

# Attacks on shop workers

**Nearly one in five shopworkers in Scotland suffered a violent attack last year according to a new report, which reveals violence has more than doubled over 12 months.**

Workers throughout Scotland told how they were pushed, punched, grabbed, sworn at, shouted at, spat at and been targeted by objects ranging from baskets to bottles, while being insulted and threatened on a daily basis.

Retail trade union Usdaw highlighted the shocking incidents in its annual survey of more than 5,500 retail staff.

The report shows that 18% of shop workers suffered a violent attack in 2023 compared to 8% in the previous 12 months and just 5% in 2019, pre-pandemic.

Levels of threats and abuse have also risen. Nearly half (46%) of shop workers surveyed said they had been threatened by a customer last year, compared with 43% pre-pandemic, and 70% experienced verbal abuse, compared with 68% in 2019.

The increases come during an epidemic of retail crime, which has also seen significant increases in theft from shops.

Retail staff across Scotland who shared their experiences told how tasks such as asking for ID for age identification or refusing to sell alcohol had caused customers to become aggressive.

They told how incidents left them “shaken”, with some afraid to go back to work.

In Lothian, one reported “threats to stab us, wait for us to finish etc”, while another said they were “touched by a male customer, he got angry, called me a rat and a lesbian because I didn’t want to be touched”.

Another, in Mid-Scotland and Fife, said a customer “grabbed me from behind”, while another in the North East said: “Customer said they liked my hair then pulled it.”

A shop worker in Glasgow recalled: “Shouting at me, getting in my face, calling me names, saying I’m useless, swearing, using derogatory female terms.”

Another told how a “pregnant member of staff got assaulted with a solar light” and another was “attacked in the car park” after finishing a shift.

A staff member in the Highlands and Islands said: “Have been pushed and punched... called horrible name and barged past by a customer who I asked to leave because he is barred for shoplifting.”

Workers in the South of Scotland told of “abuse from youths on a daily basis – threats and violence from shoplifters under the influence of drink and drugs”.

Another said: “Customer spit in my face after assaulting security.”

One worker in the west of Scotland said a customer “tried to hit me with a bottle”, while another was “hit in the face by a drunk man with a basket”.

Paddy Lillis, Usdaw General Secretary, said: “It is heart-breaking to hear these testimonies from Scottish shop workers who deserve far more respect than they receive.

“Our latest survey results clearly show the scale of the appalling violence, threats and abuse faced by retail staff.

“No-one should feel afraid to go to work, but our evidence shows that too many retail workers are.

“It is shocking that nearly a fifth of our members working in retail are being assaulted for simply doing their job and serving the community. They provide an essential service and deserve our respect and the protection of the law.

“Our members have reported that they are often faced with hardened career criminals and we know that retail workers are much more likely to be abused by those who are stealing to sell goods on.

“Our latest survey results show that seven in ten retail workers suffered abuse from customers, with far too many experiencing threats and violence. Theft from shops and armed robbery were triggers for 61% of these incidents.

“Violence and abuse is not an acceptable part of the job and much more needs to be done to protect shopworkers.

“We were delighted to have won the campaign for a protection of workers law in the Scottish Parliament, but that is the beginning not the end. We have to ensure that the legislation is central to tackle a growing wave of retail crime and Usdaw looks forward to working with Police Scotland to make that happen.”

The findings follow recent reports from the British Retail Consortium and the Association of Convenience Stores, both of which found significant increases in violence and abuse against shopworkers alongside much higher levels of shoplifting, which is costing the industry £3 billion in lost stock and security measures.