a firearm, 60% involved personal property and 40% business property in the year ending March 2015. In this period, only 2% of personal robberies involved the use of a firearm, compared with 12% of robberies of business property (data not shown).

Information is available on where the robberies involving firearms took place. In the year ending March 2015, of the 1,716 recorded robbery offences involving a firearm, 31% were committed in shops and garages (534 offences), 29% of offences (493) were committed on public highways and 18% were committed in a residential location (301 offences) (Figure 3.8, [Appendix Table 3.10](#)):

- robberies involving a firearm on public highways and shops and garages have been broadly decreasing since the year ending March 2003, from 3,452 offences to 1,027 in the year ending March 2015
- robberies involving a firearm committed in residential premises and 'other' areas have fluctuated considerably since the year ending March 2003 - the 301 robberies committed on residential premises in the year ending March 2015 is 8% (21 offences) higher than the number recorded in the year ending March 2003 but is well below the year ending March 2011 peak of 693 offences
- in the year ending March 2015, the police recorded 76 robberies of banks, building societies and post offices which involved a firearm, 17% lower than the number recorded in the previous year (92 offences) and 84% lower than the year ending March 2003 figure (464 offences)

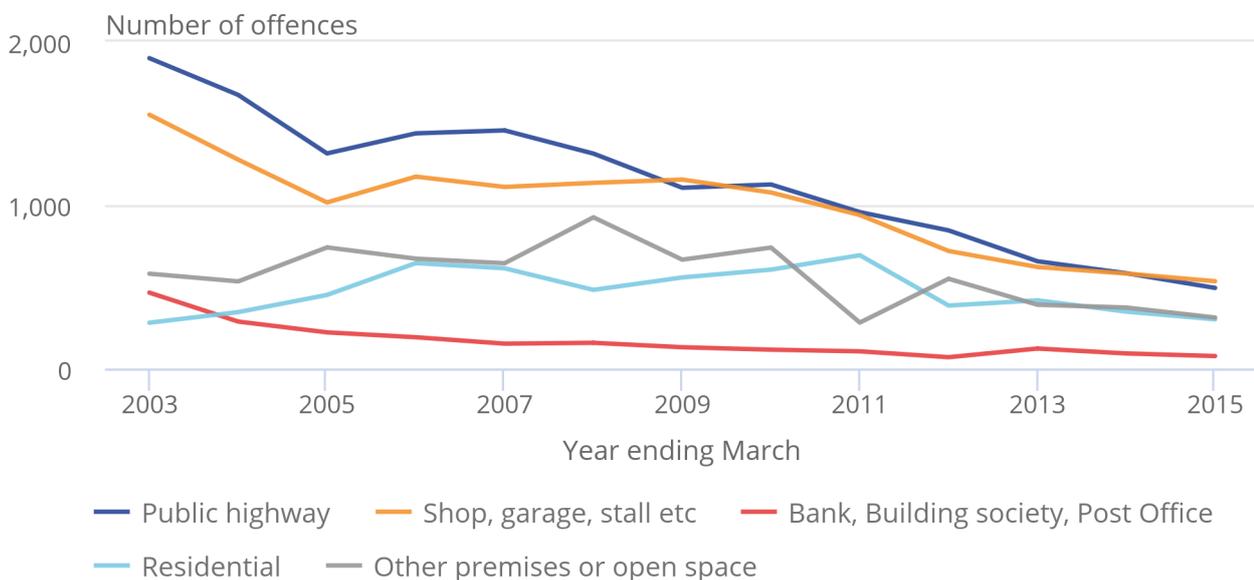
In the year ending March 2015, 61% of robberies involving firearms were committed with a handgun, 25% involved another type of firearm and in 15% of offences the firearm was unidentified ([Appendix Table 3.11](#)). In the majority of offence types involving firearms, a handgun was the most commonly used firearm.

Figure 3.8: Number of robberies in which firearms were reported to have been used, by location of offence, year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2015

England and Wales

Figure 3.8: Number of robberies in which firearms were reported to have been used, by location of offence, year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2015

England and Wales



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. These crimes are classified as robberies but are mostly break-ins where firearms have been used immediately before or at the time of stealing items from a residential property, and in order to steal these items. If firearms are used instead in the getaway, the crime is classified as a burglary.

10 . Geographical distribution of firearm offences

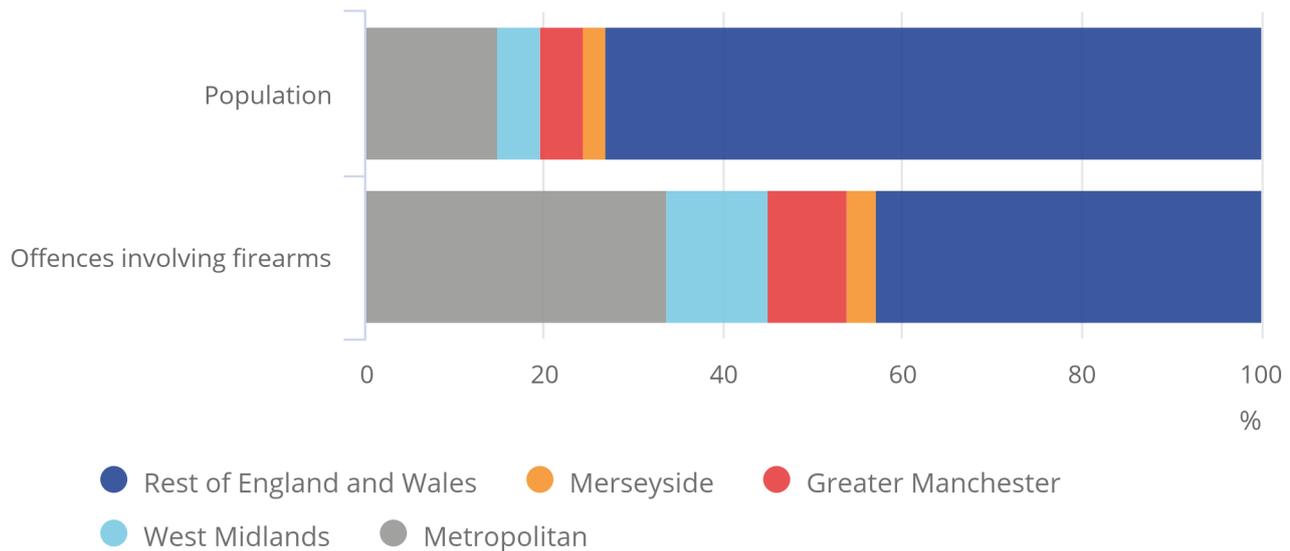
As in previous years, offences involving the use of non-air weapons (which tend to be used in more serious offences) are geographically concentrated. Just under 3 in every 5 (57%) offences recorded in the year ending March 2015 occurred in 4 police force areas: Metropolitan, West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Merseyside, all of which cover large urban areas. In comparison, just over a quarter (27%) of the population of England and Wales reside in the areas covered by these 4 forces (Figure 3.9, [Appendix Table 3.12](#)).

In the year ending March 2015, there were 9 firearm offences per 100,000 people in England and Wales. For the 4 urban forces mentioned above the rates were ¹:

- 20 per 100,000 in the West Midlands police force area
- 19 per 100,000 in the Metropolitan police force area
- 16 per 100,000 in the Greater Manchester police force area
- 12 per 100,000 in the Merseyside police force

Figure 3.9: Proportion of firearm offences, excluding air weapons, in four police force areas and the rest of England and Wales, compared with population profile of those forces, year ending March 2015

Figure 3.9: Proportion of firearm offences, excluding air weapons, in four police force areas and the rest of England and Wales, compared with population profile of those forces, year ending March 2015



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. The population figures are based on mid-2014 estimates from the Office for National Statistics.

Notes for geographical distribution of firearm offences

1. Population estimates are based on number of people resident in each police force area while number of offences recorded may include those committed against non-residents, for example people who travel into the city to work. This could partly explain the differences in rates between those areas with large non-resident populations (for example, cities) and those with lower non-resident populations.

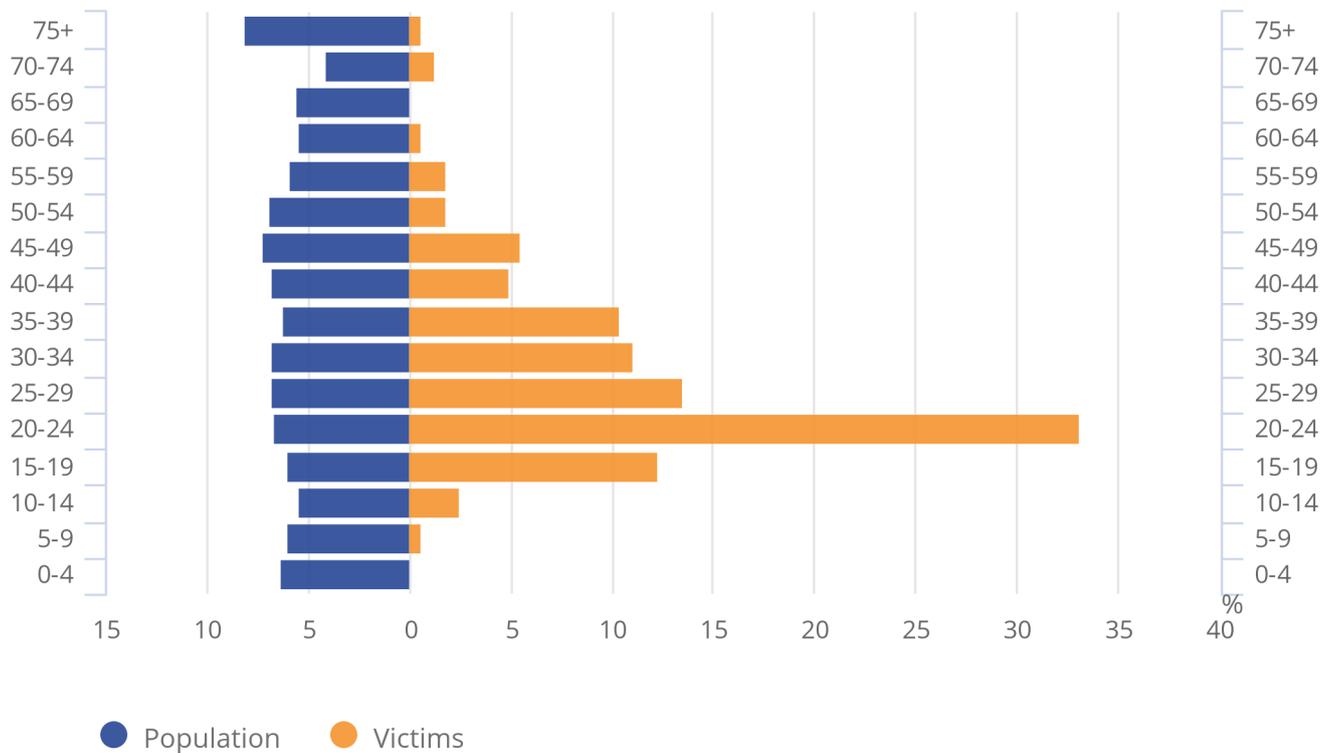
11 . Firearm offences by victim characteristics

As in previous years, in the year ending March 2015 there was variation in the risk of being a victim of an offence involving a non-air weapon by age¹ ([Appendix Table 3.13](#)):

- of the non-air weapon offences in which the age of the victim was known (91% of all instances), 55% of victims were aged between 15 and 34 even though this age group makes up only 26% of the population of England and Wales
- people aged 60 years and over were less likely to become victims, accounting for 5% of victims of non-air weapon offences but comprising 23% of the population
- when the analysis is restricted to victims who were seriously or fatally injured (163 victims for whom age was known) the difference is even more pronounced: 15 to 34 year olds formed 70% of victims (of which 33% were 20 to 24 year olds), while 2% of victims were aged 60 years or over (Figure 3.10)

Figure 3.10: Age profile of fatally or seriously injured firearm victims, excluding air weapons, compared to population profile for England and Wales, year ending March 2015

Figure 3.10: Age profile of fatally or seriously injured firearm victims, excluding air weapons, compared to population profile for England and Wales, year ending March 2015



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Excludes 2 cases where victim age was unknown.
3. The population figures are based on mid-2014 estimates from the Office for National Statistics.

Of the 4,107 (84%) offences involving non-air weapons in which victim ethnicity was recorded ¹, 67% of victims were White (2,756 offences), 15% were Asian (635), 14% were Black (568) and 4% (148) were from other minority ethnic groups ([Appendix Table 3.14](#)).

By way of comparison, 2012 population estimates (based on the [2011 Census](#)) indicate that 86% of the population of England and Wales were White, 8% were Asian, 3% were Black and the remaining 3% were of other ethnicities. Black and Asian people are therefore over-represented and White people under-represented as victims of such offences. However, it should be noted that these results have not been age-standardised and there is a relationship between age and being a victim of offences involving firearms. In addition, the age profile of the population varies by ethnicity, for example the Black ethnic group has a younger age profile than White.

Finally, there are also likely to be important socio-economic factors in offences involving firearms that cannot be examined using police recorded crime data. There is evidence from other studies that suggests that ethnicity is just one of many factors in violent incidents in general. [The social patterning of deaths due to assault in Scotland, 1980-2005: population-based study](#), for example, investigated Scottish homicides between 1980 and 2005, and concluded that “contextual influences of the neighbourhood of residence might be more important than individual characteristics in determining the victims of assault”.

Of the 4,448 offences involving a firearm, excluding air weapons, where the sex of the victim was recorded, 70% of victims were male and 30% were female (data not shown). These proportions have remained relatively consistent over the last 10 years.

Notes for firearm offences by victim characteristics

1. Age breakdowns are not available for all air weapons offences.

12 . Offences involving knives or sharp instruments

Introduction

Seven of the more serious types of offence in the police recorded crime data (homicide, threats to kill, assault with injury/assault with intent to cause serious harm, robbery, attempted murder, rape and sexual assault) can be broken down by whether or not a knife or sharp instrument was involved¹. Reporting is limited to these 7 offences to reduce the burden on police forces. They cover the vast majority of offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, there are very few knives or sharp instruments involved in other offence types. Statistics on offences recorded by the police involving a knife or sharp instrument are also published on a quarterly basis in the [Crime in England and Wales releases](#).

Unlike the data for firearms, the police do not provide detailed information at an offence level in this collection. For this reason it is not possible to analyse victim characteristics or the particular type of sharp instrument used.

Notes for offences involving knives or sharp instruments

1. A sharp instrument is any object that pierces the skin (or in the case of a threat, is capable of piercing the skin), for example a broken bottle.

13 . Offences involving knives or sharp instruments - prevalence and trends

In the year ending March 2015, knives or other sharp instruments were involved in a total of 26,374 offences recorded by the police, an increase of 2% compared with the previous year (25,975). This increase is the first rise in the number of recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument since the comparable series began in the year ending March 2009.

It is generally thought that these categories of offence are less likely to be influenced by changes in recording practice than less serious violent crime, and thus the rise is likely to represent a real change in the downward trend seen in recent years. However, there was a 15% rise in the overall number of these 7 selected offences recorded by the police over the same period ([Crime in England and Wales, Year ending March 2015](#)). This 15% rise is in part likely to be due to improvements in police recording of crime (see the 'Overview' chapter of this release for further information). Other evidence, albeit focused on the most serious knife-related crimes relating to hospital admissions for assault with a sharp instrument have shown little change in the past year, following declines in previous years (see 'Hospital admissions for assault with knives or sharp instruments' section later in the chapter). Taken together, the above suggests the picture is a complex one, with potential contributors to the reported rise in knife crime being improvements in recording processes, a genuine rise in knife crime, and a more proactive police response to it.

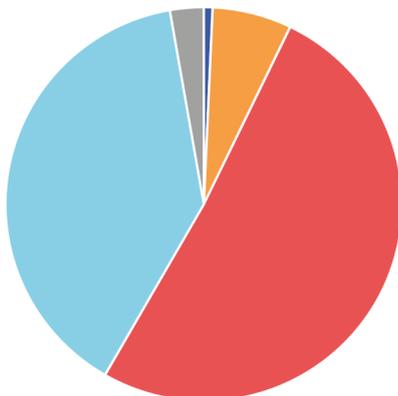
In the year ending March 2015, around 90% of knife or sharp instrument offences were either robbery (10,270 offences, 39%) or assault with injury/assault with intent to cause serious harm offences (13,488 offences, 51%). Homicides involving a knife or sharp instrument made up around 1% of the total number of knife or sharp instrument offences (Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.11: Offences recorded by police in which a knife or sharp instrument was used, year ending March 2015

England and Wales

Figure 3.11: Offences recorded by police in which a knife or sharp instrument was used, year ending March 2015

England and Wales



Source: Police recorded crime and Homicide Index, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. 'Other offences' includes: attempted murder, rape and sexual assault.

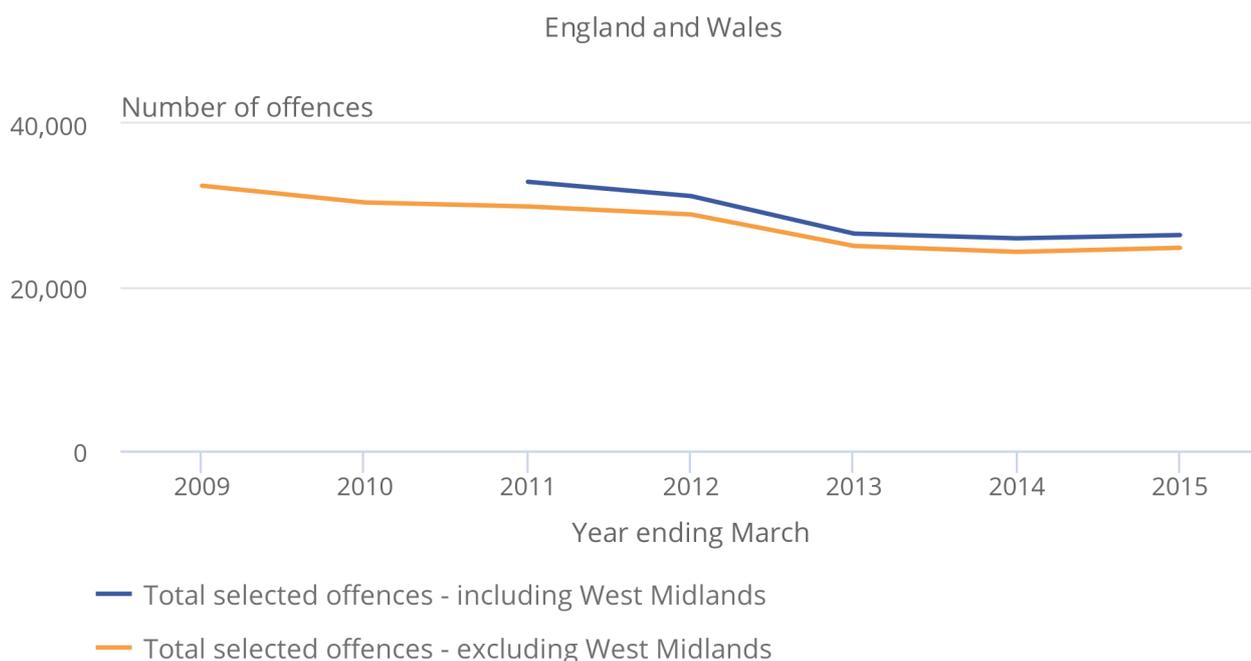
Before the year ending March 2011, there were known inconsistencies in knife or sharp instrument recording practices between police forces. West Midlands police force included unbroken bottle and glass offences in their returns but have excluded these offences in line with other forces since the year ending March 2011¹. As such, the data since the year ending March 2011 are not comparable with those from earlier years. One force (Surrey) continues to record offences involving unbroken bottles and glass in its knife or sharp instrument returns; however, the estimated number of such offences is small enough that it is not likely to impact on national trends. Thus, the years from the year ending March 2011 onwards are broadly comparable, while in order to extend the time series further back it is necessary to exclude West Midlands.

In the 4 years from the year ending March 2011 to the year ending March 2015, the number of recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument fell 20% from 32,889 to 26,374 (Figure 3.12). Most of this decrease occurred between the year ending March 2012 and the year ending March 2013 where the number of recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument fell by 15%, from 31,148 to 26,552 (Figure 3.12). The 2% increase seen in the most recent year is the first rise in the number of recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument in the comparable period from year ending March 2011 to year ending March 2015.

Figure 3.12: Number of police recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, including and excluding West Midlands PFA, year ending March 2009 to year ending March 2015

England and Wales

Figure 3.12: Number of police recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, including and excluding West Midlands PFA, year ending March 2009 to year ending March 2015



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office, and Homicide Index, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. Offences included in figures are those listed in Figure 3.11.

Despite the large reduction over the 4 years for which there are complete police force area data, the proportion of police recorded crimes for the 7 selected offences in which a knife or sharp instrument was used has fallen only slightly, from 7% in the year ending March 2011 to 5% in the year ending March 2015 ([Crime in England and Wales, Year ending March 2015](#)). This is because the equivalent offences that did not involve a knife or sharp instrument have also been falling, but at a slower rate.

Notes for offences involving knives or sharp instruments - prevalence and trends

1. See Chapter 5 of the [User Guide](#).

14 . Geographical distribution of offences involving knives or sharp instruments

The Metropolitan Police recorded 37% (9,680 offences) of all knife or sharp instrument offences in England and Wales in the year ending March 2015. This figure is equivalent to 113 offences per 100,000 population, around 2 and a half times the rate of England and Wales as a whole (46 offences per 100,000 population). In forces other than the Metropolitan Police, as with offences involving firearms, those covering urban areas typically recorded more offences involving knives or sharp instruments and had higher offence rates per 100,000 population than those covering rural areas ([Appendix Table 3.17](#))¹⁰.

Notes for geographical distribution of offences involving knives or sharp instruments

1. Population estimates are based on number of people resident in each police force area while number of offences recorded may include those committed against non-residents, for example people who travel into the city to work. This could partly explain the differences in rates between those areas with large non-resident populations (for example, cities) and those with lower non-resident populations.

15 . Hospital admissions for assault with knives or sharp instruments

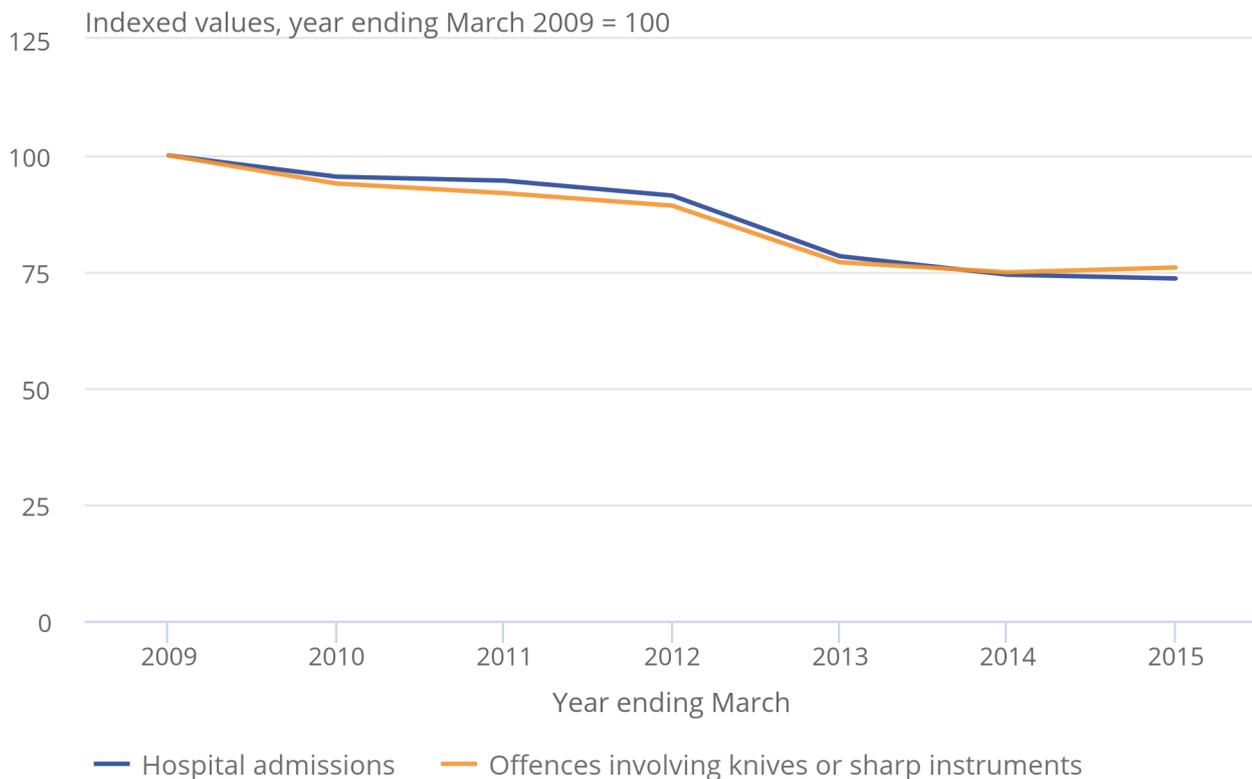
Further information on trends in offences involving knives or sharp instruments for England is available from '[Provisional Monthly Hospital Episode Statistics for Admitted Patient Care, Outpatients and Accident and Emergency Data – April 2015](#)'.

Between the year ending March 2014 and the year ending April 2015, hospital admissions for assault with sharp instruments fell by 1% (40 admissions) to 3,614. This follows a period of steady decline between the year ending March 2007 and the year ending March 2014 from 5,720 to 3,654; a fall of 36% over this period ([Appendix Table 3.18](#)).

As expected, the absolute number of recorded knife crime offences is considerably higher than hospital admissions. Hospital admissions due to offences involving knives and sharp instruments can be expected to be restricted to more serious stabbings and wounding. However, between the year ending March 2009 and the year ending April 2015, trends in hospital admissions for assault with sharp instruments and police recorded offences involving knives or sharp instruments have tracked each other very closely. Both fell sharply between the year ending March 2012 and the year ending March 2013 before remaining steady over the last 2 years (Figure 3.13). This provides further evidence that changes in the number of knife crime offences are not likely to be due to changes in recording practices.

Figure 3.13: Indexed admissions to NHS hospitals with injuries from assault with a sharp object and police recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, England, year ending March 2009 to year ending April 2015

Figure 3.13: Indexed admissions to NHS hospitals with injuries from assault with a sharp object and police recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, England, year ending March 2009 to year ending April 2015



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office, and Hospital Episode Statistics, NHS Health and Social Care Information Centre

Notes:

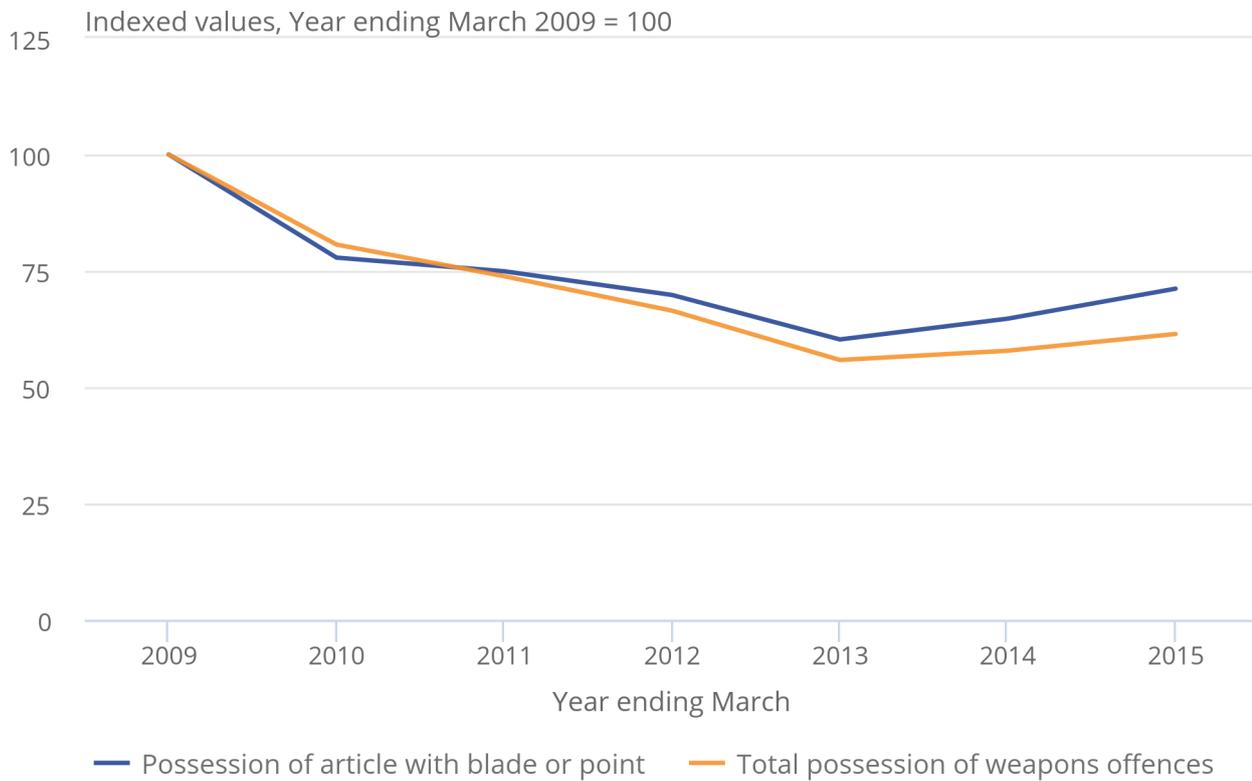
1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. All Welsh PFAs and West Midlands PFA are excluded.

16 . Possession of knives or sharp instruments

The number of offences of possession of an article with a blade or sharp point recorded by the police increased by 10% between the year ending March 2014 and the year ending March 2015 (9,050 to 9,951) ([Appendix Table A4; Crime in England and Wales, Year ending March 2015](#)). This latest increase follows a downward trend since the year ending March 2009, when the offence classification to specifically record possessions of article with blade or point was introduced. This figure can often be influenced by increases in targeted police action in relation to knife crime. The latest figure of 9,951 remains 29% below the recorded number of possessions of article with blade or point in year ending March 2009 (13,985) (Figure 3.14).

Figure 3.14: Indexed trends of possession of article with blade or point offences and total possession of weapons offences, England and Wales, year ending March 2009 to year ending March 2015

Figure 3.14: Indexed trends of possession of article with blade or point offences and total possession of weapons offences, England and Wales, year ending March 2009 to year ending March 2015



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.

17 . Knife carrying in 10 to 15 year olds and 16 to 29 year olds (CSEW)

This section presents findings from questions on knife-carrying from the self-completion ¹ module of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) for the year ending March 2015. These questions were asked of 10 to 15 year olds and 16 to 29 year olds. The questions were first asked in the year ending March 2012 survey for 10 to 15 year olds but were not asked in the adult survey until the year ending March 2014.

Firstly, respondents were asked whether they knew anyone who carried a knife for their own protection, for example, in case they got into a fight. According to the year ending March 2015 survey, 5.8% of 10 to 15 year olds said they knew someone who carried a knife for their own protection, a percentage that has not changed significantly over time² (Table 3.3). A similar percentage (4.5%) of 16 to 29 year olds said they knew someone who carried a knife, the same percentage as the previous year.

Secondly, respondents were asked whether they had personally carried a knife, in the last 12 months, for their own protection, in case they got into a fight for example. According to the year ending March 2015 survey, a very small proportion (0.5% of 10 to 15 year olds, and 0.6% of 16 to 29 year olds) said they personally carried a knife.

Table 3.3 Prevalence of knife carrying, 10-15 years old and 16-29 year olds, year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2015 Crime Survey of England and Wales

| | % | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Apr '11 to Mar '12 | Apr '12 to Mar '13 | Apr '13 to Mar '14 | Apr '14 to Mar '15 |
| 10-15 year olds | | | | |
| Know someone who carries a knife | 5.2 | 5.1 | 4.3 | 5.8 |
| Has personally carried a knife in the last 12 months | 0.7 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.5 |
| Unweighted base - number of children aged 10 to 15 ² | 3,915 | 2,866 | 2,917 | 2,358 |
| 16-29 year olds | | | | |
| Know someone who carries a knife | : | : | 4.5 | 4.5 |
| Has personally carried a knife in the last 12 months | : | : | 0.6 | 0.6 |
| Unweighted base - number of adults aged 16 to 29 ² | | | 2,567 | 2,315 |

Source Crime Survey for England and Wales, Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. These questions were first asked in the survey for 10-15s in the year ending March 2012 and for 16-29s in the year ending March 2014.
2. Includes don't know/don't want to answer.
3. : indicates that the CSEW question was not asked in that particular year.

Notes for knife carrying in 10 to 15 year olds and 16 to 29 year olds (CSEW)

1. 'Self-completion' means that the respondent reads the questions themselves and records their answers directly onto a laptop.
2. Although the estimate for the year ending March 2014 is significantly lower than the preceding year, as the estimate is also significantly lower than the subsequent year, it is thought that this is an outlier to the series.

18. Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs
- are well explained and readily accessible
- are produced according to sound methods
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.