



Recorded Crime in Scotland: Handling Offensive Weapons



CRIME AND JUSTICE

Recorded Crime in Scotland: Handling Offensive Weapons

Justice Analytical Services, Scottish Government

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Executive summary

This report presents information on the handling of offensive weapons within public places in Scotland. This includes new details on the characteristics of these cases, based on a random sample of police recorded crimes.

Key Findings

The main sources of evidence all point to a substantial and long term reduction in the handling of offensive weapons in Scotland over the past decade.

As fewer cases of handling offensive weapons were being recorded by the police, resulting in fewer convictions – both the number of adults who believed knife carrying was common in their local area and the number of emergency hospital admissions due to assault with a sharp object also fell.

Over time, the vast majority of those convicted of handling an offensive weapon remain male but by 2016-17 they were older than their counterparts 10 years earlier (with their median age increasing from 24 to 29 years old).

Based on a random sample of police recorded crimes from April to September 2017

The overwhelming majority of police recorded crimes for handling an offensive weapon in a public setting were committed by males (89%). The median age of a perpetrator was 29 years old when the weapon wasn't used in other criminal activity, this is slightly older than in 2013 when the median age was 27. When the weapon was used in other criminal activity the median age was 27.

Between 2013 and 2017, where the weapon was not used in other criminal activity, there was a decrease in the proportion of perpetrators aged between 20 and 29 (from 34% to 24%) and an increase in those aged 40 or over (from 19% to 25%). Individuals aged 13 to 19, 20 to 29 and 30 to 39 were more likely to be found in possession of an offensive weapon than expected from their overall share of the population. This is the case whether the weapon was used in other criminal activity or not.

Almost a fifth (17%) of all victims were teenagers (i.e. aged between 13 and 19). Over a quarter (26%) were aged between 20 and 29 with further 24% aged between 30 and 39 and 30% aged 40 or over. Individuals aged 13 to 19, 20 to 29, and 30 to 39 are more likely to be victims of a weapon-based crime than would be expected given their share of the population as a whole.

Three-quarters of criminal acts involving the use of a weapon in a public setting had a male victim (75%). In 70% of all cases both the perpetrator and victim were male. Just under a fifth (19%) had a female victim and a male perpetrator. Victims of criminal acts involving the use of a weapon had an median age of 31 years old.

Perpetrators and victims were more likely than not to know each other (59% known compared to 41% not known). They were both more likely than average to live in urban areas and areas of higher deprivation.

The most common criminal act committed with a weapon in a public setting was threatening or abusive behaviour (44%), followed by common assault (32%) and serious assault (14%). Threatening or abusive behaviour was more likely to occur and serious assault less likely to occur when the victim was female, compared to male victims.

The majority of criminal acts committed with a weapon against a person in a public setting involved no physical injury to the victim (71%). This proportion was slightly higher when the weapon was a bladed or pointed article like a knife (74%).

In 29% of cases the victim of a weapon-based crime in a public setting sustained some degree of physical injury (including 26% of cases where the weapon was a bladed or pointed article and 31% for other offensive weapons).

When bladed or pointed articles were used against other people in a public setting, they caused a serious assault level injury in 21% of cases (such as stab wounds or other permanent disfigurement).

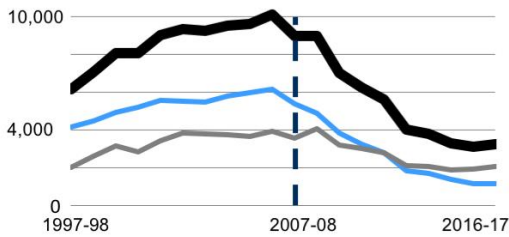
Criminal acts committed with a weapon against other people in public settings were more likely to involve no physical injury if the victim was female and if the victim did not know the perpetrator.

Recorded Crime in Scotland: Handling Offensive Weapons



A person in possession of an offensive weapon whilst in a public place, school or prison, without reasonable excuse or lawful authority, is guilty of a crime under the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995. These findings relate to a sample of crimes recorded by the police under this act.

TRENDS IN CRIMES OF HANDLING OFFENSIVE WEAPONS



Changes over the last ten years

Total handling offensive weapons	-64%	↓
Possession of an offensive weapon	-79%	↓
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	-42%	↓

Compared to the population of Scotland

	% Population	% Perpetrators		% Victims
		Weapon not used	Weapon used	
13-19	7%	24%	25%	17%
20-29	14%	24%	30%	26%
30-39	13%	22%	24%	24%
Over 40	52%	25%	18%	30%

Individuals aged 13-19, 20-29 and 30-39, were more likely to either commit or be a victim of a weapon-based crime than would be expected given their share of the population.

Characteristics of crimes of handling offensive weapons, April to September 2017

		Weapon used in other criminal activity	
		NO	YES
Male perpetrators		89%	89%
Median age		29	27
Lived in the 10% most deprived areas		27%	35%
Crimes that made a mention of alcohol		25%	31%
Knives & blades		56%	36%
Non-knife articles with a blade or point		18%	11%
Other offensive weapons		9%	21%
Bats or clubs		8%	14%
Industrial or household tools		6%	10%
Wood or stone objects		2%	7%

75%
The majority of weapons were knives or other articles with a blade or point

52%
Over half of weapons were not knives or other articles with a blade or point.

Characteristics of crimes committed against a person using an offensive weapon, April to September 2017

75%	Male victims		59%	the perpetrator was known to the victim		44%	weapons were used to threaten the victim		41%	for offensive weapons	
31	Median age		70%	of crimes involved a male perpetrator and a male victim		71%	of crimes resulted in no physical injury to the victim		49%	for blades or points	
25%	Lived in 10% most deprived areas								64%	for male victims	
									85%	for female victims	

1. Introduction

This report presents a range of information on the handling of offensive weapons within public places in Scotland, including;

- The legislation used to record these crimes.
- Trends in crimes of handling offensive weapons, including those recorded by the police, proceedings against offenders, the public's perception of weapon carrying and hospital admissions due to assault with a sharp object.
- Findings from research into recorded crimes of handling offensive weapons in public, based on a random sample of 1,500 police crime records. This includes perpetrator characteristics, types of weapons used, additional crimes committed with those weapons and other background information.
- A description of changes made to how crimes of weapon possession are recorded by the police - whereby from the 1st April 2017, crimes of handling offensive weapons are no longer aggravated into a related crime or offence where the weapon has been used by the perpetrator against another person. Scottish Government statistics have reviewed the implementation of this change through checking a random sample of crime records. The outcome of that exercise is included in this report.

Legislation

A person in possession of an offensive weapon whilst in a public place, school or prison, without reasonable excuse or lawful authority, is guilty of a crime under the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995¹.

Sections 47 and 49 of the Act define an offensive weapon as 'any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to a person, or intended, by the person having the article, for use for causing injury to a person by (i) the person having it, or (ii) some other person'.

A public place is defined as any place other than domestic premises, school premises or a prison (with the Act making separate provisions for the latter two). 'Domestic premises' means 'premises occupied as a private dwelling (including any stair, passage, garden, yard, garage, outhouse or other appurtenance of such premises which is not used in common by the occupants of more than one such dwelling)'.

Section 49 of the Act also makes it a specific crime to have any article with a blade or point in a public place, school or prison, without reasonable excuse or lawful authority. Whilst an 'article with a blade or point' may often be thought of as some type of knife, the definition can be considered to be wider than this, including for example an axe or an improvised weapon with a razor blade attached.

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/39/contents>

The Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995:

A person in possession of an offensive weapon whilst in a public place, school or prison, without reasonable excuse or lawful authority, is guilty of a crime under the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995.

Public setting: Any place other than a domestic premises, school premises or a prison. Domestic premises means occupied as a private dwelling (i.e. areas not used in common by occupants of the dwelling).

Offensive weapon: Any article made or adapted for use for causing injury to a person, or intended, by the person having the article, for use for causing injury to a person by (i) the person having it, or (ii) some other person.

Article with a blade or point: Covered by Section 49 of the Act and while may often be thought of as some type of knife, the definition can be considered to be wider, including an axe or an improvised weapon with a razor blade attached.

In April 2018, the UK Government announced plans to introduce an Offensive Weapons Bill to tackle serious violence. This Bill will make proposals that if enacted could change the legislative landscape used to record crimes of weapon possession, including in Scotland². This in turn could affect the number of weapons-related crimes recorded by Police Scotland. Some of the areas identified by the Home Office for inclusion in the Bill are plans to make new criminal offences of possessing corrosive substances in a public place or certain offensive weapons like zombie knives or knuckle dusters in private settings. Specific provisions in the proposed Bill also update the definition of a flick knife to reflect changing weapon designs.

² It is likely a legislative consent motion in the Scottish Parliament would be required to bring any new offences contained within this bill into effect in Scotland.

2. Trends in crimes of handling weapons

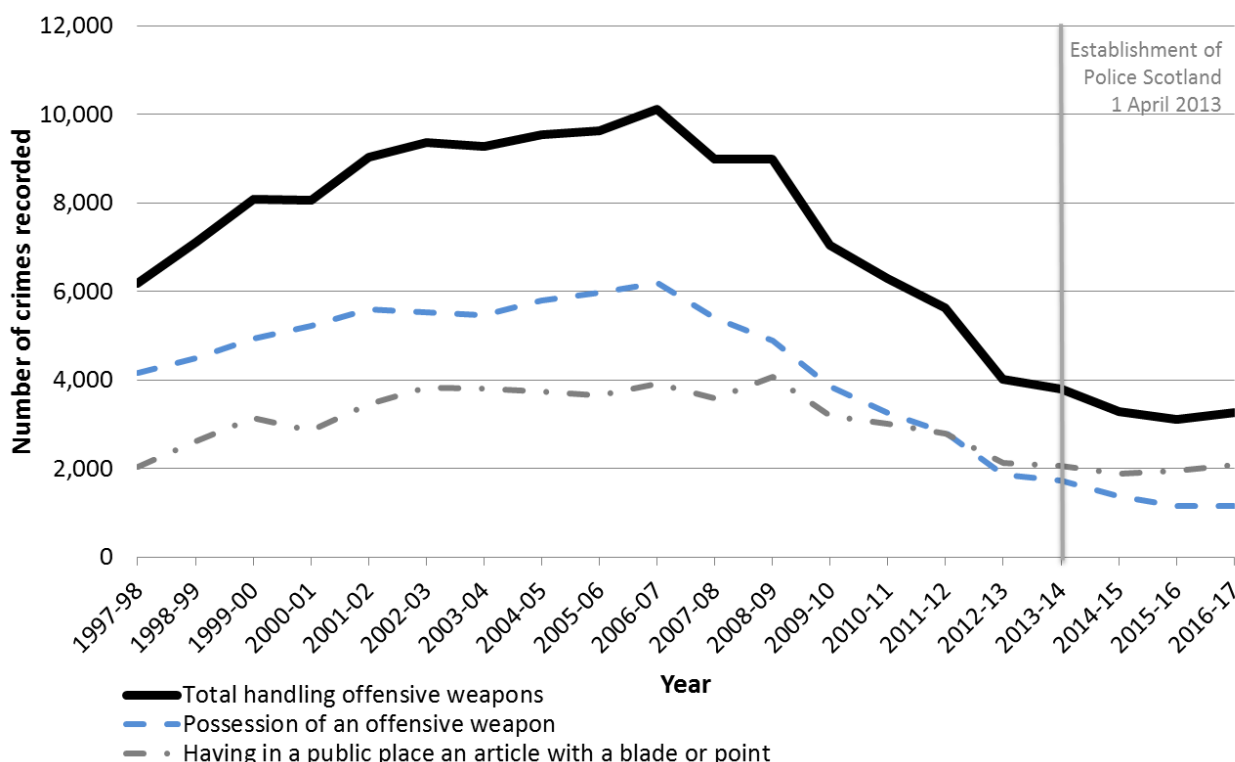
Introduction

This section provides an overview of the main statistical sources on handling offensive weapons in Scotland, including changes over time. These statistics include police recorded crime, criminal proceedings, public perceptions of knife carrying, and emergency hospital admissions due to assault with a sharp object.

Police Recorded Crime

The National Statistics on Recorded Crime in Scotland³ include information on crimes of handling offensive weapons. It should be noted that these statistics do not show the overall incidence of handling offensive weapons in Scotland, as they only include those incidents which have come to the attention of the police. [Chart 1](#) below presents statistics for crimes of handling offensive weapons over the past 20 years, from 1997-98 to 2016-17.

Chart 1. Crimes of handling offensive weapons recorded by the Police, 1997-98 to 2016-17.



Source: National Statistics on Police Recorded Crime, Scotland

In 1997-98 there were 6,191 crimes of handling offensive weapons recorded by the police in Scotland. This figure steadily increased throughout the following decade, before it peaked at 10,110 in 2006-07. Crimes of handling offensive weapons then fell substantially over the following decade, with 3,271 recorded in 2016-17, 68% lower than the 2006-07 peak.

³ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/09/3075/345334>

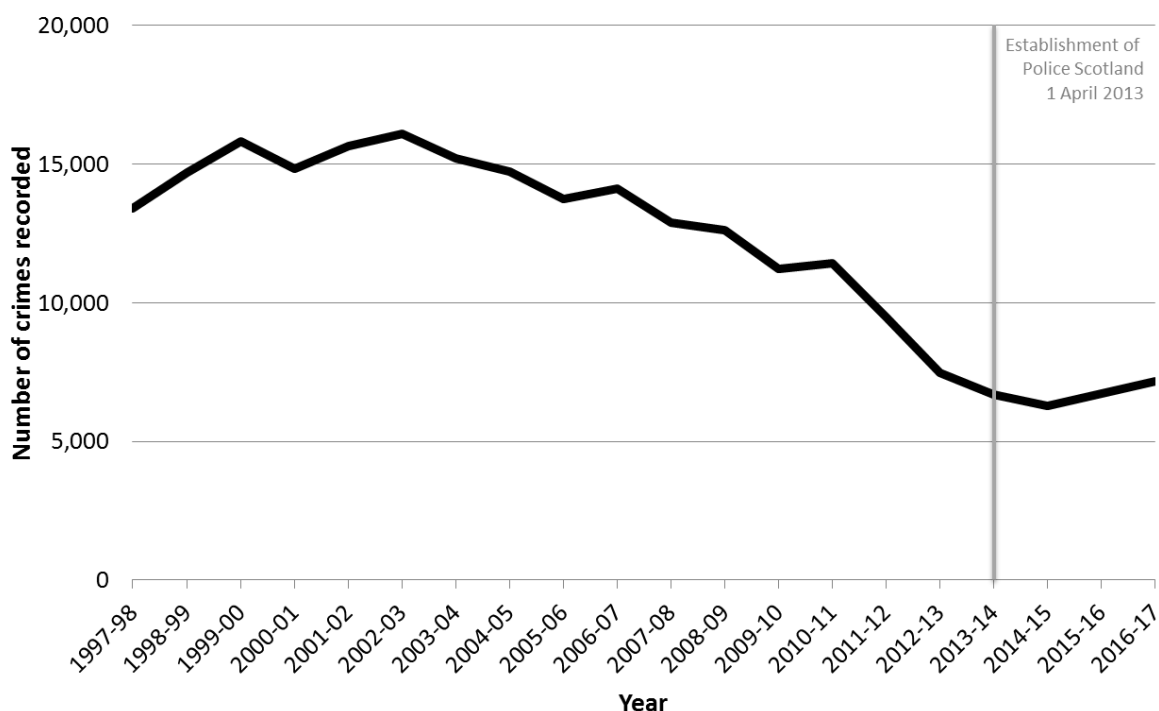
Crimes of handling offensive weapons can be split into possession of an offensive weapon (for example glass bottles or knuckledusters) or having in a public place an article with a blade or point. In both cases, levels generally increased up to 2006-07, before they fell markedly over the following decade (replicating the overall trend for handling offensive weapons). The post 2006-07 fall in possessing an offensive weapon was larger than the rise that preceded it. As such these crimes were 72% lower by 2016-17 than 1997-98. The post 2006-07 fall in having in a public place an article with a blade or point was very similar to the rise that preceded it, leaving levels recorded in 2016-17 (2,092 crimes) almost identical to the position in 1997-98 (2,030 crimes).

At present, the National Statistics on crimes of handling offensive weapons only relate to where the weapon was not used to commit a crime or offence against a person in a public setting (for example a robbery or a serious assault). If the weapon had been used in this way, it would have been treated as an aggravation of the crime/offence against a person, rather than been recorded separately. As such, whilst the presence of a weapon is a factor in some violent crimes, these figures do not provide information on the level of weapons-related violence committed in Scotland⁴.

Nonetheless, changes in the volume of non-sexual violent crime recorded by the police over the past 20 years have shown some similarity to the changes described above for crimes of handling offensive weapons. [Chart 2](#) below presents statistics for the number of non-sexual violent crimes recorded by the police from 1997-98 to 2016-17.

⁴ [Section 3](#) provides information on how changes to recording guidance for crimes of weapon possession will amend this approach from 2017-18 onwards

Chart 2. Crimes of Non-sexual violence recorded by the Police, 1997-98 to 2016-17.



Source: National Statistics on Police Recorded Crime, Scotland

In 1997-98 there were 13,394 non-sexual crimes of violence recorded by the police in Scotland. This figure fluctuated somewhat before peaking at 16,074 in 2002-03. Non-sexual crimes of violence then generally fell over the next 10 years and beyond, with 7,164 recorded in 2016-17, 55% lower than the 2002-03 peak.

Criminal Proceedings

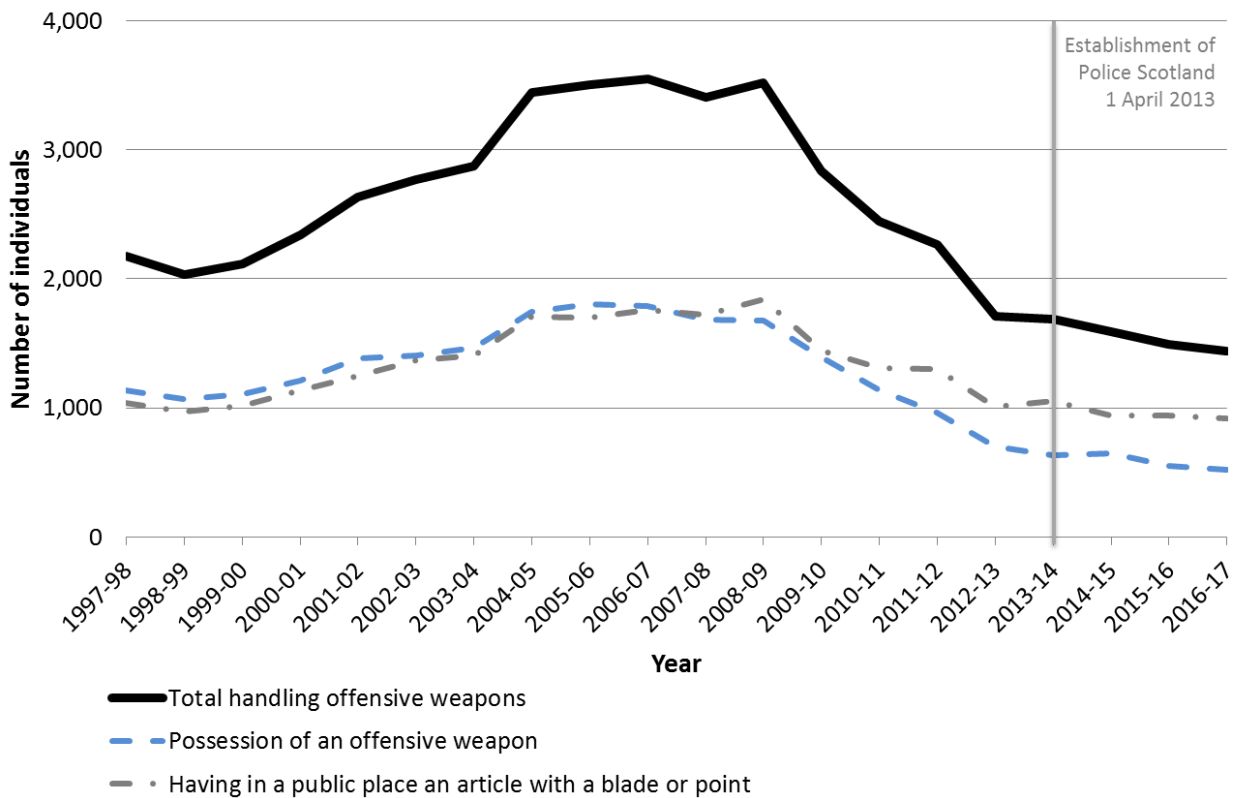
National Statistics are also available on people proceeded against in court for handling offensive weapons⁵. [Chart 3](#) below presents statistics on people convicted where the main charge⁶ was for handling offensive weapons over the past 20 years, from 1997-98 to 2016-17.

In 1997-98 there were 2,173 people convicted in court for handling offensive weapons. This figure then increased over the following years, in a similar manner to the number of crimes of handling offensive weapons recorded by the police, to peak at just above 3,500 during each year between 2004-05 and 2008-09 inclusive. Since 2008-09, and again reflecting the significant decrease in police recorded crime, the number of people convicted for handling offensive weapons has fallen sharply, by 59% to 1,436 in 2016-17.

⁵ Criminal Proceedings Scotland, 2016-17: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00532010.pdf>

⁶ The main charge is the crime or offence that received the most severe penalty if one or more charges are proved in a single proceeding.

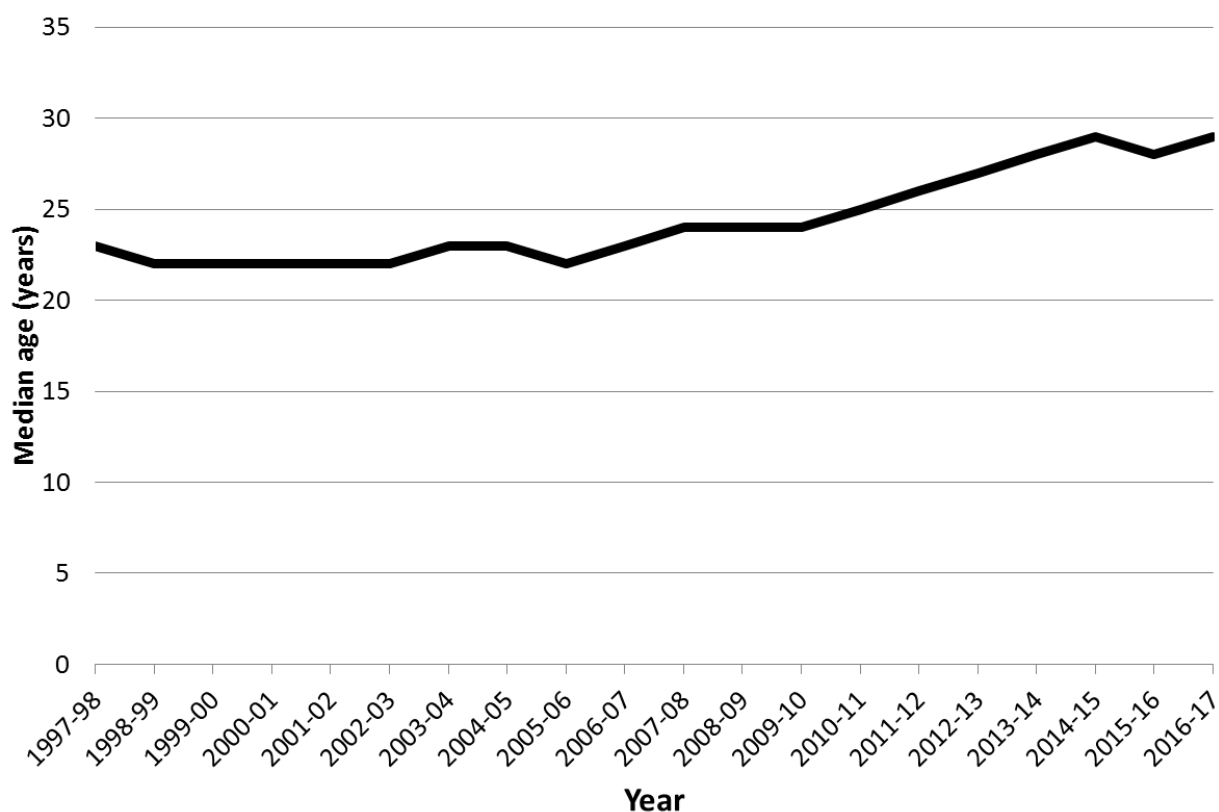
Chart 3. People convicted in court for Handling Offensive Weapons, 1997-98 to 2016-17



Source: National Statistics on Criminal Proceedings in Scotland

The statistics on convictions also provide further information on the characteristics of these cases. Over the past 20 years, 94% of those convicted for handling offensive weapons were male (46,900 out of 49,810 over 1997-98 to 2016-17). At the same time two trends were apparent in the median age of offenders. Over the first half of the period (from 1997-98 to 2006-07), the median age of offenders remained very stable at between 22 and 23 years old. During the second half of the period (from 2007-08), the median age increased steadily, from 24 years to 29 years ([Chart 4](#)).

Chart 4. Median age of people convicted for Handling Offensive Weapons, 1997-98 to 2016-17.



Source: National Statistics on Criminal Proceedings in Scotland

Those convicted of handling an offensive weapon in 2016-17 were most likely to receive a community sentence (43%) or some form of custodial sentence (34%). The proportion of convictions resulting in a custodial sentence has generally fluctuated between 30% and 40% each year between 2007-08 and 2016-17. During this time the average sentence length increased steadily from 218 days to 391 days.

Scottish Crime and Justice Survey

The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) is a large-scale social survey which asks adults about their experiences and perceptions of crime⁷. The survey plays an important role in assessing the picture of crime in Scotland as it includes crimes that have not been reported to the police, and as such do not appear in the National Statistics on police recorded crime.

The SCJS estimates that the total number of violent crimes committed in Scotland fell by more than a quarter between 2008-09 and 2016-17, from 317,000 to 231,000. Over the same period, the proportion of adults experiencing at least one violent crime fell from 4.1% to 2.9%. It was estimated that 43% of violent crimes committed in 2016-17 were reported to the police.

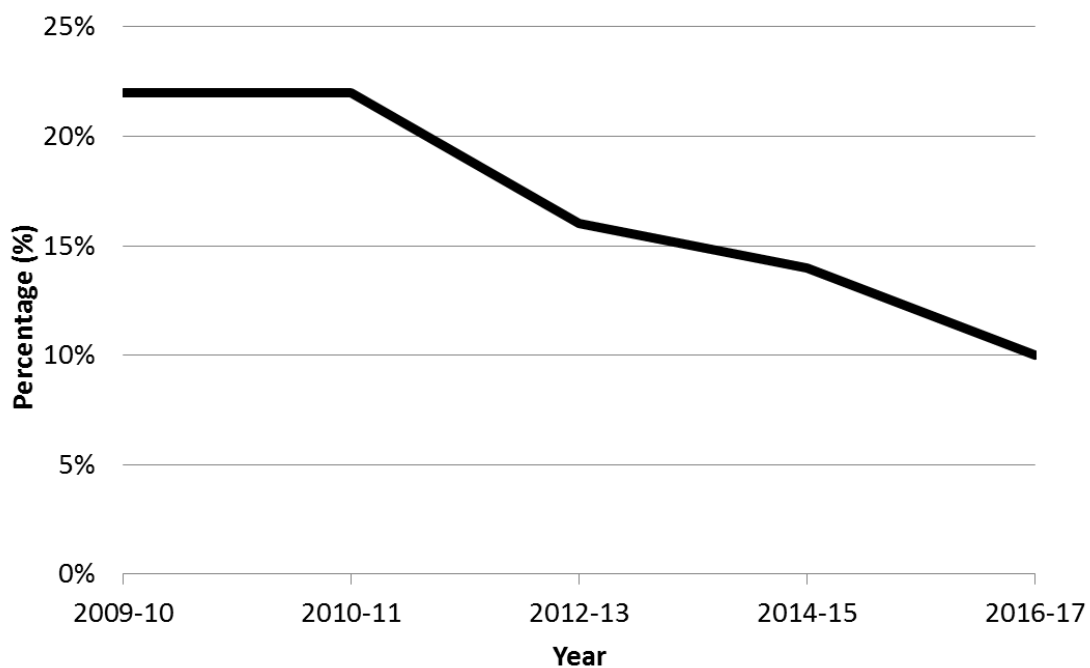
⁷ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/crime-and-justice-survey>

The survey also found that violent crime in 2016-17 did not commonly involve the presence or use of weapons, with only 15% of incidents said to have involved perpetrators with weapons⁸.

In addition to asking adults about their experiences of crime, the SCJS includes a series of questions on whether they perceive particular issues to be very or fairly common in their area. This includes the issue of people carrying knives. [Chart 5](#) below presents statistics on this question from 2009-10 (the first year it was asked) to 2016-17.

In 2009-10, 22% of adults in Scotland believed knife carrying was very or fairly common in their local area. This figure more than halved over the period up to 2016-17, by which point 10% of adults believed knife carrying was very or fairly common. Adults were more likely to believe knife carrying was very or fairly common in their local area if they lived in one of Scotland's 15% most deprived areas (29% in 2016-17, compared to 6% for everywhere else). They were also more likely to believe knife carrying was common if they lived in an urban area (12% compared to 3% for rural areas).

Chart 5. Proportion of adults who believe knife carrying in their local area is very or fairly common, 2009-10 to 2016-17.



Source: Scottish Crime and Justice Survey National Statistics

⁸ This relates to violent incidents where victims said someone saw or heard what was going on (96% of violent incidents).

Hospital Admissions

Another source of statistics relating to the handling of offensive weapons in Scotland comes from ISD Scotland's Unintentional Injuries release. This includes emergency hospital admissions as a result of assault with a sharp object⁹.

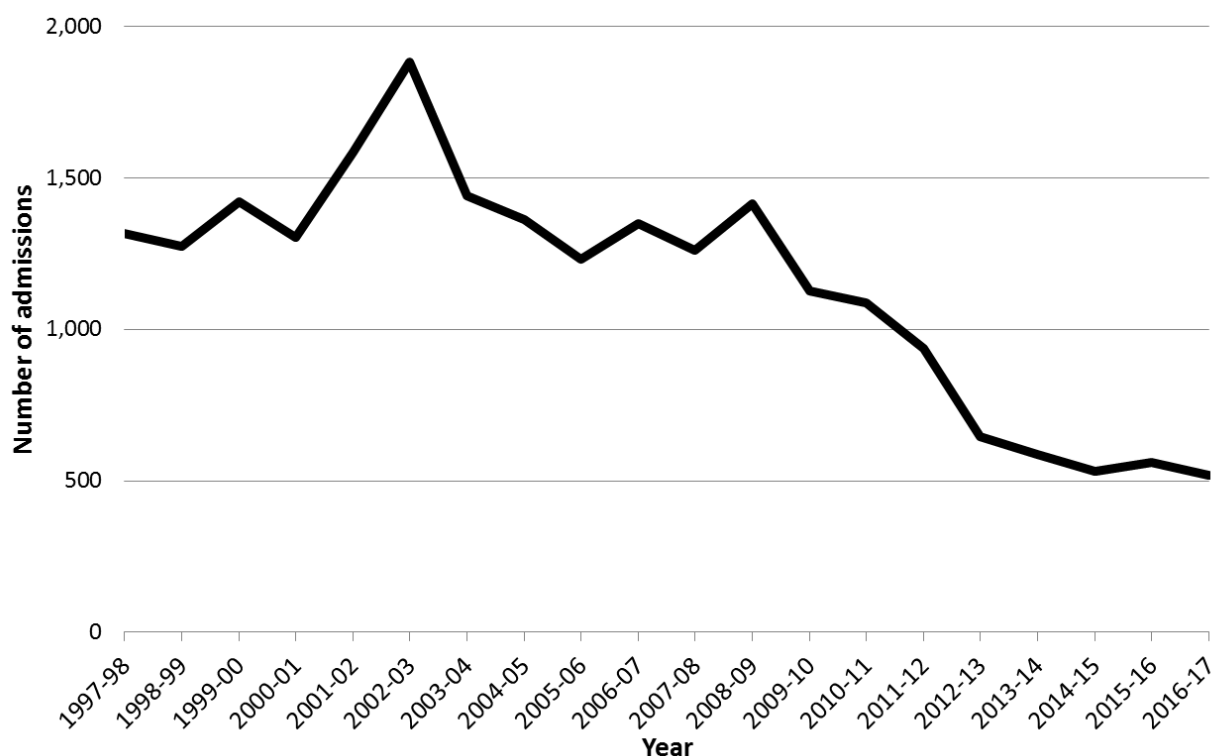
[Chart 6](#) below presents statistics for the number of emergency hospital admissions as a result of assault with a sharp object from 1997-98 to 2016-17. In 1997-98 there were 1,318 admissions due to assault with a sharp object. This figure increased substantially to a peak in 2002-03 (1,884) before falling back to previous levels in 2008-09. Since then, admissions due to assault with a sharp object have fallen substantially, down 64% to 517 by 2016-17.

It is not possible to make a direct comparison between police recorded crimes of having in a public place an article with a blade or point and emergency hospital admissions as a result of an assault with a sharp object - as the former only relates to cases where the bladed or pointed article hasn't been used in a crime against a person (so by definition cannot include an assault). However, as these sources both generally relate to the presence of weapons in Scotland (one the volume of weapons possession recorded by the police and the other the volume of hospital admissions due to assault with a weapon) – it might be anticipated that both should show similar trends over time.

As noted above, there were 517 emergency hospital admissions as a result of assault with a sharp object in 2016-17. This represents a decrease of 59% over the past decade, from 1,261 in 2007-08. This comparison confirms that the significant reduction in police recorded crimes of handling offensive weapons over the past decade has also been broadly reflected in statistics for emergency hospital admissions due to assault with a sharp object.

⁹ <http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Emergency-Care/Publications/index.asp?#2112>

Chart 6. Emergency admissions to hospital as a result of assault with a sharp instrument, 1997-98 to 2016-17.



Source: National Statistics on Unintentional Injuries in Scotland (ISD Scotland).

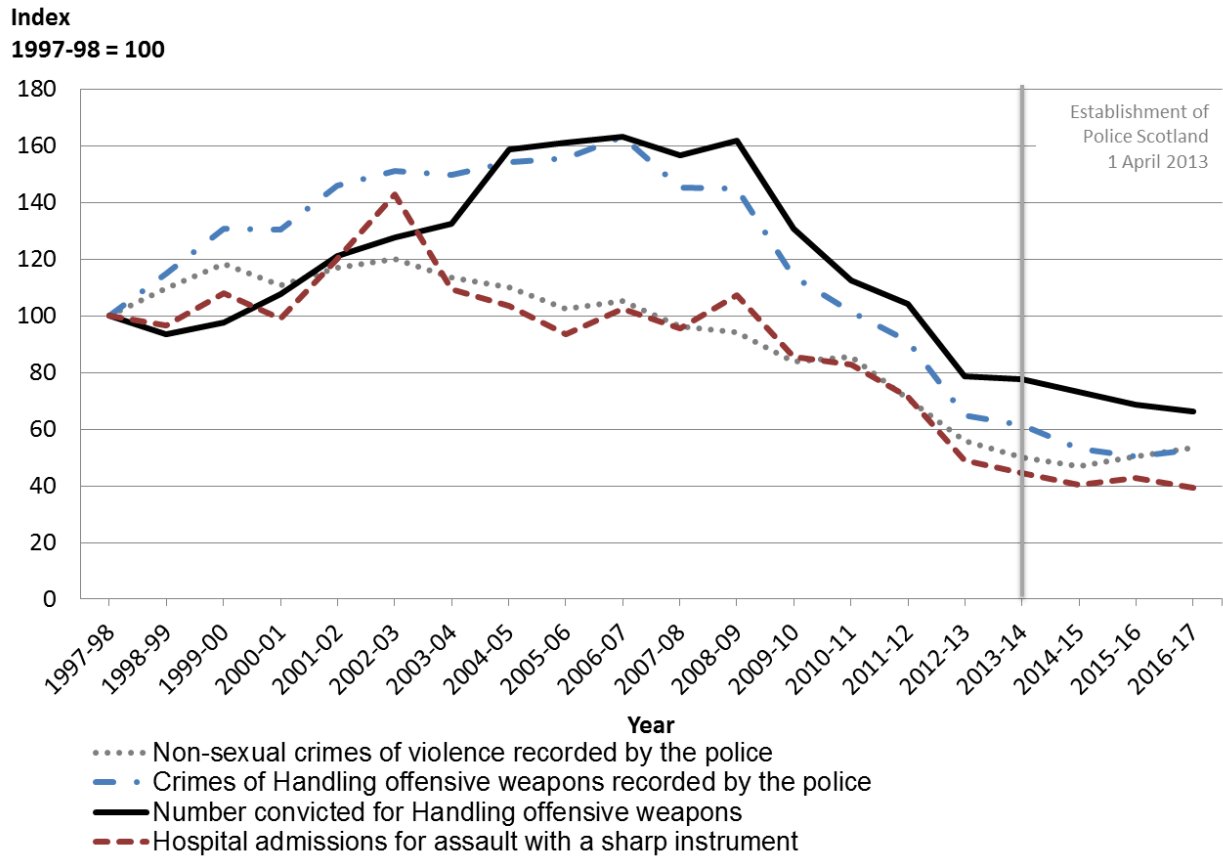
Summary of Trends in Handling Weapons

This section presents the main statistics that relate to handling offensive weapons in Scotland.

Whilst each of these sources measures a different aspect of weapon-related offending (including both Justice and Health-based measures, and administrative/survey-based data), they all point to a substantial and long term reduction in this activity over the past decade ([Chart 7](#)). As fewer cases of handling offensive weapons were being recorded by the police, resulting in fewer people being convicted – both the number of adults who believed knife carrying was common in their local area and the number of emergency hospital admissions due to assault with a sharp object also fell. There was a similar reduction over the past decade in the number of non-sexual violent crimes both experienced by the population and recorded by the police.

Those that were convicted of handling an offensive weapon remain overwhelmingly male and were older by 2016-17 than their counterparts 10 years earlier (with the median age of those convicted increasing from 24 to 29 years old).

Chart 7. Indices in selected measures, Scotland, 1997-98 to 2016-17 (Index 1997-98 = 100).



3. Characteristics of Weapons Crime in Scotland

Introduction

This section presents the findings of research into the characteristics of handling offensive weapons in Scotland. The research was based on a review of 1,500 randomly selected crimes recorded by the police between April to September in 2013 and 2017.

Methods

Scottish Government statisticians randomly selected a large sample of crime records from the 'Handling Offensive Weapons' category. With facilitative support and advice from Police Scotland they then reviewed the case notes for each crime sampled, to collect a range of information. This included perpetrator characteristics and the types of weapons they handled, and where relevant who they targeted with those weapons. No personal or sensitive details (names, dates of birth etc.) were collected.

These records were sampled from the first six months (April to September) of two different reporting years. The breakdown of the full 1,500 sample is shown below ([Table 1](#)). The sample and the findings drawn from it are also split into crimes where the weapon was not used in a public setting to commit another crime or offence against a person (henceforth referred to as 'not used in other criminal activity') and crimes where the weapon was used in a public setting to commit another crime or offence against a person (referred to as 'used in other criminal activity').

- April to September 2013:
 - 500 records for the 'not used in other criminal activity' codes.
- April to September 2017:
 - 500 records for the 'not used in other criminal activity' codes.
 - 500 records for the 'used in other criminal activity' codes.

This sample represents a quarter (25%) of all crimes of Handling offensive weapons recorded by the police between April and September 2017 (27% for the weapon not used crimes and 23% for the weapon used crimes¹⁰). The equivalent figure for the first six months of 2013 was 23% for the weapon not used crimes.

¹⁰ Police Scotland Q2 2017-18 Management Information Report (<http://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/our-performance/>)

Definition of when a weapon is used in other criminal activity

Weapon not used: This category applies to crimes where the weapon has not been used to commit a crime against a person in a public setting.

Example: While on patrol, police officers stop person A on the street on suspicion they are in possession of drugs and upon searching person A they are found to be carrying a knife.

Weapon used: This category applies to those crimes where the weapon has been used to commit a crime against a person in a public setting.

Example: Person A calls the police to report an incident whereby an unknown individual approached them on the street and threatened them with a baseball bat.

Whilst one third of the records reviewed related to 2013, findings are primarily presented for the April to September 2017 period as this provides more recent information on the characteristics of crimes of Handling offensive weapons. The inclusion of records from an earlier year was to allow the research to identify whether any significant changes had occurred in the characteristics of these crimes. Where such a statistically significant difference between 2013 and 2017 was identified, this has been highlighted below. Such a comparison can only be undertaken for crimes where the weapon being handled was not used in other criminal activity, as the recording of cases where the weapon was used commenced from the 1st April 2017. As such one of the aims of this research was to look at the first six months of activity for the newly recorded cases of using an offensive weapon against a person in a public setting – to find out what crimes were being committed with those weapons and what physical injuries were being caused.

For both years the sample was stratified by crime type. This was to ensure the prevalence of the different types of weapons crime recorded within the 'Handling offensive weapons' category was reflected within the research.

There are several methods of calculating an average; in this report the median is used to present the average age of victims and perpetrators (i.e. the age at which half of individuals are older and half are younger).

The median has been used because the distribution of ages is skewed. When using the mean to calculate the average of a skewed distribution, it is highly influenced by those values at the upper or lower end of the distribution (i.e. the older ages) and may not be truly representative of the average age. By taking the middle value of the data after sorting in ascending order, the median avoids this issue and is consequently considered a better indicator of typical 'average' age.

This research is based on a sample of police records (rather than all records), therefore the percentages (proportions) presented in this report are estimates. The true value may differ slightly from the findings presented below due to sampling error. As such, users should treat the following analysis as a broad indication of the characteristics of the 'Handling offensive weapons' category, rather than as an

exact measure as these figures only provide a measure of the volume of criminal activity that is reported to the police and may not reflect the prevalence of knife carrying in society as whole and may be influenced by changes in policing practices. All figures are presented at the national level.

It should be noted that this review did not look at the period between these two years and so doesn't examine any variation in the intervening period.

Analysis of Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

For each crime in the sample, the associated geographic information was assigned to a datazone (i.e. the location of the crime, the address of the perpetrators and, where relevant the address of the victims). These datazones were then compared to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), with the results included below.

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a tool for identifying concentrations of deprivation in Scotland. The fifth edition, SIMD16, was published in August 2016¹¹ and provides a relative measure of deprivation across small areas in Scotland. SIMD uses information from a range of indicators including income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing to provide a measure for each of the roughly 7,000 data zones in Scotland. Each data zone is provided a rank ranging from 1 (most deprived) to 6,976 (least deprived) and based on this rank can be grouped together into deciles, with each group consisting of 10% of all datazones in Scotland i.e. the first decile contains the 10% most deprived data zones in Scotland.

¹¹ <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD>

Findings

Who were the people handling an offensive weapon in Scotland in 2017?	
WHEN NOT USED IN OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITY	WHEN USED IN OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITY
89% of perpetrators were male	89% of perpetrators were male
Their median age was 29	Their median age was 27
27% lived in the 10% most deprived areas of Scotland	35% lived in the 10% most deprived areas of Scotland
82% lived in Urban Areas	86% lived in Urban Areas

Characteristics of crimes of handling offensive weapons

Perpetrators

Weapon not used in other criminal activity

Where an offensive weapon wasn't used in other criminal activity, the overwhelming majority of perpetrators in 2017 were male (89%) ([Table 2](#)). This remained the case whether or not the weapon was a bladed or pointed article or a different type of offensive weapon.

The median age of perpetrators in 2017 was 29 years old ([Table 3](#)). Individuals who were found in possession of a bladed or pointed article were slightly younger (28 years old) than those found in possession of an offensive weapon (30 years old). At 27 years old, the median age for perpetrators in 2013 was slightly lower than 2017.

A comparison of the samples drawn between 2013 and 2017 suggests there has been a significant change in the age profile of those who possess an offensive weapon. The percentage of those aged between 20 and 29 has fallen from 34% in 2013 to 24% in 2017, whilst those aged 40 or over increased from 19% to 25%. The percentage of perpetrators who were either teenagers (i.e. aged between 13 and 19) or aged between 30 and 39 remained similar between both years.

When the age profile of perpetrators is compared to Scotland's population¹² ([Table 4](#)), teenagers (i.e. aged between 13 and 19) made up almost a quarter (24%) of all perpetrators compared to 7% of the population ([Chart 8](#)). Individuals aged between 20 and 29 made up 24% of victims compared to 14% of the population. Individuals aged between 30 and 39 made up 22% of perpetrators compared to 13% of the

¹² <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates>

population. Whereas those aged 40 or over made up a quarter (25%) of all perpetrators compared to over half (52%) of the population.

In general, the age profile of individuals who are found in possession of an offensive weapon is similar whether or not that weapon is a bladed or pointed article. However, perpetrators aged between 20 and 29 were more likely to be found in possession of a bladed or pointed article (28%) than an offensive weapon (18%).

Perpetrators are more likely than average to live in areas of higher deprivation ([Chart 9](#)). For example 27% of perpetrators lived in the 10% most deprived datazones in Scotland (which contain 10% of the population) whilst only 3% of perpetrators lived in the 10% least deprived areas of Scotland (which also contain 10% of the population).

At 82%, perpetrators of these crimes are more likely to reside in an urban area than the population as whole (70%). The remaining 18% of perpetrators live in either a small town (10%) or rural area (8%), both of which are lower than the percentage of the total population that lives there (13% and 17% respectively).

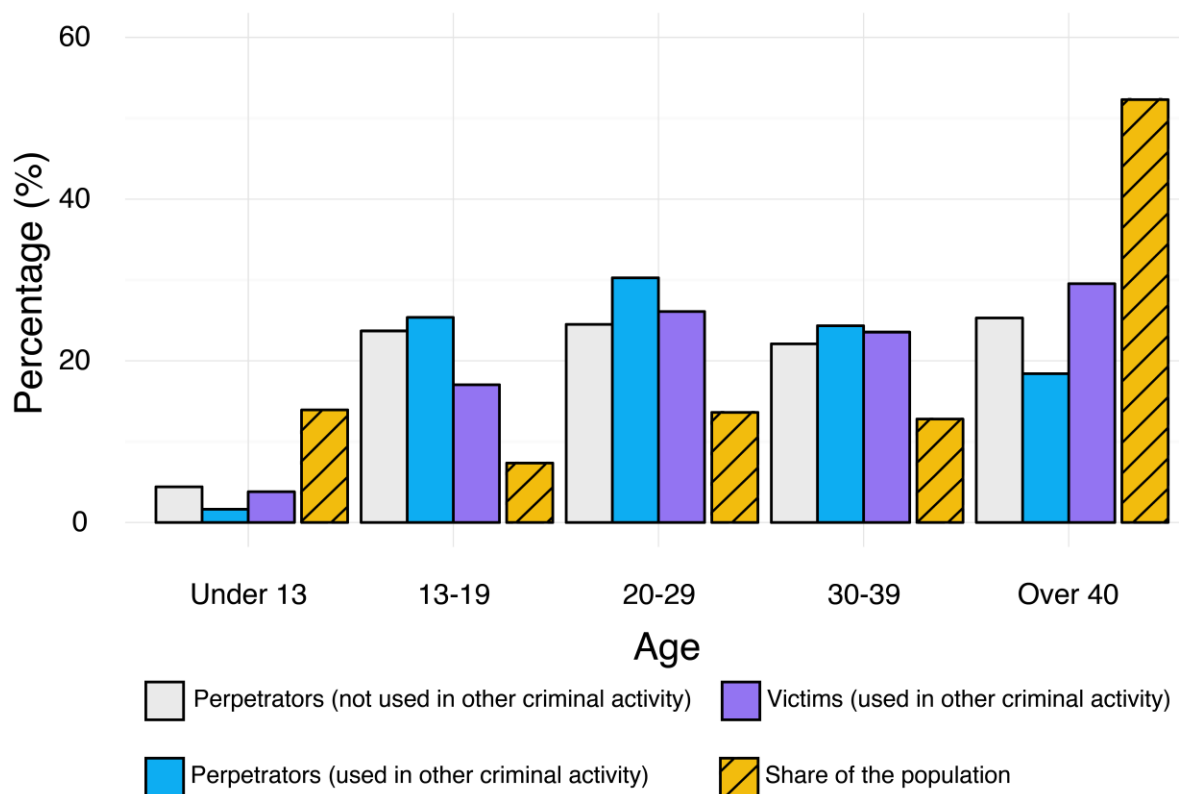
Weapon used in other criminal activity

Where an offensive weapon was used in other criminal activity against a person, the overwhelming majority of perpetrators in 2017 were also male (89%) ([Table 2](#)). This remained the case whether or not the weapon was a bladed or pointed article or an offensive weapon.

The median age of perpetrators in 2017 was 27 years old. Individuals who committed crimes involving a bladed or pointed article were slightly older (28 years old) than those that involved an offensive weapon (25 years old). A quarter (25%) of perpetrators were teenagers (i.e. aged between 13 and 19). Almost a third (30%) were aged between 20 and 29 with a further 24% aged between 30 and 39 and a fifth (18%) were aged 40 or over.

In general, the age profile of individuals who are found in possession of an offensive weapon is similar whether or not that weapon is a bladed or pointed article. However, perpetrators aged between 30 and 39 were more likely to be found in possession of a bladed or pointed article (28%) than an offensive weapon (22%).

Chart 8 Percentage of perpetrators and victims against the share of the population in 2017, by age group.



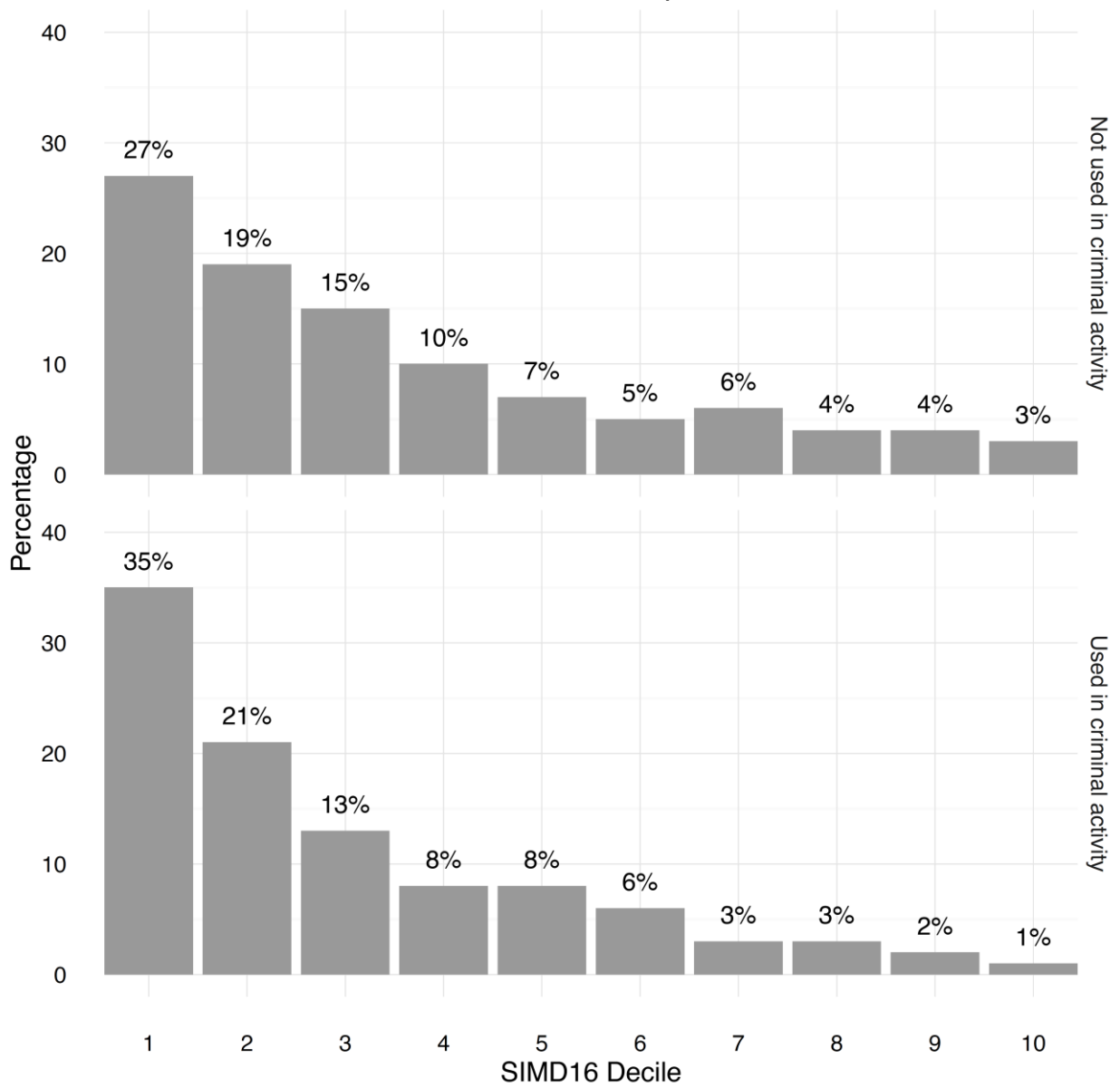
When the age profile of perpetrators is compared to Scotland's population¹³ ([Table 4](#)), teenagers (i.e. aged between 13 and 19) made up a quarter (25%) of all perpetrators compared to 7% of the population ([Chart 8](#)). Individuals aged between 20 and 29 made up 30% of victims compared to 14% of the population. Individuals aged between 30 and 39 made up 24% of perpetrators compared to 13% of the population. Whereas those aged 40 or over made up a less than a fifth (18%) of all perpetrators compared to over half (52%) of the population.





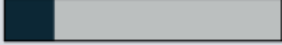
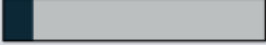












Perpetrators of using weapons to commit other criminal activity were much more likely to live in areas of higher deprivation ([Chart 9](#)). For example 35% of perpetrators lived in the 10% most deprived datazones in Scotland, whilst only 1% of perpetrators lived in the 10% least deprived areas of Scotland.

At 86%, perpetrators of these crimes are more likely to reside in an urban area than the population as a whole (70%). The remaining 14% of perpetrators live in either a small town (8%) or rural area (6%), both of which are lower than the percentage of the population that live there (13% and 17% respectively).

¹³ <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates>

Chart 9. Perpetrator location, by SIMD16 Decile and whether the weapon was used to commit another crime, April to September, 2017.



What weapons were perpetrators handling in a public setting in 2017?		
	WHEN NOT USED IN OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITY	WHEN USED IN OTHER CRIMINAL ACTIVITY
 Knives and blades	 56%	 36%
 Non-knife articles with a blade or point	 18%	 11%
 Other offensive weapons	 9%	 21%
 Bats or clubs	 8%	 14%
 Industrial or household tools	 6%	 10%
 Wood or stone objects	 2%	 7%

Weapons

Weapon not used in other criminal activity

When the weapon was not used in other criminal activity, over half of all weapons (56%) were knives and blades and almost a fifth (18%) were non-knife articles with a blade or point. Together these comprise three quarters (75%) of all weapons ([Table 5](#)) a significant increase from two-thirds of all weapons (66%) in 2013.

Of the remaining weapons almost a tenth (9%) were other offensive weapons (there were frequent references to glass bottles and knuckledusters), 8% were bats or clubs, 6% were industrial or household tools and 2% were wooden or stone objects. Together these weapons comprise a quarter (25%) of all weapons found, a significant decrease from 34% in 2013.

The other offensive weapons category above includes cases where the weapon was an acid or other corrosive substance. Of the 500 crimes sampled in 2017 (where the weapon was not used in other criminal activity) two cases made reference to the perpetrator being in possession of a potentially corrosive substance.

Weapon used in other criminal activity

In 2017, when the weapon was used in other criminal activity, over a third (36%) of weapons were knives and blades and a tenth (11%) were non-knife articles with a blade or point ([Table 5](#)). In total these make up almost half (48%) of all weapons, significantly lower than for when the weapon was not used in other criminal activity (75%).

Of the remaining weapons, over a fifth (21%) were other offensive weapons, 14% were bats or clubs, 10% were industrial or household tools and 7% were wooden or stone objects. Together these comprise over half (52%) of all weapons, significantly higher than for when the weapon was not used in other criminal activity (25%).

The other offensive weapons category above would have included cases where the weapon used in other criminal activity was an acid or other corrosive substance. However of the 500 crimes sampled in 2017, no cases involved this type of weapon

Reporting

Weapon not used in other criminal activity

There are a number of different ways in which crimes can be reported to the police. The way in which crimes came to the attention of the police was similar regardless of the weapon involved.

Where the weapon was not used to commit other criminal activity, the most common way in which crimes came to the attention of the police was when a witness reported the incident (46% in 2017). This was a significant increase on 2013 when 38% of crimes were witness reported ([Table 6](#)). Over a quarter of reports (28%) came from police discovering the weapon possession while investigating another crime or incident. Police patrols accounted for 17% of all crimes recorded, a significant decrease compared to 2013 (25%).

Weapon used in other criminal activity

Where the weapon was used to commit a crime or offence against a person, the way this came to the attention of the police is different than where the weapon was not used ([Table 6](#)). Reporting by the victim accounted for half (50%) of all crimes, with over a third (36%) reported by a witness. The remaining 15% is split almost equally across all the other reporting groups.

Location

Weapon not used in other criminal activity

In 2017, the majority of crimes (61%) where the weapon was not used in other criminal activity occurred in an open space (the majority of which were streets, footpaths and roads) ([Table 7](#)). Crimes of possessing an offensive weapon are slightly more likely to occur in an open space (65%) compared with bladed or pointed articles (58%).

Sixteen per cent of these crimes occurred in a public or voluntary sector setting in 2017, a significant increase compared to 6% in 2013. This category includes, schools, prisons, police stations, medical centres and other public sector buildings, all of which had a higher volume recorded in 2017 compared with 2013.

Between 2013 and 2017, the proportion of possession of an offensive weapon that occurred in a school setting increased from 1% to 6% (compared to less than 1% in

2017 when the weapon was used in other criminal activity). However, this is based on a very small number of cases within the overall sample and should be treated with caution.

Fourteen per cent of these crimes took place in a dwelling-type setting (which includes gardens, common stairwells and other communal areas). The remaining 10% were split across either retail, night-time economy and other business or public transport settings.

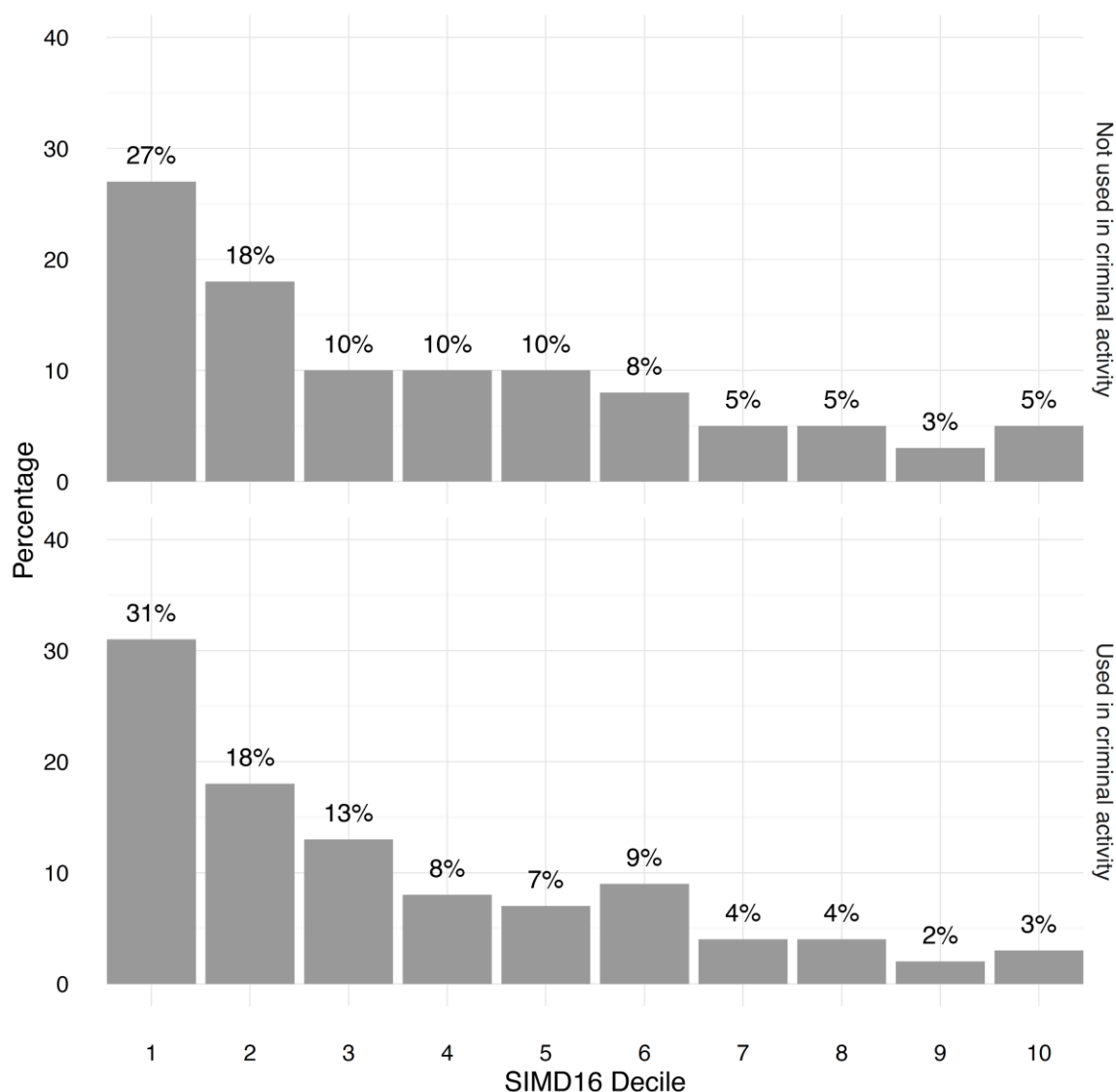
The location of crimes where the weapon was not used in other criminal activity were skewed towards areas of higher deprivation ([Chart 10](#)). For example, 27% of crimes occurred in the 10% most deprived areas of Scotland whilst only 5% occurred in the 10% least deprived areas of Scotland. The clear majority of these crimes (82%) occurred in an urban area, with the remaining 18% split between small towns (10%) and rural areas (8%).

Weapon used in other criminal activity

In 2017, the majority of crimes (59%) where the weapon was used in the other criminal activity occurred in an open space (mostly streets, footpaths and roads) ([Table 7](#)). Where the weapon was used, slightly more occurred in a dwelling-type setting (23%) compared to where the weapon was not used (14%). However, fewer cases occurred in a public or voluntary sector setting (4%) than when the weapon was not used (16%). A slightly larger proportion of crimes occurred in a retail setting than where the weapon was not used, 13% compared to 8%.

Where the weapon was used in other criminal activity the location was also skewed towards areas of higher deprivation, with 31% of crimes occurring in the 10% most deprived areas of Scotland, whilst only 3% occurred in the 10% least deprived areas of Scotland. The vast majority of these crimes (86%) occurred in an urban area, with the remaining 14% split between small towns (8%) and rural areas (6%).

Chart 10. Locus of crimes, by SIMD16 Decile and whether the weapon was used to commit another crime, April to September, 2017.



Day and time the crime was committed

Weapon not used in the commission of a crime

In 2017, almost two thirds (64%) of all crimes where the weapon was not used occurred between midday and midnight across the entire week ([Table 8](#)), a similar proportion to the crimes in 2013. The weekend¹⁴ accounted for over a third (35%) of these crimes in 2017, compared to almost half (47%) in 2013.

Weapon used in the commission of a crime

Almost three quarters (72%) of all crimes where the weapon was used to commit a crime or offence against a person occurred between midday and midnight ([Table 8](#)). The weekend accounted for 44% of all these crimes.

¹⁴ The weekend is defined here as 6pm on Friday to Sunday midnight.

Alcohol and drugs

Weapon not used in other criminal activity

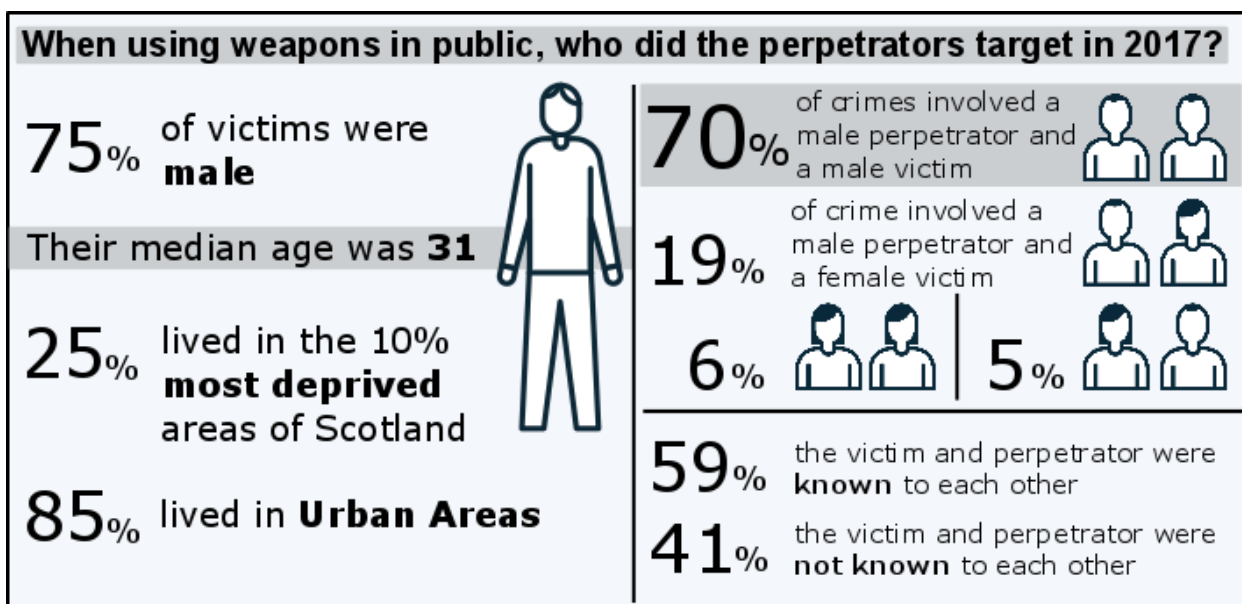
A number of records make reference to the consumption of alcohol and/or drugs. This could be in reference to the perpetrator(s), the victim(s) or both. This doesn't necessarily mean that it was a causal factor in these crimes. At the same time alcohol or drugs may have been consumed prior to some of these crimes taking place, but not referenced in the crime record.

In 2017, almost half (47%) of weapon possession crimes where the weapon had not been used in other criminal activity made reference to either alcohol and/or drugs ([Table 9](#)). This breaks down into 25% alcohol, 18% drugs, and 4% both. The proportions in all cases were similar regardless of whether the crime involved an offensive weapon or a bladed or pointed article.

Weapon used in other criminal activity

When the weapon was used in other criminal activity, significantly less made reference to either alcohol and/or drugs than when the weapon was not used (39%). This breaks down into 31% alcohol, 5% drugs, 3% both ([Table 9](#)).

The difference in the proportion of records that made reference to drugs between crimes where the weapon was and was not used could be due to the different ways in which these crimes come to the attention of the police. Significantly more crimes were discovered by officers on patrol when the weapon was not used (17%) than when it was (3%) and this in turn could relate to when a perpetrator is discovered to be in possession of an offensive weapon upon being searched under suspicion of being in possession of drugs.



Characteristics of crimes committed against a person using an offensive weapon

This section provides commentary on the types of crimes that have been committed using a weapon in a public setting, along with the demographics of the victims of these crimes, and the nature of any physical injuries sustained as a result of the perpetrators actions.

Victims

In 2017, when the weapon was used in other criminal activity, the majority of victims were male (75%) (Table 4). When the crime involved an offensive weapon the proportion of male victims was slightly higher (78%) than for crimes involving a bladed or pointed article (70%).

The median age of all victims was 31 years old, and was similar regardless of the type of weapon used in the crime (Table 11). Almost a fifth (17%) of all victims were teenagers (i.e. aged between 13 and 19). Over a quarter (26%) were aged between 20 and 29 with further 24% aged between 30 and 39 and 30% aged 40 or over.

Three out of the 500 records sampled involved a police officer as a victim. In each of these cases the perpetrator was in possession of an offensive weapon rather than a bladed or pointed article.

When the age profile of victims is compared to Scotland's population¹⁵ (Table 4), individuals aged 13 to 19 (i.e. teenagers) made up 17% of all victims compared to 7% of the population (Chart 8). Individuals aged between 20 and 29 made up 26% of victims compared to 14% of the population. Individuals aged 30 to 39 made up 24% of victims compared to 13% of the population.

¹⁵ <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates>

Whereas individuals aged 40 or over made up almost a third (30%) of all victims compared to over half (52%) of the population.

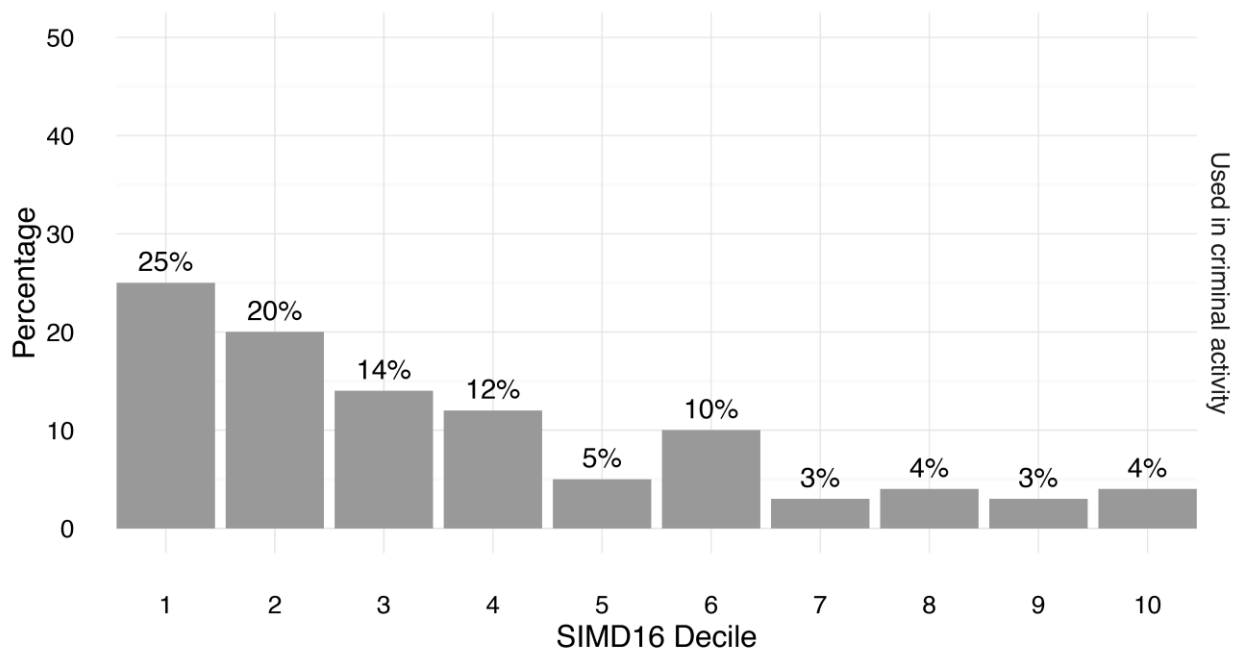
In the majority of these crimes (70%), both the victim and the perpetrator were male ([Table 12](#)). Just under a fifth (19%) involved a female victim and a male perpetrator. The remaining tenth was split into crimes where both the victim and perpetrator were female (6%) and where the victim was male and the perpetrator was female (5%).

For those crimes where both the perpetrator and the victim were male, 62% involved an offensive weapon and 38% involved a bladed or pointed article. Crimes that involved a male perpetrator and a female victim were equally likely to involve either an offensive weapon or a bladed or pointed article (50% for both).

Individuals who live in more deprived areas of Scotland were more likely to be victims of a weapon-based crime in a public setting than those who live in less deprived areas ([Chart 11](#)). For example, 25% of victims lived in the 10% most deprived areas of Scotland, whilst only 4% of victims lived in the 10% least deprived areas of Scotland.

The majority of victims (85%) lived in an urban area, compared with 70% of the population as a whole. The remaining 15% of victims reside in either a small town (9%) or a rural area (6%), both of which are lower than the percentage of the population that live there (13% and 17% respectively).

Chart 11. Victim locus, by SIMD16 Decile when the weapon was used to commit another crime, April to September, 2017.



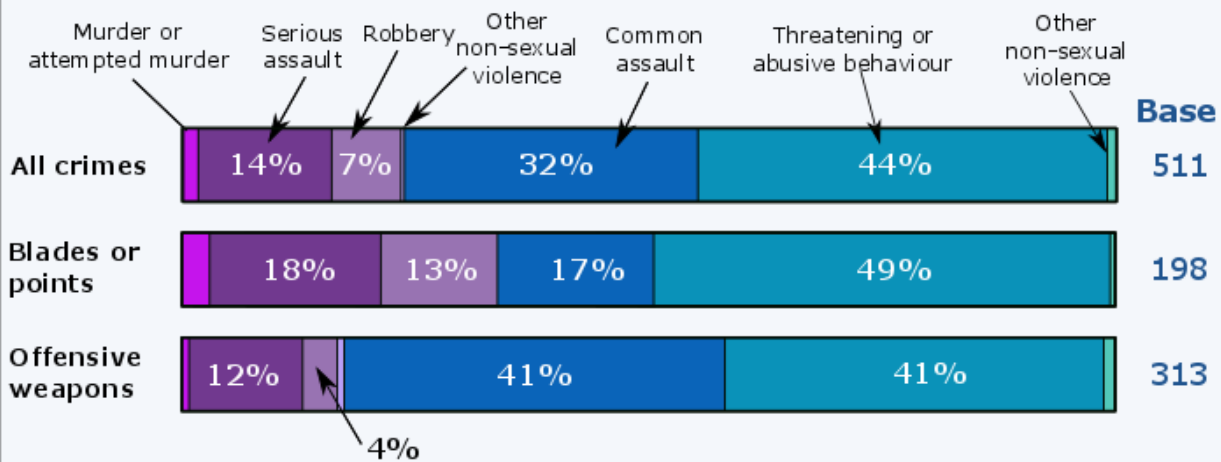
Relationship between victims and perpetrators

The definitions used to classify the relationship between victims and perpetrators (where both were identifiable) are shown below.

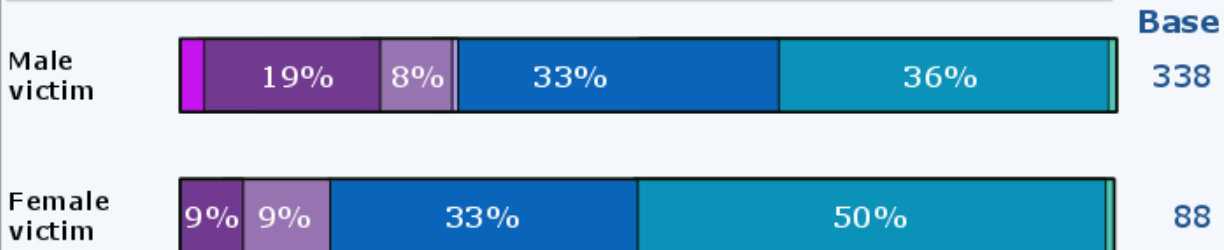
- Relative – this includes any parents, grandparents and siblings.
- Partner or ex-partner – where the victim and perpetrator were or had been in a relationship.
- Acquaintances – includes friends, neighbours, colleagues, class mates etc.
- Professional – this is primarily where the victim has come into contact with the perpetrator in a professional capacity. This includes where the victim was a police or prison officer, a nurse, carer, teacher, commercial staff etc. It also includes a small number of cases where the perpetrator is the ‘professional’ responsible for the victim.
- Strangers – this is where the perpetrator was not known to the victim prior to the crime.

In 2017, 59% of crimes where the weapon was used involved a perpetrator who was known to the victim ([Table 13](#)). The most common relationship between the victim and perpetrator was an acquaintance (52% of all cases). One in twenty (5% of crimes) involved either a relative or a partner/ex-partner. In the remaining 41% of crimes the victim and perpetrator were not known to each other. In the vast majority of cases this is because they were strangers (39% of all cases sampled), though in a small number of cases the victim was a police officer or other professional (2%).

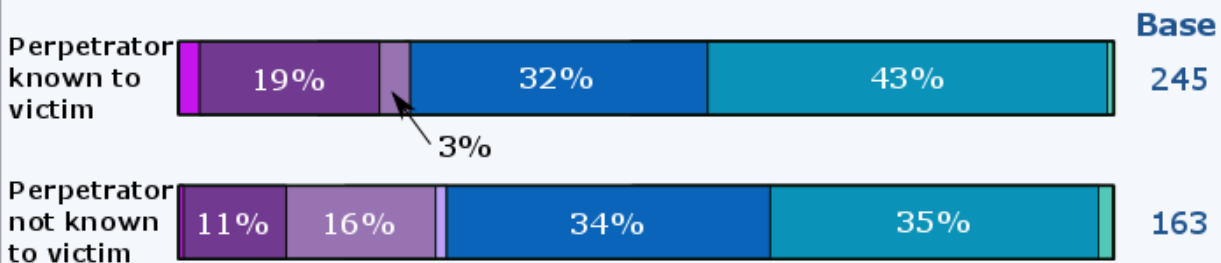
What crimes did perpetrators commit with weapons in a public setting?



Did male victims and female victims experience different crimes?



Did knowing the perpetrator make a difference to the crime committed?



Percentages are shown for categories which occurred in 5% or more of all crimes.

Crimes committed against a person

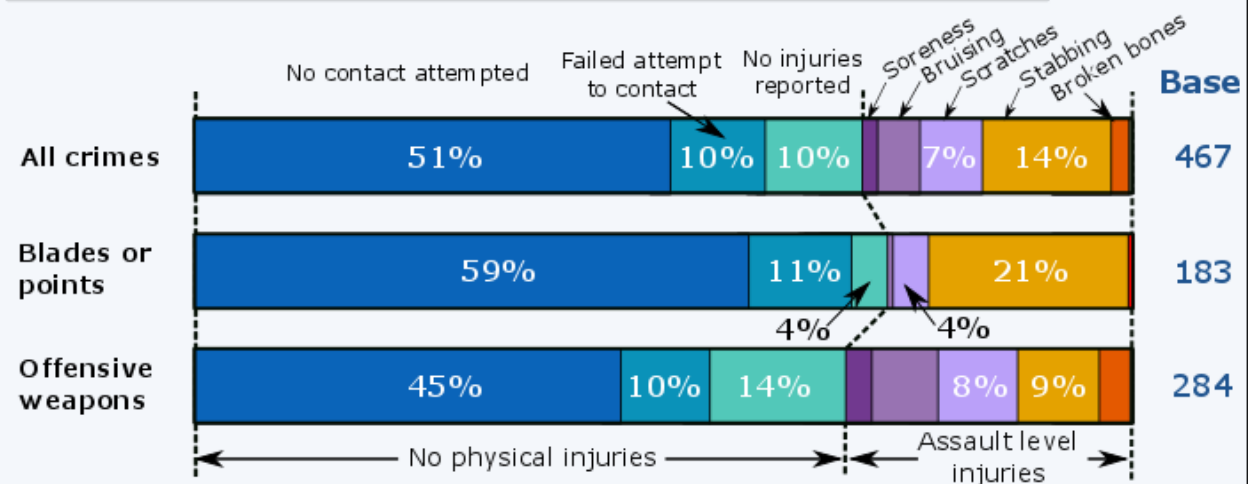
The most common crime committed against a person with a weapon is threatening or abusive behaviour (44%), followed by common assault (32%), and serious assault (14%) (Table 14). The type of crime committed varied depending on the weapon being used. When the weapon was a bladed or pointed article, the most common crime it was used to commit was to threaten the victim (49%), a further 18% were serious assault, 17% common assault, 13% robbery and, 3% homicide/attempted murder. Offensive weapons were equally likely to have been used to threaten or commit a common assault (41% each). Offensive weapons are in general less likely to be used to commit more serious crimes with 12% for serious assault and 4% for robbery.

When the victim was female they were more likely to be threatened (50%) than when the victim was male (36%). Males were more likely to be the victim of serious

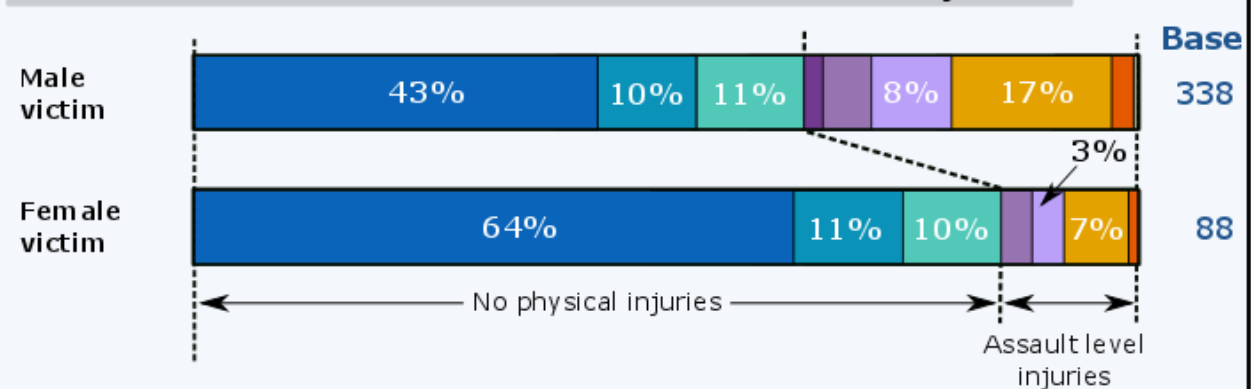
assault (19% compared with 7% for females). Common assaults were equally likely for male and female victims (33% each) and robberies were similar between males (8%) and female (9%) victims.

When the victim knew the perpetrator, they were more likely to be threatened (43%) than when the victim and the perpetrator were not known to each other (35%). Victims were also more likely to suffer a serious violent crime (including murder & attempted murder and serious assault) when they knew the perpetrator (22% compared to 12% when they did not know the perpetrator). Victims who did not know the perpetrator were more likely to be robbed (16%) compared to victims who did know the perpetrator (3%).

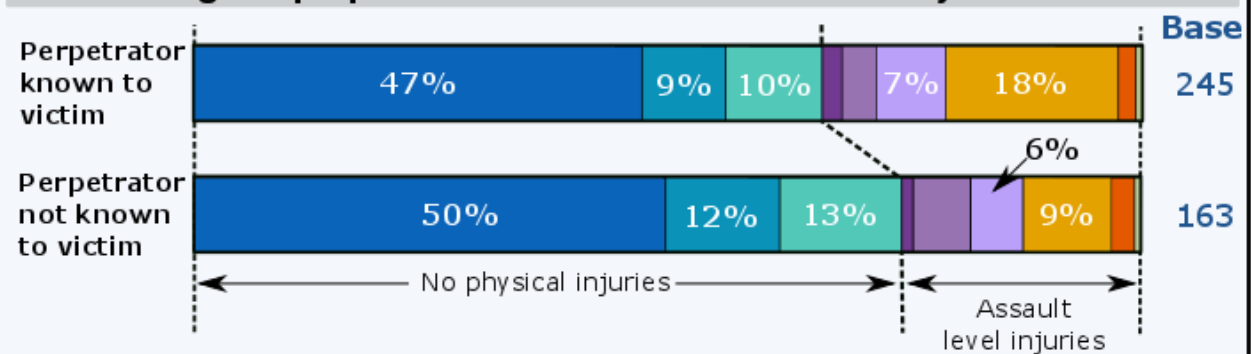
What, if any, physical injuries were sustained by the victims?



Did male victims and female victims sustain different injuries?



Did knowing the perpetrator make a difference to the injuries sustained?



Percentages are shown for categories which occurred in 5% or more of all crimes.

Physical injuries sustained by the victim

Over three fifths (61%) of crimes committed against a person involved no contact between the weapon and the victim (Table 15) – either because no contact was attempted by the offender (51%) or any attempt to make contact failed (10%). This overall proportion was higher for crimes involving bladed or pointed articles (70%) than for those involving offensive weapons (55%). In a further 10% of crimes, contact with the victim was made but no physical injuries were reported (4% for blades or points, 14% for offensive weapons).

In the remaining 29% of crimes, there was some degree of physical injury sustained by the victim (26% for blades or points, 31% for offensive weapons). Blades or points were more likely to cause serious assault level injuries i.e. stab wounds or permanent disfigurement (21%). Whereas offensive weapons were more likely to cause a wider range of physical injuries including scratches, bruising, and soreness which combined made up 18% of injuries compared to 4% for blades or points.

When the victim was female, almost 9 in 10 crimes (85%) involved no physical injury to the victim, compared with almost two-thirds (64%) for male victims. For female victims, almost two-thirds (64%) involved no contact being attempted by the perpetrator, compared with almost half (43%) of male victims. Male victims were more likely to suffer a stabbing or permanent disfigurement (17%) than female victims (7%).

Crimes that resulted in no physical injury to the victim were more likely when the victim did not know the perpetrator (75%) than when they did (67%). Crimes that resulted in the victim suffering either a stabbing or permanent disfigurement were more likely when the victim knew the perpetrator (18%) compared with when they didn't (9%).

4. Changes to counting rules for handling offensive weapons

Scotland's recorded crime statistics are produced by Scottish Government statisticians, working to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics¹⁶. This process is supported by the Scottish Crime Recording Board (SCRB), which exists to support the production of accurate and objective statistics on crime in Scotland. It does this primarily through its role as the guardian of, and ultimate decision maker on, issues related to the Scottish Crime Recording Standard¹⁷ (SCRS).

Position before the change

Prior to the 1st April 2017, any crime or offence committed with a weapon against a person in a public setting was counted once with the weapon-possession treated as an aggravation of that crime or offence. For example, if a person reported to the police that they had been threatened in a public setting by an individual with a knife, the possession of the knife would have been considered an aggravation of the threatening behaviour. Given this, statistics on recorded crimes of handling offensive weapons up to and including 2016-17 only relate to where the weapon has not been used to commit a crime against a person in a public setting. An example of such a case could be where police officers search an individual under the Misuse of Drugs Act, and during this time uncover a weapon, or officers may receive witness reports of someone being in possession of a weapon whilst they are in a public setting.

Position after the change

The SCRB has changed the approach outlined above so that from the 1st April 2017, any crime or offence committed with a weapon against a person in a public setting will be recorded with the weapon possession treated as a separate crime (i.e. the aggravation rule outlined above has been removed). Under this new position, if a person reported to the police that they had been threatened in a public setting by an individual with a knife – two crimes or offences would now be recorded – one for the threatening behaviour and a second for handling a bladed or pointed article in a public setting.

This change will lead to additional crimes of weapon possession being recorded by the police from 2017-18 onwards.

The SCRB made the change outlined above to better reflect criminal law in this area, so that a perpetrator committing a crime or offence with a weapon against a person in a public setting will now generally be proceeded against for both the crime or offence committed with the weapon and possession of the weapon. It

¹⁶ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

¹⁷ The SCRS is the national standard for the recording and counting of crimes and offences recorded by the Police Service of Scotland (Police Scotland).
<http://www.scotland.police.uk/assets/pdf/138327/232757/scottish-crime-recording-standard?view=Standard>

should be noted this change **only** affects incidents that occur in a public setting (i.e. fulfills the condition of the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act referred to in [Section 1](#)).

Statisticians provided users with further details on this change through a SCOTSTAT announcement on the 5th May 2017. The National Statistics on Recorded Crime for the 2017-18 reporting year, due to be published in September 2018, will be the first bulletin to reflect this change.

Quality of recording practice for crimes of Handling Offensive Weapons

As outlined above, the new approach to recording crimes of handling offensive weapons was introduced from the 1st April 2017. Given the impact this change is likely to have on the Recorded Crime National Statistics, Scottish Government statisticians undertook a subsequent review of crime records to test whether it had been implemented effectively. This exercise, carried out in collaboration with Police Scotland, had two outcomes. The first is a report into the quality of crime recording decisions for handling offensive weapons (presented below) and the second a summary of these crimes' characteristics (providing additional information on this type of offending). This is presented in [Section 3](#).

A random sample of 1,000 crimes of handling an offensive weapon was selected from April to September 2017 (i.e. the first 6 months following the change to recording practice). This represented around a quarter of all crimes of handling offensive weapons recorded during this time. The sample was split into 500 crimes of handling an offensive weapon which wasn't used to commit a further crime or offence against a person (i.e. the existing measure and shortened to 'weapon not used') and 500 crimes of using an offensive weapon to commit a further crime or offence against a person (i.e. the additional cases recorded since the 1st April 2017 and shortened to 'weapon used'). For each crime selected, the record was reviewed to determine if the description of the incident was consistent with the crime-classification assigned to it.

Findings from the 2017 Sample

The findings of this review are shown in [Table 16](#), which presents the percentage of crimes correctly classified for each of Police Scotland's 13 divisions and Scotland as a whole. The results are generally discussed at the national level, unless otherwise stated, as most differences at the divisional level were not statistically significant.

Overall, 91% of the 1,000 crimes sampled were correctly classified (i.e. the description of the event provided in the crime record correctly corresponded to the crime-classification assigned to it). Two divisions were significantly higher than the Scottish average (Forth Valley and Tayside).

For those newly recorded crimes of using an offensive weapon to commit a further crime or offence against a person, the percentage of cases correctly classified was

93%. This suggests that the implementation of new codes to separately identify these cases within the statistics has gone well. For crimes of handling but not using an offensive weapon (i.e. the existing measure), the percentage of cases correctly classified was 89%.

The review found that one way of further improving these figures would be to ensure the correct application of the 'weapon used'/'weapon not used' distinction when categorising a crime. Of the 1,000 crimes sampled – 25 involved an offensive weapon being used to commit a crime or offence against a person, but the case had been classified as a crime of 'weapon not used'. There were a further 14 cases where the crime had been classified as 'weapon used' but the weapon had not been used to commit a crime or offence against a person. These discrepancies would make no difference when looking at the overall recorded crime for handling offensive weapons, however during the period being sampled this suggests the resulting statistics would slightly over-estimate the number of 'weapons not used' crimes and under-estimate the 'weapons used' measure. If the 'weapon used'/'weapon not used' distinction was correctly applied in all cases, the percentage of crimes correctly classified overall would increase to 96% for the 'weapon used' measure and 94% for the 'weapon not used' measure.

The review also found several examples of a crime being recorded for handling an offensive weapon, but there was insufficient evidence to confirm this had occurred. This could be because the weapon had been seen or used in a private dwelling (the associated Act only applies to a public setting) or the level of corroboration required in the SCRS to record a crime of handling a weapon hadn't been met (for example officers may only have had CCTV images suggesting someone was in possession of a weapon or lacked a second witness to a crime of weapon possession in cases where the weapon wasn't used). Of the 1,000 crimes sampled, 27 involved this type of error. The effect of this is to somewhat over-estimate the number of weapons crimes, albeit the review did identify 12 examples where the crime selected was correctly classified, but the case notes revealed the presence of a second or third weapon that hadn't been recorded as a separate crime(s).

We therefore conclude that the collective impact of these errors on the total volume of recorded crime for weapon possession in 2017 is likely to be limited. However, it should be noted that this review only looked at cases where a crime of handling an offensive weapon had been recorded. What cannot be measured by this approach is how frequently an incident involving the possession of a weapon is recorded by the police without an associated crime being added. Whilst there is no evidence to suggest this is likely to be a significant issue, a separate study by statisticians into the characteristics of non-sexual violence in Scotland (based on a random sample of crime records¹⁸) will identify whether there are any examples of non-sexual violent crime where a crime of weapon possession should have been recorded but wasn't.

¹⁸ <https://news.gov.scot/news/3-fall-in-recorded-crime>

Reviewing Weapons Crime from an earlier Period

Statisticians also reviewed a random sample of 500 crimes for the 'weapons not used' category, covering the six months from April to September 2013. This part of the review was undertaken to measure how effectively the 'weapon not used' category was functioning before the change to recording practice came into effect on the 1st April 2017. Whilst a later period could have been chosen for this test, the selected timescale of April to September 2013 had two distinct advantages. The first was that it allowed an assessment to be made of the likely position inherited by Police Scotland from the legacy forces (with the national force formally established on the 1st April 2013). The second is that by having four years between samples of the 'weapon not used' category (2013 and 2017), the research element of this exercise stood a better chance of detecting any significant changes in the characteristics of these crimes (as opposed to selecting a period immediately prior to the change in recording practice).

The findings of this additional sample are shown in [Table 17](#), which presents the percentage of crimes correctly classified for each of the 13 Police Scotland divisions and Scotland as a whole. Overall, 84% of the 500 crimes sampled were correctly classified. One division (Highlands & Islands) was significantly lower than the national average, whilst three were significantly higher (Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway and Lanarkshire). The percentage of cases correctly classified during the first six months of Police Scotland's existence (along with a degree of variation at the divisional level), suggests that the national force inherited a somewhat mixed position, where there was room for further improvement in the quality of recording practice.

The most common error for a 'weapon not used' crime in 2013 was where the previously discussed aggravation rule, whereby a crime of weapon possession shouldn't be recorded when the weapon has been used in a crime or offence against a person, hadn't been correctly applied. Of the 500 crimes sampled, 53 involved cases where the weapon had been used in a public setting to commit a crime or offence against a person. In all these cases, the possession of a weapon should have been treated as an aggravation of that crime or offence, rather than been recorded as a separate crime of weapon possession. On their own, these errors will lead to an over-estimate in the volume of recorded crime for weapon possession, relative to the SCRS guidance that applied at the time.

This issue affected some divisions more than others, with six areas having at least 15% of their 'weapon not used' sample contain an error in the application of the aggravation rule (i.e. the weapon had been used). Those areas were Argyll & West Dunbartonshire, Forth Valley, Fife, Edinburgh, Highlands & Islands and Lothian & Borders. The prevalence of this error type was much lower in the other seven divisions, suggesting that a degree of caution is needed if comparing statistics on weapons possession between divisions during this time.

The other types of discrepancy found in the sample were similar to those described above for the 2017 exercise – mostly cases where an incorrect code had been

used to classify the crime (for example where a knife or other sharp object had been classified as an 'offensive weapon' rather than the specific code for a 'bladed weapon') or there was insufficient evidence in the record to confirm that a crime of weapon possession should have been recorded.

Comparing findings from 2013 and 2017

As noted above, from the 1st April 2017 the aggravation rule no longer applied – with police officers now expected to record a separate crime of handling an offensive weapon, where such a weapon is used to commit another crime or offence against a person in a public setting. Given this, the error found in the earlier sample from 2013 (whereby 53 separate crimes of weapon possession were recorded instead of being treated as an aggravation) can no longer occur. It is likely this change has contributed to a significant improvement in the quality of crime recording practice for those six divisions referred to above that had the most errors in the application of the aggravation rule. Collectively, 75% of 'weapons not used' crimes were classified correctly for those six divisions in 2013, rising to 88% by 2017. This increase in turn contributed to a higher percentage of correctly classified crimes for the 'weapon not used' category in 2017 (at 89% across Scotland, compared to 84% in 2013).

Summary of findings, their impact on the National Statistics and next steps

- The clear majority of crimes recorded for possessing an offensive weapon in 2017 were classified and counted correctly by Police Scotland.
- The review suggests that the additional codes introduced to identify those new cases of using an offensive weapon to commit a crime or offence against a person in a public setting, have been effectively implemented during this initial period.
- The position could be further improved, in particular for the existing measure of possessing (but not using) an offensive weapon in a public setting. Scottish Government Statisticians and Police Scotland will work together in the coming months to support this, through meeting to discuss the findings of this review and what associated actions may help – including possible enhancements to the guidance on recording these crimes or training for officers. This process will be overseen by the Scottish Crime Recording Board.
- The review identifies two areas that users of the National Statistics on police recorded crime should note going forward.
- The first is that statistical comparisons between Police Scotland divisions in the volume of weapons crime recorded prior to 1st April 2017 should be undertaken with some caution - where such a comparison includes an area that didn't consistently apply the aggravation rule for counting crimes of weapon possession.

- The second is that the review identified an over-count in crimes of handling offensive weapons (not used) in 2013, which had improved by 2017 (this may have been due, at least in part, to the introduction of the change to recording guidance for crimes of weapon possession). The review also suggests some over-estimate in crimes of handling (but not using) offensive weapons remained in 2017. This suggests that short-term changes in the volume of crime recorded for possessing an offensive weapon (not used) should be regarded with some caution.
- Time series comparisons in the volume of crime recorded for possessing an offensive weapon are likely to be reliable and reflective of real change over the medium to longer term, as the significant reduction in recorded crimes of weapon possession has been replicated in other sources (see [Section 2](#)).
- This advice will be incorporated into the upcoming 2017-18 National Statistics on recorded crime, which will be published in September 2018. Going forward (and as noted above) statisticians will also work with Police Scotland and the Scottish Crime Recording Board to promote further improvement in recording practice for crimes of handling offensive weapons.

Tables

Please note:

- Where no records were found a dash (-) has been used to signify this.
- Where a percentage is based on a low base, of less than five records, an asterisk (*) has been used to signify this.
- Percentages are based on rows, and may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
- For the category of possession of an offensive weapon as represented in all tables a small proportion of the total crimes relate to the possession of guns. These specific crimes relate to the Firearms 1968 Act¹⁹ which doesn't require the crime to occur in a public setting (unlike the Criminal Law Consolidation 1995 Act). We are unable to discern this legislation separately within our analysis but estimate it to be small within the overall sample (i.e. less than 10 of our 2017-18 sample of 500 crimes where the weapon wasn't used to commit a crime against a person).

¹⁹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1968/27/contents>

Table 1. Number of 'Handling offensive weapons' crimes recorded by the police and number sampled, April to September 2013 and April to September 2017.

	Number of crimes recorded ¹			Number of crimes sampled		
	2013	2017	Total	2013	2017	Total
Not used in other criminal activity	2,171	1,865	4,036	500	500	1,000
Possession of an offensive weapon	1,013	663	1,676	227	178	405
Possession of an offensive weapon	1,001	634	1,635	225	168	393
Possession of an offensive weapon (not elsewhere specified) in a prison	12	13	25	2	5	7
Possession of an offensive weapon (not elsewhere specified) in a school	-	16	16	-	5	5
Restriction of an offensive weapon	5	13	18	2	3	5
Restriction of an offensive weapon	5	13	18	2	3	5
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	1,153	1,189	2,342	271	319	590
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	1,153	1,116	2,269	271	300	571
Having in a prison an article with a blade or point	-	22	22	-	3	3
Having in a school an article with a blade or point	-	51	51	-	16	16
Used in other criminal activity	-	2,195	2,195	-	500	500
Possession of offensive weapon used in other criminal activity	-	1,333	1,333	-	302	302
Possession of offensive weapon used in other criminal activity	-	1,306	1,306	-	298	298
Possession of offensive weapon in a prison used in other criminal activity	-	13	13	-	2	2
Possession of offensive weapon in a school used in other criminal activity	-	14	14	-	2	2
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point used in other criminal activity	-	862	862	-	198	198
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point used in other criminal activity	-	846	846	-	194	194
Having in a prison an article with a blade or point used in other criminal activity	-	6	6	-	2	2
Having in a school an article with a blade or point used in other criminal activity	-	10	10	-	2	2
Total	2,171	4,060	6,231	500	1,000	1,500

1. Police Scotland Q2 2017-18 Management Information Report

<http://www.scotland.police.uk/about-us/our-performance/>

Table 2. Gender of perpetrators (where identifiable) by crime type, April to September, 2013 and 2017.

	Percentage		Number sampled ¹
	Female	Male	
Not used in commission of a crime			
Apr - Sep 2013	8%	92%	526
Possession of an offensive weapon	9%	91%	250
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	7%	93%	274
Apr - Sep 2017	11%	89%	514
Possession of an offensive weapon	12%	88%	184
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	11%	89%	326
Used in commission of a crime			
Apr - Sep 2017	11%	89%	536
Possession of an offensive weapon	10%	90%	325
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	11%	89%	211

1. For crimes where the weapon was not used, the total number for the individual crimes will not equal that for the entire sample. This is because the crimes of restriction of an offensive weapon sampled as part of this work are not presented separately due to the small numbers involved.

Table 3. Age of perpetrators (where identifiable) by crime type, April to September, 2013 and 2017.

	Under 13	13-15	16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Median age	Number sampled ¹
Not used in commission of a crime										
Apr - Sep 2013	2%	6%	16%	34%	23%	13%	5%	*	27	520
Possession of an offensive weapon	3%	7%	22%	28%	25%	9%	5%	*	26	246
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	*	4%	12%	39%	21%	16%	5%	*	27	273
Apr - Sep 2017	4%	10%	13%	24%	22%	17%	7%	1%	29	498
Possession of an offensive weapon	5%	11%	14%	18%	23%	19%	8%	*	30	175
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	4%	10%	13%	28%	22%	15%	7%	2%	28	319
Used in commission of a crime										
Apr - Sep 2017	2%	9%	16%	30%	24%	13%	5%	*	27	489
Possession of an offensive weapon	*	10%	19%	31%	22%	12%	5%	*	25	290
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	4%	7%	13%	30%	28%	13%	6%	*	28	199

1. For crimes where the weapon was not used, the total number for the individual crimes will not equal that for the entire sample. This is because the crimes of restriction of an offensive weapon sampled as part of this work are not presented separately due to the small numbers involved.

Table 4. Population of Scotland, by age group, 2013 and 2017.

		Under 13	13-15	16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Total
2013	Number	737,225	174,354	253,792	722,352	654,819	782,093	738,858	1,264,207	5,327,700
	Percentage	14%	3%	5%	14%	12%	15%	14%	24%	100%
2017	Number	755,311	162,131	236,752	738,857	694,133	710,103	785,935	1,341,578	5,424,800
	Percentage	14%	3%	4%	14%	13%	13%	14%	25%	100%

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates>

Table 5. Weapons used, where identified, by crime type, April to September, 2013 and 2017.

	Knives and blades ¹	Non-knife articles with a blade or point	Other offensive weapons	Bats and clubs	Industrial and household tools	Wood or stone objects	Number sampled ¹
Not used in commission of a crime							
Apr - Sep 2013	53%	13%	9%	12%	8%	4%	496
Possession of an offensive weapon	14%	13%	20%	26%	18%	10%	227
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	87%	12%	*	-	*	-	269
Apr - Sep 2017	56%	18%	9%	8%	6%	2%	498
Possession of an offensive weapon	9%	26%	22%	23%	15%	4%	178
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	84%	14%	*	-	*	-	316
Used in commission of a crime							
Apr - Sep 2017	36%	11%	21%	14%	10%	7%	496
Possession of an offensive weapon	3%	10%	34%	24%	17%	12%	297
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	86%	13%	*	-	-	-	199

1. For crimes where the weapon was not used, the total number for the individual crimes will not equal that for the entire sample. This is because the crimes of restriction of an offensive weapon sampled as part of this work are not presented separately due to the small numbers involved.

Table 6. How crimes are reported / come to the attention of the police, by crime type, April to September, 2013 and 2017.

	Open space	Dwelling	Retail, night-time economy and other business	Public or voluntary sector	Public transport	Number sampled ¹
Not used in commission of a crime						
Apr - Sep 2013	70%	13%	10%	6%	1%	500
Possession of an offensive weapon	70%	16%	10%	4%	*	229
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	71%	10%	10%	7%	*	269
Apr - Sep 2017	61%	14%	8%	16%	1%	500
Possession of an offensive weapon	65%	15%	7%	12%	*	179
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	58%	14%	9%	17%	2%	317
Used in commission of a crime						
Apr - Sep 2017	59%	23%	13%	4%	1%	500
Possession of an offensive weapon	60%	23%	11%	4%	2%	301
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	57%	22%	16%	4%	*	199

1. For crimes where the weapon was not used, the total number for the individual crimes will not equal that for the entire sample. This is because the crimes of restriction of an offensive weapon sampled as part of this work are not presented separately due to the small numbers involved.

Table 7. Location where the crime was committed, where known, by crime type, April to September, 2013 and 2017.

	Open space	Dwelling	Retail, night-time economy and other business	Public or voluntary sector	Public transport	Number sampled ¹
Not used in commission of a crime						
Apr - Sep 2013	70%	13%	10%	6%	1%	500
Possession of an offensive weapon	70%	16%	10%	4%	*	229
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	71%	10%	10%	7%	*	269
Apr - Sep 2017	61%	14%	8%	16%	1%	500
Possession of an offensive weapon	65%	15%	7%	12%	*	179
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	58%	14%	9%	17%	2%	317
Used in commission of a crime						
Apr - Sep 2017	59%	23%	13%	4%	1%	500
Possession of an offensive weapon	60%	23%	11%	4%	2%	301
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	57%	22%	16%	4%	*	199

1. For crimes where the weapon was not used, the total number for the individual crimes will not equal that for the entire sample. This is because the crimes of restriction of an offensive weapon sampled as part of this work are not presented separately due to the small numbers involved.

Table 8. Time the crime occurred, by crime type, April to September, 2013 and 2017.

	Midnight to 6am	6am to midday	Midday to 6pm	6pm to midnight	Number sampled ¹
Not used in commission of a crime					
Apr - Sep 2013	22%	14%	26%	38%	500
Apr - Sep 2017	17%	19%	34%	30%	499
Used in commission of a crime					
Apr - Sep 2017	16%	12%	34%	39%	495

1. The total number sampled excludes a small number where either the day and/or time the crime took place was unknown.

Table 9. Whether there was a mention of either drugs or alcohol, by crime type, April to September, 2013 and 2017.

	Alcohol	Drugs	Both	No	Yes	Number sampled ¹
Not used in commission of a crime						
Apr - Sep 2013	23%	14%	5%	58%	42%	500
Possession of an offensive weapon	23%	10%	3%	63%	37%	229
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	23%	17%	6%	54%	46%	269
Apr - Sep 2017	25%	18%	4%	53%	47%	500
Possession of an offensive weapon	23%	17%	3%	56%	44%	179
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	26%	19%	5%	50%	50%	317
Used in commission of a crime						
Apr - Sep 2017	31%	5%	3%	61%	39%	500
Possession of an offensive weapon	33%	4%	2%	61%	39%	301
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	29%	7%	4%	60%	40%	199

1. For crimes where the weapon was not used, the total number for the individual crimes will not equal that for the entire sample. This is because the crimes of restriction of an offensive weapon sampled as part of this work are not presented separately due to the small numbers involved.

Table 10. Gender of victims (where identifiable) by crime type, April to September, 2017.

	Percentage		Number sampled
	Female	Male	
Used in the commission of a crime			
Apr - Sep 2017	25%	75%	566
Possession of an offensive weapon	22%	78%	335
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	30%	70%	231

Table 11. Age of victims (where identifiable) by crime type, April to September, 2017.

	Under 13	13-15	16-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Median age	Number sampled
	Used in commission of a crime									
Apr - Sep 2017	4%	4%	13%	26%	24%	15%	9%	5%	31	552
Possession of an offensive weapon	2%	5%	16%	24%	22%	17%	10%	4%	31	328
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	6%	4%	8%	29%	25%	13%	8%	7%	30	224

Table 12. Gender of victim, by gender of perpetrator and crime type, April to September, 2017.

	Male perpetrator ¹		Female perpetrator ¹		Number sampled
	Male victim	Female victim	Male victim	Female victim	
Used in commission of a crime					
Apr - Sep 2017	70%	19%	5%	6%	566
Possession of an offensive weapon	74%	16%	5%	6%	333
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	65%	23%	5%	7%	233

1. Where the crime involved more than one perpetrator, the details for the main perpetrator was used in each case.

Table 13. Relationship between victim and perpetrator (where identifiable), by crime type, April to September, 2017.

	Acquaintances	Strangers	Professional	Relative	Partner or ex-partner	Known ¹	Not known	Number sampled
Used in commission of a crime								
Apr - Sep 2017	52%	39%	4%	3%	2%	59%	41%	541
Possession of an offensive weapon	50%	39%	6%	3%	2%	58%	42%	323
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	55%	38%	*	3%	2%	61%	39%	218

1. Includes acquaintances, relatives, partner or ex-partner and some professionals where the perpetrator was known to the victim (i.e. care workers)

Table 14. Crimes committed against a person using the weapon, by crime type, April to September, 2017.

	Murder and attempted murder	Serious assault	Robbery	Other non-sexual violence ¹	Common assault ²	Threatening and abusive behaviour	Other Misc. offences ³	Total sampled
Used in commission of a crime								
Apr - Sep 2017	2%	14%	7%	*	32%	44%	1%	511
Possession of an offensive weapon	*	12%	4%	*	41%	41%	*	313
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	3%	18%	13%	-	17%	49%	*	198

1. Includes the crimes of Threats & extortion and Abduction.

2. Includes Common assault of an emergency worker.

3. Includes the offences of Breach of the peace, Racially aggravated harassment and Racially aggravated conduct

Table 15. Physical injuries sustained, by crime type, April to September, 2017.

	No physical injuries			Assault level injuries							Total sampled	
	No contact attempted	Failed attempt at contact	No injuries reported	Sore-ness / minor injuries	Bruising / swelling	Scratches / laceration (blood drawn)	Stabbing or permanent disfigurement	Broken bones / fractures etc.	Other	Fatal		
Used in commission of a crime												
Apr - Sep 2017	51%	10%	10%	2%	4%	7%	14%	2%	*	*	467	
Possession of an offensive weapon	45%	10%	14%	3%	7%	8%	9%	3%	*	-	284	
Having in a public place an article with a blade or point	59%	11%	4%	-	*	4%	21%	-	-	*	183	

Table 16. Quality of crime recordings, April to September 2017, by Police Division.

Division	Weapon not used				Weapon used				Apr - Sep 2017			
	Sample	Number correct	Number incorrect	% correctly classified	Sample	Number correct	Number incorrect	% correctly classified	Sample	Number correct	Number incorrect	% correctly classified
Scotland	500	444	56	89%	500	466	34	93%	1,000	910	90	91%
Argyll and West Dunbartonshire	14	11	3	79%	24	23	1	96%	38	34	4	89%
Ayrshire	38	31	7	82%	25	25	0	100%	63	56	7	89%
Dumfries and Galloway	17	16	1	94%	10	10	0	100%	27	26	1	96%
Edinburgh	49	42	7	86%	43	39	4	91%	92	81	11	88%
Fife	22	18	4	82%	31	25	6	81%	53	43	10	81%
Forth Valley	32	32	0	100%	18	17	1	94%	50	49	1	98%
Greater Glasgow	120	106	14	88%	152	144	8	95%	272	250	22	92%
Highlands and Islands	15	12	3	80%	8	7	1	88%	23	19	4	83%
Lanarkshire	77	70	7	91%	78	73	5	94%	155	143	12	92%
Lothians and Scottish Borders	21	20	1	95%	20	16	4	80%	41	36	5	88%
North East	42	40	2	95%	35	33	2	94%	77	73	4	95%
Renfrewshire and Inverclyde	28	21	7	75%	27	25	2	93%	55	46	9	84%
Tayside	25	25	0	100%	29	29	0	100%	54	54	0	100%

CAUTION SHOULD BE EXERCISED WHEN COMPARING INDIVIDUAL DIVISIONS TO THE NATIONAL POSITION, AS AT LEAST PART OF ANY DIFFERENCE MAY BE DUE TO SAMPLING ERROR

The only divisions that had a statistically significant difference overall to the national position were **Forth Valley** and **Tayside** (both of which were higher than the national position)

Table 17. Quality of crime recordings, April to September 2013, by Police Division.

Division	Weapon not used			
	Sample	Number correct	Number incorrect	% correctly classified
Scotland	500	422	78	84%
Argyll and West Dunbartonshire	27	22	5	81%
Ayrshire	21	20	1	95%
Dumfries and Galloway	9	9	0	100%
Edinburgh	66	53	13	80%
Fife	22	17	5	77%
Forth Valley	32	23	9	72%
Greater Glasgow	103	91	12	88%
Highlands and Islands	25	12	13	48%
Lanarkshire	59	58	1	98%
Lothians and Scottish Borders	45	35	10	78%
North East	40	36	4	90%
Renfrewshire and Inverclyde	18	17	1	94%
Tayside	33	29	4	88%

CAUTION SHOULD BE EXERCISED WHEN COMPARING INDIVIDUAL DIVISIONS TO THE NATIONAL POSITION, AS AT LEAST PART OF ANY DIFFERENCE MAY BE DUE TO SAMPLING ERROR

The only divisions that had a statistically significant difference overall to the national position were **Ayrshire**, **Dumfries & Galloway**, and **Lanarkshire** (all of which were higher than the national position) and **Highlands & Islands** (which has lower than the national position).

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication:

- are available in more detail through statistics.gov.scot
- are available via an alternative route
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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