

Compendium

## Offences involving the use of weapons

This chapter presents analyses of offences involving weapons recorded by the police in the year ending March 2016, specifically 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 year ending March 2016 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

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### Correction

#### 3 March 2017

Small errors have occurred in the Appendix Tables, one Bulletin Table and one figure in section 12 of the commentary due to incorrect links within the files. We have corrected these errors which affected Appendix Tables 3.05, 3.06, 3.14 and 3.17, and Figure 3.10 of the Bulletin Tables.

You can see all previous versions of this data on the previous versions page. We apologise for any inconvenience.

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# 1 . Main points

There were 8,399 offences in which firearms were involved; a 7% increase compared with the previous year. This is the second annual consecutive increase following a long-term downward trend in offences involving firearms.

Offences involving knives or sharp instruments also rose by 11% over the same period (to 28,859).

There were 26 fatalities resulting from offences involving firearms; 7 more than the previous year. However, the 19 fatalities in the previous year were the lowest since the series began in 1969.

Of the 28,859 offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, 15,137 (52%) were for assault with injury or assault with intent to cause serious harm and 10,516 (36%) were used in a robbery.

Among 10 to 15 year olds, 6.2% said they knew someone who carried a knife for their own protection, as did 4.2% of 16 to 29 year olds.

## 2 . Things you need to know about this release

### Firearms

Information is available from the police on whether a firearm is used during any recorded notifiable offence<sup>1</sup>. If a firearm had been used, the Home Office receive additional data about the circumstances of that offence<sup>2</sup>.

“ 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 that 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".

## Knives or other sharp instruments

Information is also available on whether an offence involved a knife or a sharp instrument. Seven of the more serious types of offence in the police recorded crime data (homicide, threats to kill, assault with injury or 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 involved. 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](#).

Before the year ending March 2011, there were known inconsistencies in knife or sharp instrument recording practices between police forces. West Midlands and Sussex police forces included unbroken bottle and glass offences in their returns but have excluded these offences in line with other forces since the year ending March 2011. 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 data 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 and Sussex.

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.

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: Things you need to know about this release

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.
3. 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.
4. See Chapter 5 of the [User Guide](#).

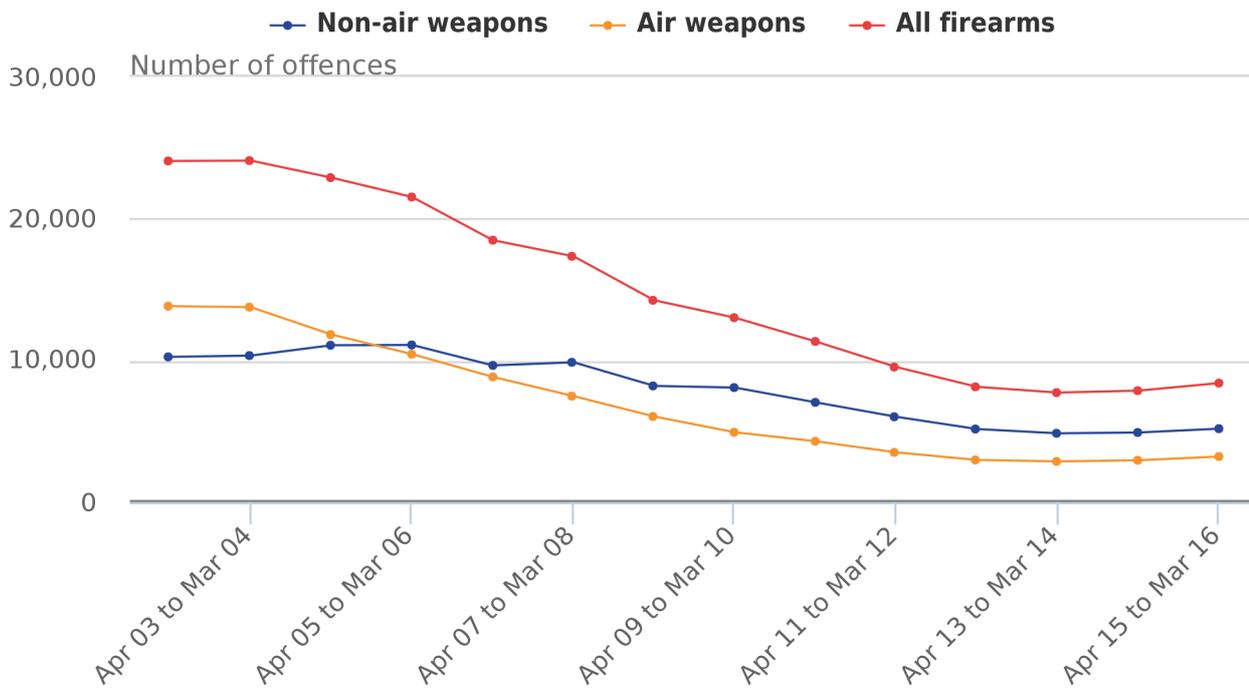
### 3 . Prevalence and trends of offences involving firearms

Offences involving firearms make up a small proportion of overall police recorded crime. In the year ending March 2016, they were used in approximately 0.2% of all police recorded offences (excluding fraud), the same proportion seen for the last 4 years ([Appendix Table 3.01](#)). This is a lower proportion than seen 10 years ago when 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.

The police recorded 8,399 offences involving a firearm in the year ending March 2016, an increase of 7% compared with the previous year (7,865 offences). There were increases in both air weapon (9%) and non-air weapon (6%) offences over the last year (Figure 3.1; [Appendix Table 3.02](#)).

This is the second consecutive annual increase in offences involving firearms but follows the decade between years ending March 2004 and March 2014 in which the number of offences involving firearms fell sharply from 24,094 to 7,729. The 8,399 offences recorded in the year ending March 2016 is around two-thirds lower (65%) than the peak (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 2003 to year ending March 2016**



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 or sell imitation firearms and tightened the rules for the manufacture and sale of certain types of air weapon.

The increase in offences involving firearms over the last 2 years 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 on the quality of recording has led to improved compliance with the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS).

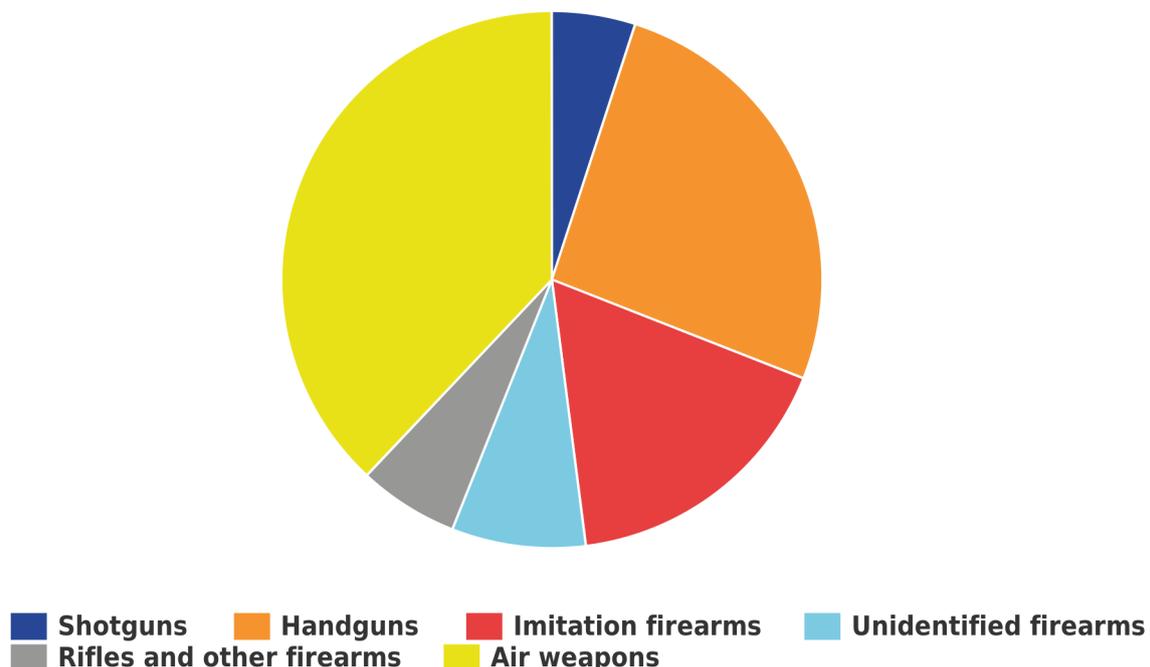
While there was an overall increase in offences involving firearms in the year ending March 2016, most of the increase was in less serious weapons such as imitation firearms (up 27%; 308 offences) and air weapons (up 9%; 263 offences). It is thought that these increases are due to improvements in police recording of these offences. Furthermore, there has been a decrease in the number of offences involving unidentified firearms, from 833 to 666 (a 20% fall). Information from the police has indicated that the identification of firearms involved in offences has improved in the last year. Therefore, some of the increase in offences involving handguns (up 5%, 96 offences) and imitation weapons may be partly due to this better identification. For more information on improvements in police recording see the 'Things you need to know' section in Chapter 1, the Overview.

## 4 . What types of weapons are used in offences involving firearms?

The type of weapon used in offences involving firearms has changed over the last decade. In the year ending March 2006, non-air weapons constituted 52% of offences involving firearms while 48% 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 ([Appendix Table 3.03](#)).

Handguns were used in 26% of all offences involving firearms (equivalent to 2,157 offences) in the year ending March 2016, making them the second most commonly used firearm after air weapons (Figure 3.2). Imitation weapons were used in 17% (1,431) of offences involving firearms, while in 8% (666) of offences the type of firearm used was unidentified.

**Figure 3.2: Offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used, by type of principal weapon, year ending March 2016**



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

Notes:

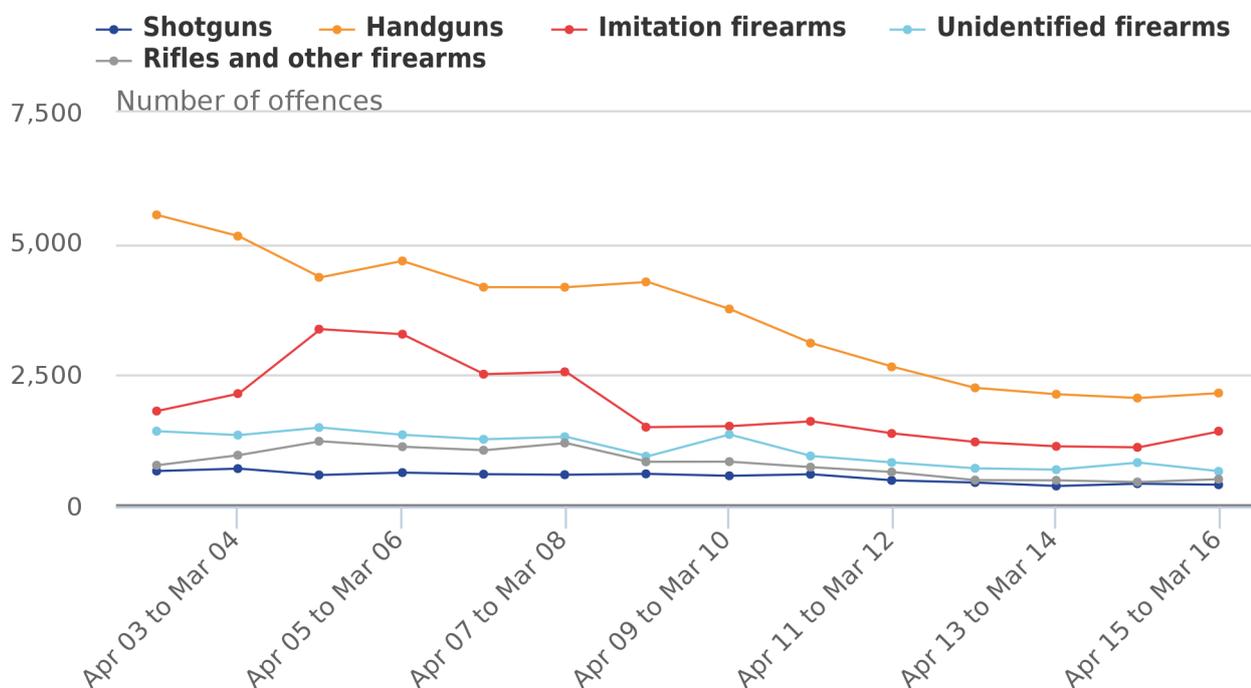
1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. A serious injury is one which necessitated a stay in hospital or involves fractures, concussion, severe general shock, penetration by a bullet or multiple shot wounds.

Over the longer-term, there have been steep falls in offences involving all types of firearms (Figure 3.3):

- offences involving handguns have fallen from a peak of 5,549 in the year ending March 2003 to 2,157 in the year ending March 2016, a fall of almost two-thirds (61%)
- the number of imitation weapon offences peaked later, at 3,373 in the year ending March 2005, but was 58% lower in the year ending March 2016 (1,431 offences)
- the number of offences involving unidentified firearms also peaked in the year ending March 2005 (1,500 offences) and has fallen by more than half (56%) since then, to 666 in the year ending March 2016

The trend in shotgun offences differs to that for other non-air weapons, with falls not seen until recent years (Figure 3.3). Shotguns were used in 5% (411) of offences involving firearms recorded by the police in the year ending March 2016. Between the year ending March 2005 and year ending March 2011, there were around 600 shotgun offences per year. In the last 3 years, there have been around 400 offences involving shotguns each year.

**Figure 3.3: 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 2016**



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.

## 5 . How were firearms 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. Of the 8,399 offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2016, the firearm was ([Appendix Tables 3.03 and 3.07](#)):

- fired in 56% of cases (4,727 offences): this proportion has remained fairly stable for the last 8 years but is lower than 10 years ago (67% in the year ending March 2006)
- used as a threat in 42% of cases (3,489 offences): again, this has been fairly stable for the last 8 years but is higher than 10 years ago (29% in year ending March 2006)
- used as a blunt instrument in 2% of cases (183 offences): this is the lowest number of blunt instrument firearm offences since the introduction of the NCRS in April 2002

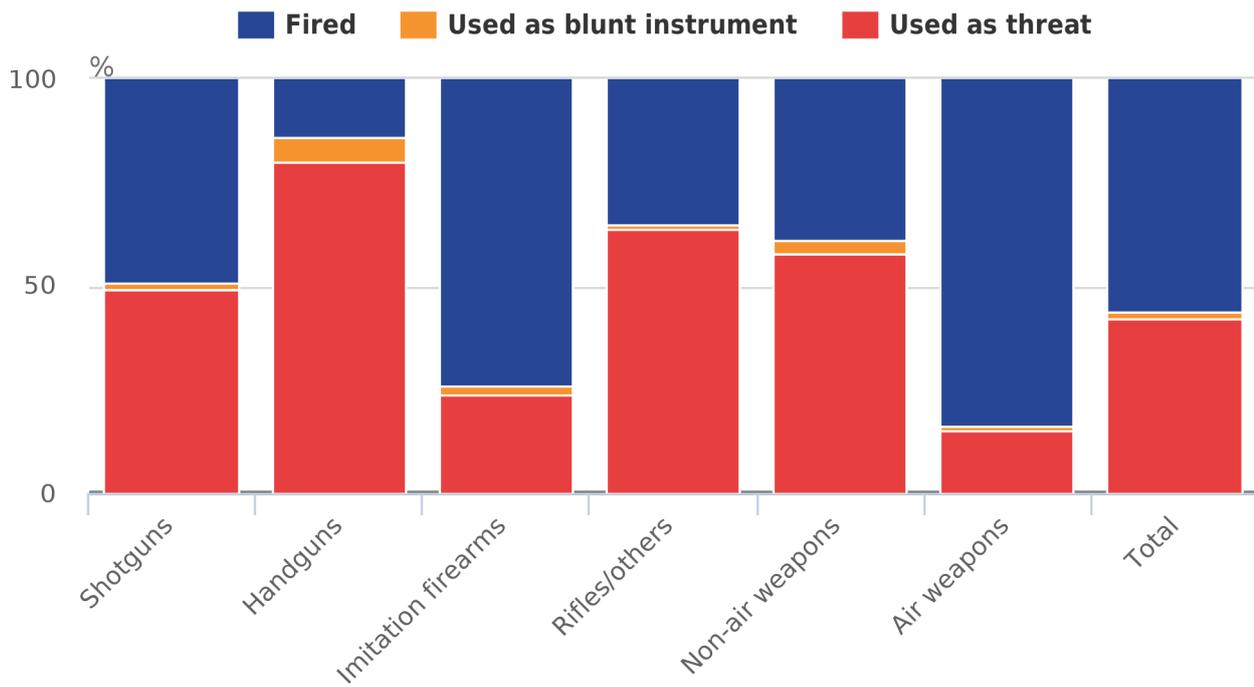
As in previous years, the likelihood of a weapon being fired varied considerably by weapon type (Figure 3.4; [Appendix Table 3.03](#)):

- air weapons were fired in 85% of the 3,217 offences in which they were involved (2,728 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, around two-thirds (67%) of offences involving air weapons were criminal damage offences, compared with just 6% of non-air weapon offences ([Appendix Table 3.08](#))
- in contrast, non-air weapons were fired in 39% of the offences in which they were involved (1,999 offences)

Within non-air weapons:

- handguns were fired in just 14% of the 2,157 offences in which they were used (310 offences); however, this is the highest proportion since the introduction of the NCRS in April 2002, in 80% of offences they were used as a threat and in 6% as a blunt instrument
- shotguns were fired in 49% of the 411 offences in which they were used and in 49% were used to threaten

**Figure 3.4: 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 2016**



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.

## 6 . Injuries sustained in offences involving firearms

There were 1,520 injuries as a result of offences involving firearms in the year ending March 2016 ( [Appendix Table 3.05](#)). Although this represents a 13% rise on the previous year, the number of injuries in the year ending March 2015 (1,340) was the lowest level seen since 1972, when there were 1,130 injuries<sup>1</sup>. The number of injuries in the last year is around two-thirds (70%) lower than 10 years ago (5,004 injuries in the year ending March 2006). The number of injuries tends to rise or fall in line with the overall number of offences. Over the last 10 years, 20% of offences involving firearms have resulted in an injury. In the year ending March 2016, 18% of offences involving firearms resulted in an injury, slightly below this 10 year average.

### Severity of injuries sustained

The firearms collection requires police to grade injuries sustained as a result of offences involving firearms 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 generally been substantial decreases in all types of injury sustained resulting from these offences over this period. In the year ending March 2016, there were increases in all types of injury in line with the increase in the total number of offences:

- there were 26 fatalities resulting from firearms offences, 7 higher than the previous year, the second lowest total since 1980; as in previous years, fatal injuries continue to constitute less than 1% of the total number of firearm offences
- serious injuries increased by 27% during the year ending March 2016, from 183 injuries to 232; however, the number of serious injuries is less than half recorded 10 years ago (595 injuries in the year ending March 2006)
- slight injuries, which consistently account for over 8 in 10 of the injuries caused by firearms, increased from 1,138 to 1,262 in the year ending March 2016, an 11% increase; slight injuries are at less than a third of the level than they were 10 years ago in the year ending March 2006 (4,359 injuries)

## **Injuries by severity and weapon used**

The severity 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 or controlled explosion; bullet or pellet) and variations in the circumstances and offences in which they are used (Table 3.1, [Appendix Table 3.04](#)).

**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 2016 <sup>1</sup>**

England and Wales

Weapon type	Number of offences	Percentages <sup>2</sup>				
		Of those fired:				
		Fatal injury	Serious injury <sup>3</sup>	Slight injury	No injury	
Shotguns	411	49	3	32	24	81
Handguns	2,157	14	5	35	49	87
Imitation firearms <sup>4</sup>	1,431	75	0	1	59	65
Rifles/others <sup>5</sup>	1,183	35	2	10	50	78
Non-air weapons	5,182	39	1	10	51	38
Air weapons	3,217	85	0	1	9	92
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,399</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>82</b>

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. There were 4 injuries sustained by on-duty police officers in the year ending March 2016, all of which were slight. 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).

**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 2016**

England and Wales

Year	Total	Fatal injury	Serious injury <sup>2</sup>	Slight injury
Number of offences				
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
Apr '15 to Mar '16	4	0	0	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, particularly in 1998 and 2002, so these figures are not directly comparable. However, changes in recording have led to increases in the number of offences recorded – therefore the number of injuries seen in the last few years is relatively low in the series which began in 1969.

## 7 . Types of offences where firearms are used

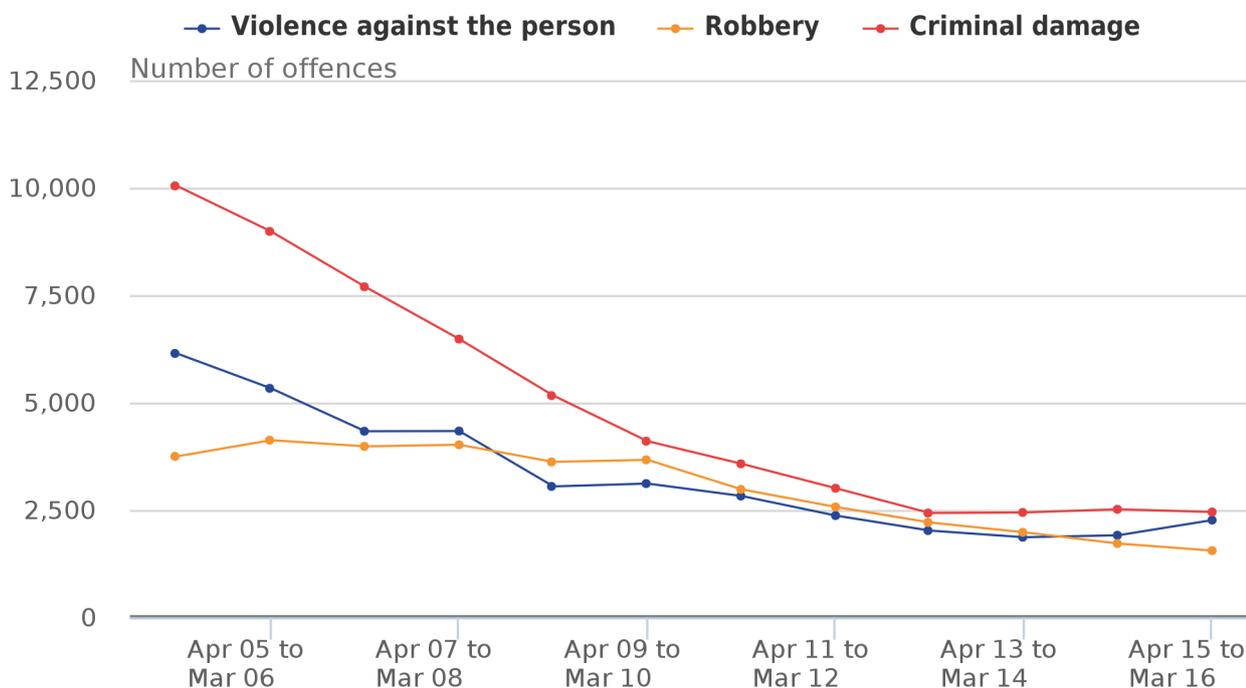
The most common offence types in which firearms are used are violence against the person (27%), criminal damage (29%) and robbery (18%). Together these 3 offences accounted for three-quarters (75%) of all firearms offences in the year ending March 2016. While there were sharp falls in all 3 of these offence types up to the year ending March 2012, since then the trends have differed (Figure 3.5, [Appendix Table 3.08](#)).

Violence against the person offences involving firearms have increased by 19% during the year ending March 2016, from 1,908 to 2,261. Over the same period, overall police recorded violence against the person also increased, by 28%<sup>1</sup>. The increase in violence against the person is thought to be predominantly due to improvements in police recording<sup>2</sup>. The number of these offences involving firearms is 20% lower than 5 years ago (2,822) and 58% lower than 10 years ago (5,327).

Robbery offences involving firearms fell by 10% during the year ending March 2016, from 1,715 to 1,551, continuing the long-term downward trend seen since the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) in April 2002. In contrast, overall robbery offences increased by 2% over the same period. The number of robberies involving firearms has fallen by 62% since the year ending March 2006 (4,121 offences). Overall robbery offences have fallen by 48% over the same period (from 98,168 to 51,127).

Criminal damage offences involving firearms have been relatively flat over the last 4 years, with the 2,449 offences recorded in the year ending March 2016 similar to the 2,426 offences recorded in the year ending March 2013. Prior to this, between the year ending March 2003 and the year ending March 2013, the number of recorded offences fell by over three-quarters (78%).

**Figure 3.5: 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 2016**



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

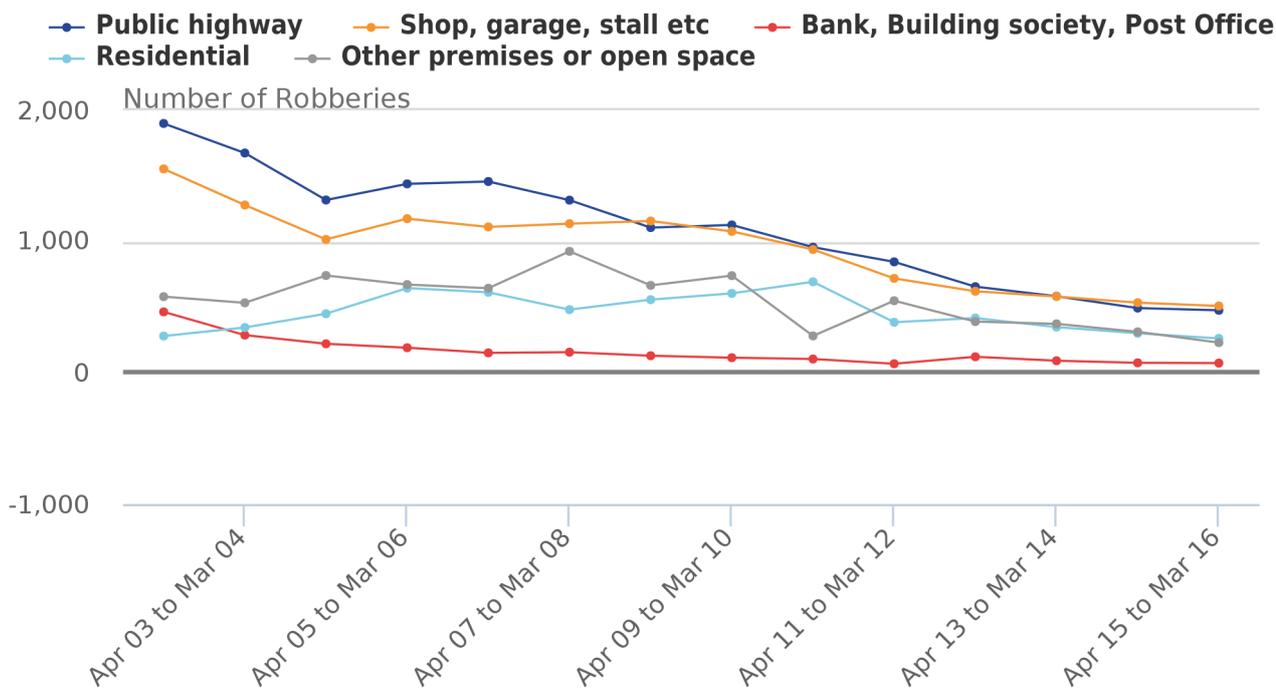
Notes:

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 (described in the Overview chapter) 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.

## Robberies involving a firearm

According to police recorded crime figures for the year ending March 2016, 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 2016](#)). Information is available on where the robberies involving firearms took place. Of the 1,551 recorded robbery offences involving a firearm in the year ending March 2016, 33% were committed in shops and garages (509 offences), 31% on public highways (476 offences) and 17% in a residential location (262 offences) (Figure 3.6, [Appendix Table 3.10](#)).

**Figure 3.6: Number of robberies in which firearms were reported to have been used, by location of offence, year ending March 2003 to year ending March 2016**



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.

In the year ending March 2016, 64% of robberies involving firearms were committed with a handgun ([Appendix Table 3.11](#)).

Notes for: Types of offences where firearms are used

1. These offences are published in [Appendix Table A4](#) in the Crime in England and Wales quarterly release.
2. See the 'Overview' chapter of this publication for more detail on the increase in overall police recorded violence.

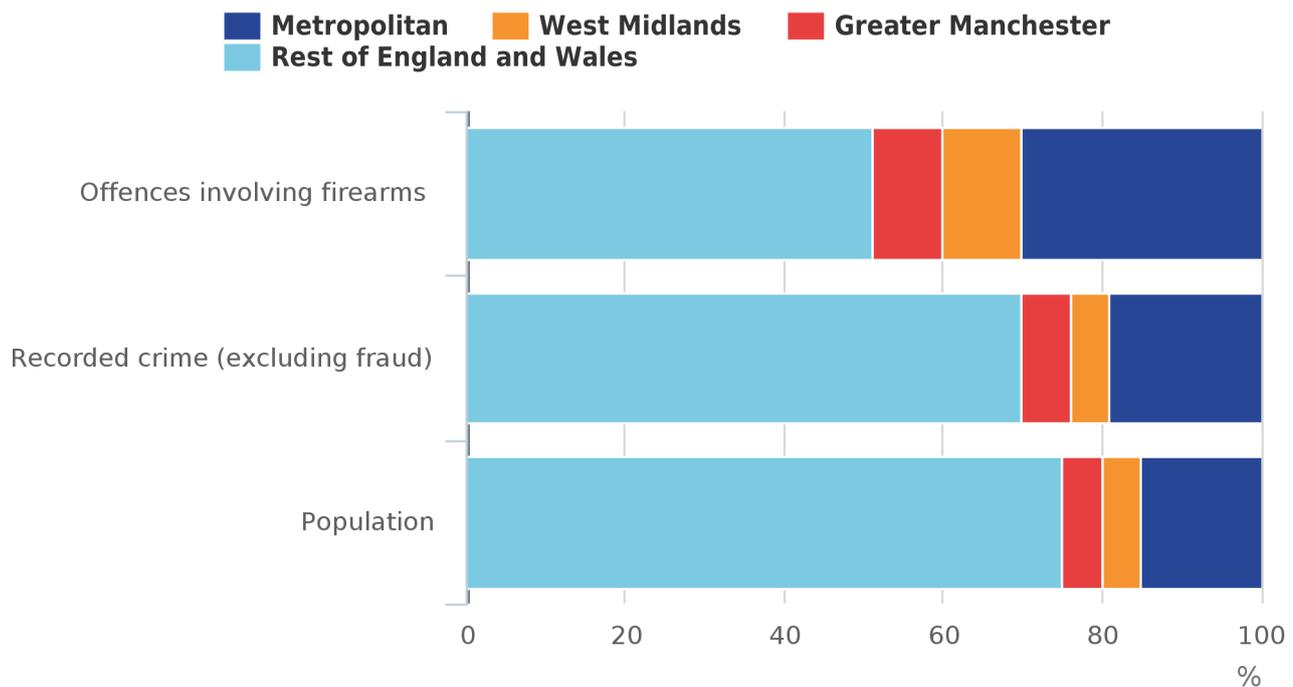
## 8 . Geographical distribution of firearm offences

As in previous years, offences involving the use of non-air weapons (which tend to be used in more serious offences) were geographically concentrated in some of the larger metropolitan areas. Around half (49%) of all offences involving a firearm in England and Wales occurred in 3 police force areas: Metropolitan, West Midlands and Greater Manchester. In comparison, a quarter (25%) of the population of England and Wales reside in these areas (Figure 3.7, [Appendix Table 3.12](#)). Figure 3.7 also shows how offences involving firearms are more concentrated than overall police recorded crime.

There were 9 firearm offences per 100,000 people in England and Wales in the year ending March 2016. For the 3 forces mentioned in this section the rates were <sup>1</sup>:

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

**Figure 3.7: Proportion of non-air weapon offences, in three police force areas and the rest of England and Wales, compared with population profile of those forces, year ending March 2016**



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-2015 estimates from the Office for National Statistics.

## 9 . Firearm offences by victim characteristics

As in previous years, in the year ending March 2016 there was variation in the risk of being a victim of an offence involving a non-air weapon by age<sup>1</sup> ([Appendix Table 3.13](#)). Of the non-air weapon offences in which the age of the victim was known (91% of all instances):

- 54% of victims were aged between 15 and 34 even though this age group made up only 26% of the total population of England and Wales
- people aged 60 years and over were less likely to be victims, accounting for 4% of victims of non-air weapon offences but comprising 23% of the population

Further analysis of offences involving firearms by victim characteristics can be found in [Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences: Year ending March 2015](#).

### Notes for: Firearm offences by victim characteristics

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

## 10 . Prevalence and trends of offences involving knives or sharp instruments

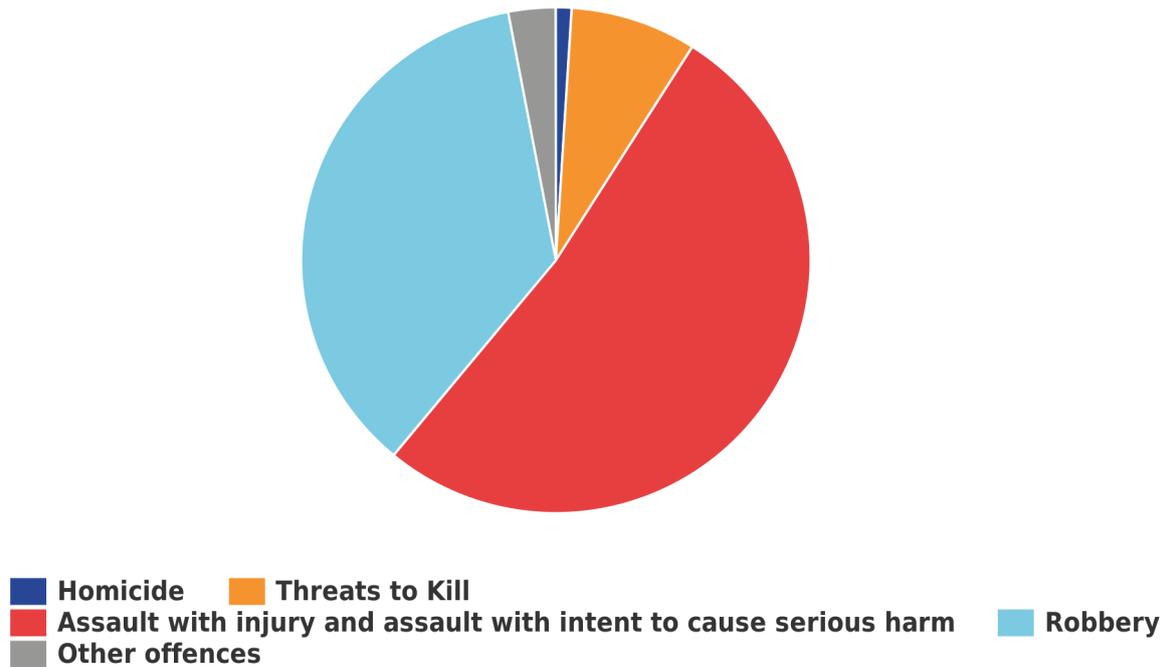
Knives or other sharp instruments were involved in 28,859 offences recorded by the police in the year ending March 2016, an increase of 11% compared with the previous year (26,040)<sup>1</sup>. This is the second consecutive annual increase in the number of recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument and follows a previous downward trend since the year ending March 2009 when the series began.

It is generally thought that offences involving knives 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, improvements in recording are likely to be a factor in the increase. There was a 15% rise in overall crime recorded by the police in the 7 selected offences covered by the knife crime collection ([Crime in England and Wales, Year ending March 2016](#)). This 15% rise is in part likely to be due to improvements in police recording of crime (see the 'Things you need to know' section in Chapter 1, the Overview for further information).

In some police force areas, it is likely that the rise in offences involving knives is a genuine increase. Hospital admissions for assault by a sharp object have shown a 13% increase in the past year, although this figure is focused on the most serious knife-related crimes. This increase follows a decline in previous years (see the 'Hospital admissions for assault by sharp object' section of this chapter for more information). This may suggest that initial increases in police recorded knife offences were due to improvements in recording rather than a genuine increase. For the year ending March 2016, the picture has been more complex, 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 handling knife crime.

In the year ending March 2016, around half (52%; 15,137 offences) of all knife or sharp instrument offences were for assaults (with injury or with intent to cause serious harm). Just over a third (36%; 10,516 offences) were robberies. Homicides involving a knife or sharp instrument made up less than 1% of the total number of knife or sharp instrument offences (Figure 3.8; [Appendix Table 3.14](#)).

**Figure 3.8: Offences recorded by the police in which a knife or sharp instrument was used by selected offence type, year ending March 2016**



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

**Notes:**

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

The trend in offences involving knives or sharp instruments was downwards between the year ending March 2009 and the year ending March 2014, with the number of offences (excluding the West Midlands and Sussex <sup>2</sup>) falling by 26% (Figure 3.9). Since March 2014, there has been a 13% increase in these offences.

Figures for the year ending September 2016 show that the number of offences involving knives or sharp instruments has continued to increase. These increases are analysed in [Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2016](#).

**Figure 3.9: Number of police recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, including and excluding West Midlands and Sussex PFAs, year ending March 2009 to year ending March 2016**



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

**Notes:**

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. West Midlands and Sussex changed their recording practices in April 2011, so their data are not comparable over the time period shown.

Notes for: Prevalence and trends of offences involving knives or sharp instruments

1. The offences included are: homicide, threats to kill, assault with injury or assault with intent to cause serious harm, robbery, attempted murder, rape and sexual assault.
2. These forces are excluded as they changed their recording practices in April 2001; see the 'Things you need to know' section of this chapter for more information.

## 11 . Geographical distribution of offences involving knives or sharp instruments

The Metropolitan Police Service recorded around a third (34%) of all knife or sharp instrument offences (equivalent to 9,738 offences) in England and Wales in the year ending March 2016. This figure is equivalent to 114 offences per 100,000 population, more than twice the rate for England and Wales as a whole (50 offences per 100,000 population). Forces that covered other urban areas also recorded more offences involving knives or sharp instruments and had higher offence rates per 100,000 population than those covering rural areas ([Appendix Table 3.16](#)).<sup>1</sup> A similar trend is observed in offences involving firearms.

### 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.

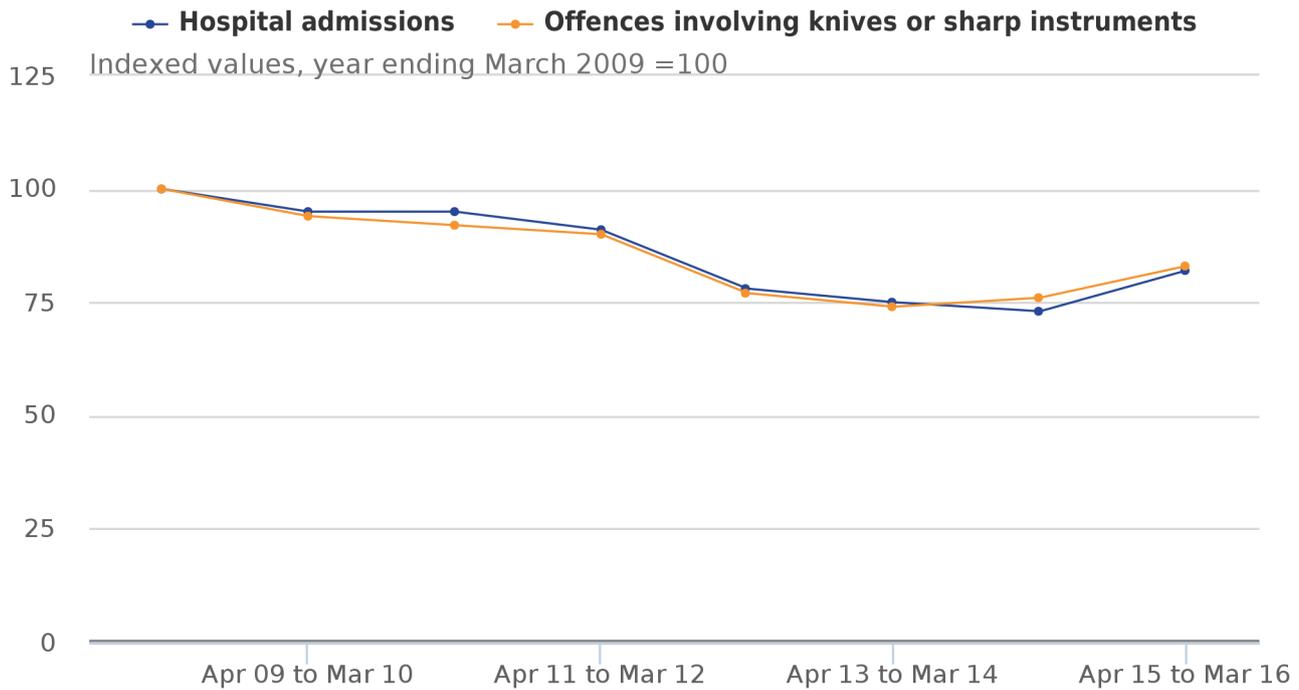
## 12 . Hospital admissions for assault by sharp object

Further information on trends in assault offences by sharp object for England is available from [Hospital Admitted Patient Care Activity, 2015-16](#) published by NHS Digital.

There were 4,054 hospital admissions for assault with sharp instruments in the year ending March 2016, a 13% increase compared with the previous year (3,590 admissions). This follows a period of steady decline between the year ending March 2007 and the year ending March 2015, from 5,720 to 3,590; a fall of 37% over this period ([Appendix Table 3.17](#)).

As expected, the absolute number of recorded knife crime offences is considerably higher than hospital admissions for assault by sharp object. Hospital admissions due to offences involving sharp objects can be expected to be restricted to more serious stabbings and wounding. However, between the year ending March 2009 and the year ending March 2016, trends in hospital admissions for assault with sharp objects and police recorded offences involving knives or sharp instruments have tracked each other very closely – with the exception of the year ending March 2015. In this year, the number of hospital admissions fell slightly, by 2%, while police recorded knife offences increased by 2% (Figure 3.10). This may suggest that initial increases in police recorded knife offences were due to improvements in recording rather than a genuine increase. During the year ending March 2016, the picture has been more complex, as previously mentioned, 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 handling knife crime.

**Figure 3.10: Indexed admissions to NHS hospitals with injuries from assault with a sharp object and police recorded offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, England excluding West Midlands and Sussex PFAs, year ending March 2009 to year ending March 2016**



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office, and Hospital Episode Statistics, NHS Digital

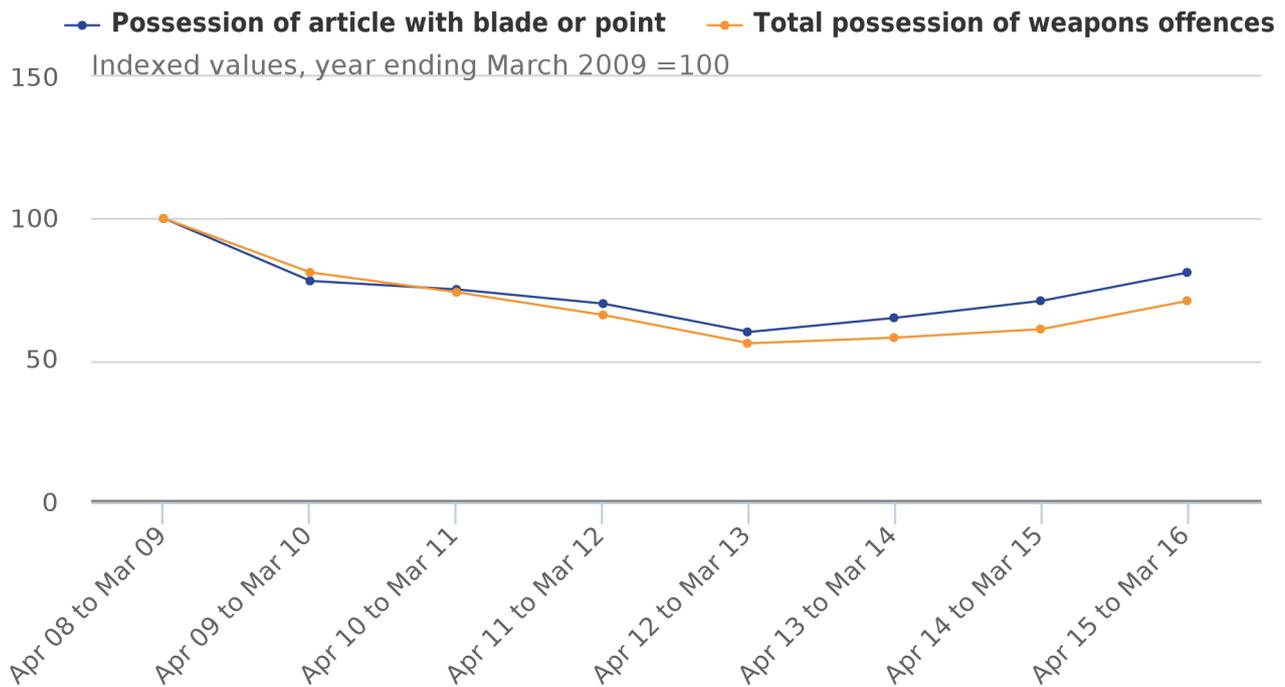
Notes:

1. Police recorded crime data are not designated as National Statistics.
2. All Welsh PFAs and West Midlands and Sussex PFA are excluded. West Midlands and Sussex changed their recording practices in April 2011, so their data are not comparable over the time period shown.
3. Data for 2015 is year ending April.

### 13 . 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 14% between the year ending March 2015 and the year ending March 2016 (9,873 to 11,498) ( [Appendix Table A4](#); Crime in England and Wales, Year ending March 2016). This is the third consecutive annual rise; prior to this, there was 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 11,498 remains 18% below the recorded number of possessions of article with blade or point in the year ending March 2009 (13,985) (Figure 3.11).

**Figure 3.11: 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 2016**



Source: Police recorded crime, Home Office

**Notes:**

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

## 14 . What does the CSEW tell us about knife carrying?

This section presents findings from questions on knife-carrying from the self-completion<sup>1</sup> module of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) for the year ending March 2016. 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 of 16 to 29 year olds 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. The year ending March 2016 survey estimated that 6.2% of 10 to 15 year olds knew someone who carried a knife for their own protection, a percentage that has not changed significantly over time<sup>2</sup> (Table 3.3). A similar percentage (4.2%) of 16 to 29 year olds knew someone who carried a knife.

Secondly, respondents were asked whether they had personally carried a knife for their own protection in the last 12 months. A very small proportion (0.3% of 10 to 15 year olds, and 0.7% of 16 to 29 year olds) personally carried a knife. Again, the changes in this series over time are not statistically significant.

**Table 3.3 Prevalence of knife carrying, 10 to 15 year olds and 16 to 29 year olds, year ending March 2012 to year ending March 2016 Crime Survey for England and Wales<sup>1,2</sup>**

**England and Wales**

	Apr '11 to Mar '12	Apr '12 to Mar '13	Apr '13 to Mar '14	Apr '14 to Mar '15	Apr '15 to Mar '16
Percentages					
<b>10 to 15 year olds</b>					
Know someone who carries a knife	5.2	5.1	4.3	5.8	6.2
Has personally carried a knife in the last 12 months	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.3
Unweighted base - number of children aged 10 to 15 <sup>2</sup>	3,915	2,866	2,917	2,358	2,771
<b>16 to 29 year olds</b>					
Know someone who carries a knife	:	:	4.5	4.6	4.2
Has personally carried a knife in the last 12 months	:	:	0.6	0.6	0.7
Unweighted base - number of adults aged 16 to 29 <sup>2</sup>			2,567	2,315	2,391

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

Notes:

1. These questions were first asked in the survey for 10 to 15 year olds in the year ending March 2012 and for 16 to 29 year olds 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: What does the CSEW tell us about knife carrying?**

1. "Self-completion" means that the respondent reads the questions themselves and records their answers directly onto a laptop.
2. The estimate for the year ending March 2014 shown in Table 3.3, although significantly different to the preceding and subsequent year, looks out of line with the series.