

Rise in number of assaults on shop staff

Nearly one in ten shop workers in Scotland suffered a violent attack last year according to a report that reveals violence at double pre-pandemic levels.

Workers throughout Scotland have said they were pushed, punched, kicked, shaken, poked, grabbed and even stabbed while serving members of the public.

They also said they were sworn at, verbally abused and threatened occurred on a daily basis.

Retail trade union Usdaw highlighted the shocking incidents in its latest annual survey of retail staff.

Of 1011 shop workers who took part north of the Border, 8% said they had been assaulted in 2024.

Nearly half were threatened by customers and over two thirds suffered verbal abuse.

Udaw described the statistics as “shocking”, amid an “epidemic of retail crime” that has also seen significant increases in theft from shops.

Retail staff who shared their experiences told how tasks such as asking for ID to confirm age, refusing to sell alcohol or simply being out of stock for certain products had caused customers to become aggressive.

Many, the survey revealed, were “afraid to go to work”.

In Lothian, one shop worker recalled “racially abusive statements made to me and about me”.

Another said a customer “grabbed (me) by the scruff of my work jacket and shook me whilst yelling I had ruined their son’s Christmas because we were out of a specific chocolate”.

A respondent in Mid-Scotland and Fife was followed by men to their car.

Workers in Central Scotland told of being “punched in the shoulder and verbal abuse – being called names and sworn at” and being “deliberately misgendered”.

One shop worker in the region told how a “customer tried to grab my face”, while another reported being “shouted at for tills not working”.

Another recalled a “colleague got stabbed with a screwdriver”.

In South Scotland a worker noted “customers grabbing my waist, pulling my hair, grabbing my shoulder/arms/legs, telling me they stalk me, telling me to meet them after work, making sexual comments toward me”.

Paddy Lillis, Usdaw General Secretary, said: “Scottish retail workers suffer far too many incidents of violence, abuse and threats. No-one should feel afraid to go to work, but our evidence shows that too many retail workers are.

“It is shocking that over three-quarters of our members working in retail are being abused, threatened and 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.

“Scotland has had a protection of shop workers law in place

since 2021, after Labour's Daniel Johnson MSP promoted the legislation, and it has already been used in around 10,000 incidents.

"We continue to work with retailers, the Scottish Government and Police Scotland to help ensure that legislation is fully utilised and that retail workers receive the protection and respect they deserve."

While the results of the survey in Scotland were shocking, many of the statistics remained below the UK average, which showed that 10% of shop workers were assaulted, 53% were threatened and 77% were abused.

The region of the UK that suffered worst in all three categories was London, where 17% were assaulted, 68% threatened and 83% abused.

Asked what employers could do to support their workers more, the most popular answer was a "ban on offenders", followed by "more security" and "better police involvement".



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