



# EVIDENCE FOR ACTION

**SHOP  
THEFT**

**VIOLENCE  
AGAINST  
SHOPWORKERS**

**REHABILITATION**

**ANTI-SOCIAL  
BEHAVIOUR**

**INVESTMENT**

## The Crime Report 2023

A report by the Association of Convenience Stores  
[#ACSCrimeReport](#)

**ACS** | the voice of  
local shops

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Foreword

When we ask people what they most want to see improved in their local communities, safety and security comes out on top. Yet, the Crime Report reveals that local parades and high streets, at the heart of communities, continue to be blighted by crime and anti-social behaviour. This undermines people's confidence in their communities and with one third of shoppers witnessing violence or abuse towards shopworkers in the past year, no wonder many people feel more anxious when visiting their local shops.

The recommendations we have included in the Crime Report focus on how police forces and Government can better allocate resources and measure the impact of interventions. The evidence is clear; there is a small group of persistent offenders that account for most of the crime experienced by local shops. Retailers indicate that over two thirds of shop thieves are repeat offenders, often with addiction issues or connected to organised crime, or both. The question is how do we address this widely acknowledged trend?

We have seen positive approaches from some police forces that work with retailers in creating 'Most Wanted' lists of

shop thieves, creating evidence packs and designing conditions that can be attached to Criminal Behaviour Orders so offenders can be dealt with quickly and effectively. Well-funded drug rehabilitation services have the potential to deliver immense restorative benefits to individuals that are caught in a vicious cycle of addiction and criminality. We want to promote these types of interventions and see them used more widely.

Local shops have a responsibility for tackling retail crime and keeping their colleagues safe. This commitment is demonstrated yet again by the multi-million-pound investment made in security equipment in order to make stores, communities and colleagues safer. We are pleased to see ongoing investment in support services for colleagues that are victims of crime.

The Crime Report presents evidence for action to Government and police forces. It is also an open invitation to work in partnership to deliver safer communities for everyone.

James Lowman, Chief Executive, ACS

Cost of crime to convenience stores

Crime against convenience retailers costs an estimated



EVIDENCE FOR ACTION – POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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**'Most Wanted' shop thieves list for each force**

Every police force in England and Wales must co-ordinate 'Most Wanted' lists of prolific shop thieves so resources are targeted at removing them from the streets. The 'Most Wanted' lists should be developed by existing police business crime leads in each force area in consultation with retailers. For each offender on the Most Wanted list there should be Criminal Behaviour Orders developed with bespoke conditions banning them from retail areas or referring them to rehabilitation programmes.
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**Review the impact of the aggravating factor for attacks on shopworkers**

The introduction of an aggravating factor for attacks on public facing workers is an important milestone in the recognition of the abuse and violence shopworkers experience. We need to make sure the aggravating factor is working by monitoring its use and responding accordingly. The Ministry of Justice should be tasked with collecting information on the application of the aggravating factor by Magistrates.
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**Invest in offender rehabilitation programmes**

Addiction issues are one of the main drivers of shop theft and violent offending. We need more investment by Police and Crime Commissioners in high quality local rehabilitation programmes that break the cycle of offending and free offenders from the misery of drug addiction.
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**Utilise existing anti-social behaviour powers better**

Anti-social behaviour around local shops and high streets undermines community wellbeing. Important anti-social behaviour tools like the Community Trigger and Community Remedy powers are not being utilised by local authorities, police and Police and Crime Commissioners.
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**Enable investment in crime prevention measures**

Investment in crime prevention measures in local shops deters crime in communities. The Treasury should seek to incentivise investment in crime prevention measures and regulators should look favourably on technological innovations and data sharing between businesses that will enable crime prevention.



"The increase in prolific and persistent offenders across retail is having a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of our colleagues as they strive to run brilliant stores in local communities. The fatigue from this persistent pressure from thieves leaves colleagues frustrated, helpless and feeling tense in their working environment. More collaboration is needed across the sector supported by policing and other resources to address these issues in a sustainable way for our colleagues."

**Jenny Alleyne, Co-op, Head of Operational Risk & Compliance**



For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)



"Many of the people stealing from my shop are known to the community and the police. We need to do a better job at tackling these offenders and bringing them to justice. Unfortunately, shop thieves know that the police rarely take notice of anything stolen under £50 in value."

**Fiona Malone, Tenby Stores**



For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)

**£228m**  
invested in crime prevention across the sector over the last year

On average each store spent  
**£4,698**  
on crime prevention measures over the year

79% of retailers believe the cost of living crisis has led to an increase in theft

1.1 million incidents of shop theft over the last year



## Top areas of support for colleagues

- 1 Support helpline made available
- 2 Additional training on crime management
- 3 Counselling services

## Top features in-store

- 1 External security
- 2 CCTV
- 3 Intruder alarms
- 4 Staff training on crime management
- 5 Perspex screens

## Profile of shop thieves



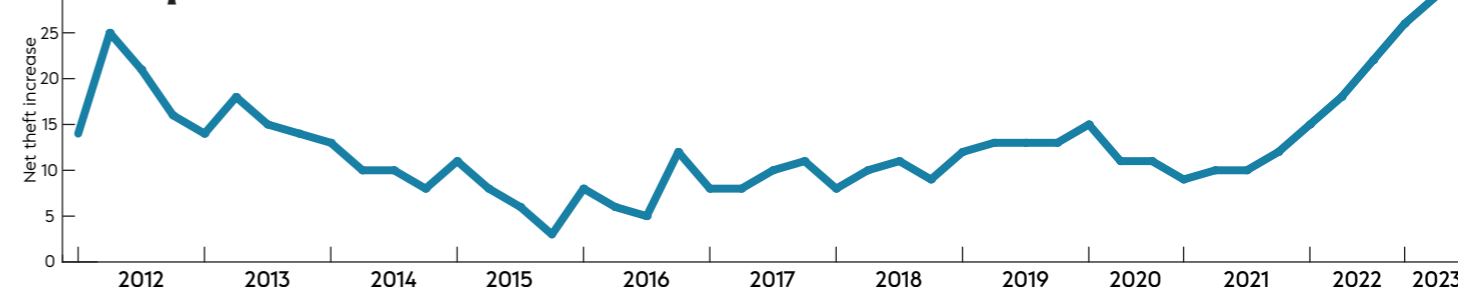
## Motivations for repeat offending

- 1 Drug or alcohol addiction
- 2 Opportunist
- 3 Organised crime

## Most commonly stolen items

- 1 Meat
- 2 Alcohol
- 3 Confectionery

## Shop theft index



## What we need

Hundreds of millions of pounds are invested each year by retailers in preventing crime in communities. We have also seen investment measures to support shopworkers when they are victims of violence and abuse at work. Wherever possible, the Government should facilitate this investment through tax relief, such as exempting the application of business rates on to CCTV installations, or through grant funding.

Every pound invested by a business in preventing crime increases the feelings of safety and positivity among local citizens about their communities. Regulators should also explore and look favourably upon the use of new technologies like facial recognition and its use in retail settings.

## What we need

Retailers tell us that the majority of shop theft is committed by a small number of repeat offenders, often with addiction issues or part of organised criminality. These offenders are known to businesses, police and the local community but there are no structures in place to target resources and collate evidence about them. Police forces should adopt the model used by Nottingham Police, where police business crime leads develop 'Most Wanted' shop thieves lists in consultation with retailers.

For each offender, an evidence pack is developed, and Criminal Behaviour Orders are prepared with relevant conditions to address the root cause of their offending. For example, referrals to rehabilitation services. When offenders are next picked up by the police, Criminal Behaviour Orders can be issued immediately and offenders dealt with.



"I don't think people realise the really negative effect abuse of staff can have. Please ShopKind."

Richard Inglis, Store Owner, Welcome in partnership with Southern Co-op



For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)

"Increasingly we experience groups of young people hanging around outside the shop and sometimes being abusive to staff. It's difficult to know how to deal with this or how we can get support from the police."

Amit Puntambekar, Nisa Retailer



For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)

Number of incidents of violence estimated in the sector = **41,000+**

**13%** of violent incidents result in injury

Over **8,800** incidents of robbery

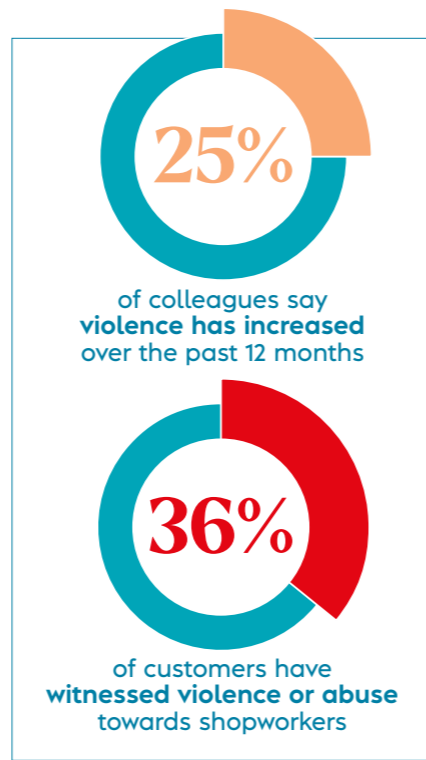
## Top triggers for violence

- Encountering shop thieves
- Enforcing an age restricted sales policy
- Refusal to serve intoxicated customers

## Of crimes where a weapon was present

- 44% Knife
- 55% Other weapon (e.g. axe, hammer or syringe)
- 1% Firearm

ACS Crime Report 2022



## What we need

We have seen the prevalence of violence towards shopworkers fall from the unprecedented levels seen during the pandemic, but levels of violence remain unacceptably high. We need to ensure that instances of violence towards shopworkers are being attended to by the police, referred to courts and the new aggravating factor being applied.

There are currently no formal structures or resources being applied by the Government to measure the application of the aggravating factor introduced in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022. The Ministry of Justice should be tasked with collecting information on the application of the aggravating factor by Magistrates and making recommendations on its impact.

Over **759,000** incidents of verbal abuse

**34%** of verbal abuse incidents are hate-motivated, according to retailers

**1/3** of shoppers are more anxious when they shop

Source: ShopKind Polling 2023

**87%** of store colleagues have experienced verbal abuse

## Top examples of anti-social behaviour

- Rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour
- Begging
- Littering
- Vandalism
- Street drinking

## What we need

We have seen a rise in levels of anti-social behaviour around stores that often manifests in groups of people loitering, being abusive to shopworkers and making people feel unsafe in our communities. There are many existing anti-social behaviour powers and tools that could be utilised better to address anti-social behaviour.

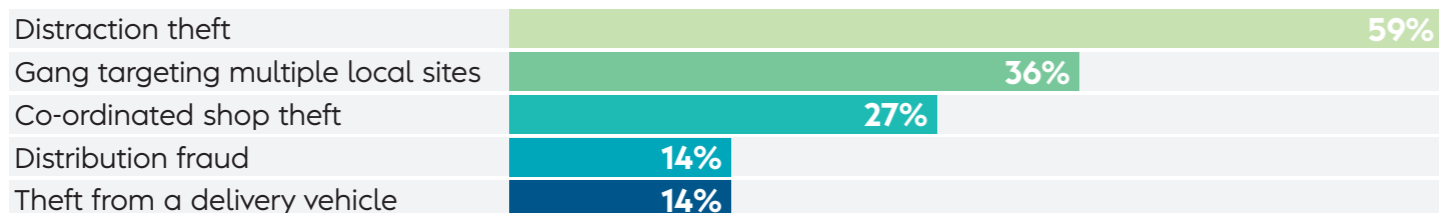
Awareness of the Community Trigger power amongst citizens and business is low, meaning allocation of resources by police and local authorities to a cross agency response to anti-social behaviour is often missing. The Home Office and Department for Levelling up should be tasked with promoting the use of the Community Trigger and reviewing the preparedness of local authorities to respond to anti-social behaviour.



**65%** of retailers believe incidents involving organised crime groups have increased in the last 12 months

ACS Crime Survey 2023

### Types of organised crime experienced



### Burglary



Number of incidents of burglary estimated in the sector = **11,000+** | The cost per incident = **£1,766** | Total cost to the sector = **£19.5m**

ACS Crime Survey 2023

### Cyber security



**77%** of retailers have experienced cyber crime in the last year

#### Most common types of cyber crime

- 1 Phishing emails
- 2 Hacking
- 3 Ransomware

#### Most common prevention methods

- 1 Using secure passwords
- 2 Installed anti-virus software
- 3 Backed up data

### What we need

We welcome the establishment of a group to address the rise in organised criminality targeting retailers led by Sussex PCC Katy Bourne. Organised crime can take many forms, from localised gangs stealing to order from stores to criminals working across police force boundaries targeting supply chains.

We want to see this group collate evidence on organised crime trends and helping to coordinate a cross force response. Business Crime Reduction Partnerships (BCRPs) and Business Improvement Districts have an important role to play in co-ordinating industry and police response to organised crime. A uniform approach to collecting and sharing data between BCRPs, BIDs and police forces can have a positive impact on tackling organised crime trends.



"Shoplifting, abuse and assaults still plague our retailers and their long-suffering staff. The impact of crime leads to frightened shopworkers and intimidated customers. Accepting that loss and violence is the price of doing business and not reporting incidents, undermines the best efforts of police and retailers who are trying to turn the tide. I urge any business experiencing crime to contact their local police for advice on reporting incidents."

**Katy Bourne, Police and Crime Commissioner, Sussex**

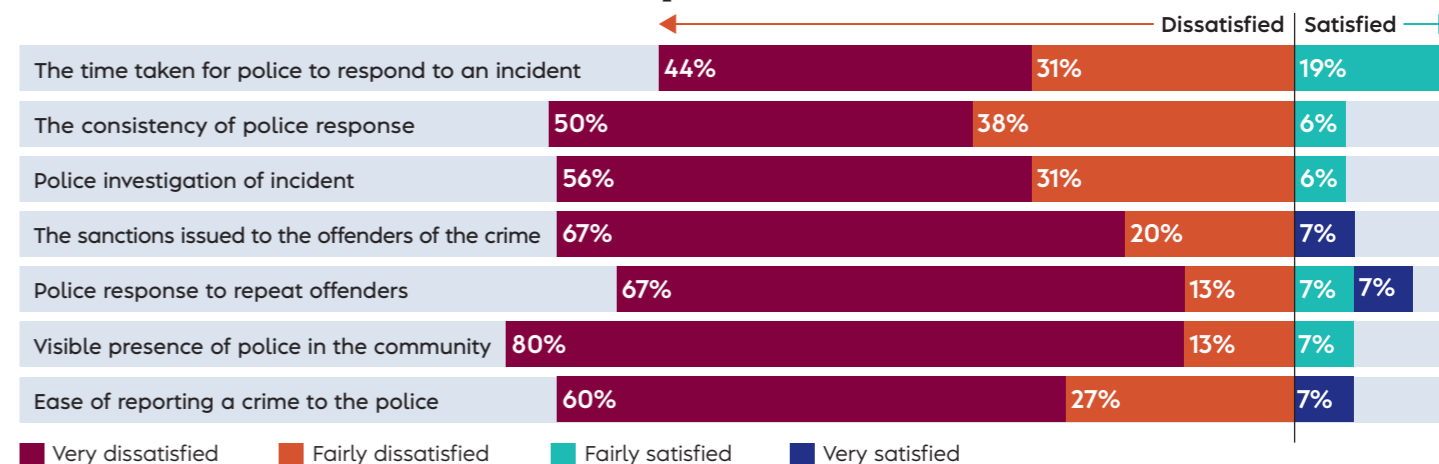


For more information go to [acs.org.uk](https://acs.org.uk)

**39 out of 42\*** Police and Crime Commissioners reference business crime in their Police and Crime Plans

This is more than double the number of PCCs who did this two years ago, which is the result of campaigns to promote PCC awareness of retail crime

### Retailers' satisfaction levels with police



**ONLY 16%** of all retail crime is reported by retailers to the police

#### Why retailers don't always report crime

(Based on open-ended responses)

1. No confidence in a follow up investigation
2. Perceived lack of interest from police
3. The time it takes to file and process reports

### What we need

Police and Crime Commissioners are doing more to recognise the problem of violence towards shopworkers and retail crime overall. Nearly all Police and Crime Commissioners now reference retail crime in their Police and Crime Plan. But this sentiment must be matched with funding to enable police force business crime leads and offender rehabilitation programmes.

Flagship rehabilitation programmes, such as the Offender to Rehab scheme in the West Midlands, and the policy proposed in the Centre for Social Justice's 'Desperate for a Fix' (2018) paper should be adopted. These policies have a real impact on retail crime and transform the lives of offenders. Delivering these rehabilitations programmes will take investment and commitment from Police and Crime Commissioners.

Crime is one of the biggest operational challenges for retailers and the illustration below outlines some of the key considerations for managing crime.

Assessing the vulnerabilities of your business to crime and planning a proportionate response is essential, whether it is installing CCTV or providing additional training for staff.

An example risk assessment for a convenience store is available from the Health and Safety Executive website: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies/pdf/newsagent.pdf>

## External security



Where reasonably practicable, advertising on shop windows should be restricted to allow for clear viewing into and out of the premises.

Ensure that all doors and windows are secured to prevent burglaries.

For high-risk stores, consider the installation of external shutters (this may require planning consent).

## Anti-social behaviour

If you are experiencing anti-social behaviour contact your local police or community safety partnership via [www.police.uk](http://www.police.uk) or your local police website

If you are experiencing persistent anti-social behaviour you can use the Community Trigger power to force a response from local agencies. To find out how to activate the Community Trigger in your area visit: <https://asbhelp.co.uk/asb-help/>

## ATMs

If you have an ATM located outside, ensure that you have CCTV with a good view of the ATM. This will help with the police investigation in the event of an ATM ram raid.

## Colleagues and customers



## Store colleagues

Make sure you consult with store colleagues on risks assessment and provide regular training on:

- Security measures such as panic buttons and CCTV.
- Internal and external crime reporting processes.
- Dealing with abusive customers.

ACS has developed the following materials to support store colleagues:

- ACS' Managing Violence and Abuse in Convenience Stores. The animation is available on ACS' YouTube Channel.
- The Suzy Lamplugh Trust in association with ACS has developed 'Suzy's Charter for Workplace Safety'.

## Customer service

Be attentive, acknowledge all customers as they enter the store, so that potential thieves know that you are watching them.

Display ShopKind materials in your store to promote positive behaviour towards store colleagues.

If you think you have spotted someone concealing goods, avoid direct confrontation, instead, offer them a basket or help with carrying their goods.

## In-store security



## CCTV

Ensure one camera provides quality images of everyone entering your premises and a second that covers the till. Identify other frequently targeted areas of the store for camera location and consider the angle of view and lighting.

When operating CCTV in your premises you need to display signs telling people CCTV is in operation. You must also keep a record of your policy for protecting your customer's and employees' privacy for example not using audio recording or putting cameras in private areas. Do not keep CCTV footage for longer than you need. More information is available on the Information Commissioner's Office website: [ico.org.uk](http://ico.org.uk)

Any company using CCTV for crime prevention purposes is required to pay an annual data protection fee to the Information Commissioner's Office. To find out more about how to pay your annual data protection fee visit: [ico.org.uk/fee](http://ico.org.uk/fee)

## Self-Scan Tills

ACS created dedicated guidance on preventing theft from self-scan tills that is available on the ACS website: [acs.org.uk/crime-report-2022](http://acs.org.uk/crime-report-2022)

## Cyber crime

Retailers can protect themselves from the most common cyberattacks by backing up data, keeping smartphones and tablets safe, preventing malware damage, avoiding phishing attacks, (e.g. emails asking for sensitive information such as bank details), and using passwords to protect your data.

For more information on ways to improve cyber security in your business see the National Cyber Security Centre's guidance for small businesses here: [ncsc.gov.uk/smallbusiness](http://ncsc.gov.uk/smallbusiness)

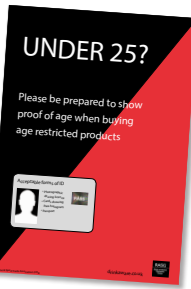
## Till position

Place high-value goods or targeted products (meat, cheese, alcohol, confectionery) in view of the till.

Ensure that the front of the store is visible from the till, so staff can see customers approaching.

## Age restricted sales

Ensure you have visible Challenge 25 signage at the entrance, till and near all age-restricted products in your store. This will remind customers they will be challenged for proof of Age. You can download and print Challenge 25 materials here: [acs.org.uk/challenge25](http://acs.org.uk/challenge25)



Make sure staff know the store policy and acceptable proof of age documents.

When asking for ID think about the following as ways to prevent confrontation: deflect, flattery, being constructive. For more information about ways to mitigate violence from enforcing age-restricted sales, see ACS' Preventing Underage Sales Guide here: [acs.org.uk/advice/age-restrictions](http://acs.org.uk/advice/age-restrictions)

## Managing cash

To reduce the risk of burglary and robbery decrease the amount of cash held in tills and on your premises and consider using counter drop safes. Regularly change the routine of banking procedures so they are not easily observable.

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## Internal theft

- Check references of any new employee.
- Highlight internal investigation procedures in staff meetings or staff newsletters.
- Implement training processes for Store Managers and Supervisors to help them identify staff theft.
- Train staff to make them aware of the security features in-store.

## Identifying staff theft

- Monitor till processes carefully and review individual end of day reports.
- Use till overlay systems to allow CCTV to combine with 'real-time' till receipt images.
- Monitor voids and refunds transactions closely
- Analyse till, cash management and inventory data to identify trends - look for anything out of the ordinary.
- When carrying out internal theft investigations, ensure you establish how and why the offence happened. This enables you to tackle the motive and presents an opportunity to prevent future incidents.

## Reporting staff theft

- Report incidents to the police using the 101 number.
- Only using civil action means that the offender can move into another business and repeat the offence.



## 1. ACS Crime Survey 2023

Unless otherwise stated all data in this report comes from ACS' Crime Survey 2023. An online survey was conducted between 13<sup>th</sup> February and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, capturing incidents and cost of crime experienced by convenience retailers over the last 12 months.

The survey had 23 respondents, representing over 3,500 convenience stores in total. The survey gathered responses from independent, multiple and co-operative retailers and the data has been weighted to represent these store types in the same proportion as they are represented in the overall market. Data regarding the overall number of stores in the convenience sector, as well as a breakdown by store type, can be found in ACS' 2022 Local Shop Report.

Where necessary, we have taken an average from responses over the past two years to better represent consistent trends within the sector.

## 2. Why retailers don't always report crime

Information on why retailers don't always report crime was captured through the following open-ended question; 'What, if anything, prevents you from reporting crimes to the police?'. Responses were categorized into themes using an inductive coding approach, resulting in the themes represented in the report.

## 3. ACS Voice of Local Shops survey (VOLS)

The VOLS survey is a telephone survey with a sample of 1,100 independent retailers, including unaffiliated, symbol group and independent forecourt retailers.

Data on the percentage of independent retailers who have experienced violence in the last year was taken from the following VOLS question:

*Which of the following best describes your experience of violence in the last year?*

- I have experienced an increase in violence.
- I have experienced a decrease in violence.
- I have experienced the same level of violence.
- I have not experienced any violence.
- Don't know.

'Don't know' responses were excluded for analysis. Those who recorded experiencing an increase, decrease or the same level of violence in the last year were considered to have experienced some form of violence over the last year.

## 4. ACS Colleague Survey 2023

An online survey looking at the demographics, experiences and situations of staff working within the convenience sector. Fieldwork was carried out between 26<sup>th</sup> January and 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023. The percentage of staff experiencing verbal abuse was based on the following question within the Colleague Survey:

*Over the last twelve months, how often (if at all) have you been a victim of the following in the workplace?*

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Every few months
- Monthly
- Don't know
- Daily or almost daily

Those who responded with any option other than 'never' were considered to have experienced some form of verbal abuse in the last year.

## 5. Shopper Polling

A survey of 1,072 UK adults conducted by Yonder. Fieldwork was carried out between the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of March 2023. The percentage of customers who have witnessed violence or abuse towards shopworkers was based on the following question:

*Have you ever witnessed shopworkers being verbally or physically abused by another customer?*

- Yes I have
- No I haven't
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Those who answered 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say' were excluded for analysis.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the retailers who took the time to complete our 2023 Crime Survey and share their crime data with us, without which this report would not be possible.

## Additional resources

For more information about retail crime and wider crime trends please see the following websites, reports and statistics:

### ShopKind campaign

<https://nbcc.police.uk/crime-prevention/shopkind-webpage>

### British Retail Consortium

<https://brc.org.uk/making-a-difference/priorities/crime/>

### USDAW Freedom From Fear campaign

<https://www.usdaw.org.uk/freedomfromfear>

### Home Office Commercial Victimization Survey (CVS) 2018

The CVS is a telephone survey where respondents from a representative sample of business premises in England and Wales are asked about crimes experienced at their premises in the 12 months prior to the interview.

Estimates for the 2018 CVS are based on 2000 interviews with respondents at premises in wholesale and retail.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/829399/crime-against-businesses-2018-hosb1719.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/829399/crime-against-businesses-2018-hosb1719.pdf)

### Office for National Statistics (ONS) Crime in England and Wales

ONS publish quarterly their Crime in England and Wales statistical bulletins which are produced in partnership with the Home Office. The statistics are based on police recorded crime data and look at trends in overall police recorded crime.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2021>

