



BRITISH RETAIL CONSORTIUM VIOLENCE AGAINST SHOP WORKERS

SUMMARY

The retail industry contributes £96 billion annually to the British economy and is the UK's largest private sector employer, providing jobs for over three million people, with almost one in ten jobs in the UK in retail. The British Retail Consortium (BRC) is the go-to trade association for the industry, with members from all sizes, sectors and constituencies. We work to make a positive difference to the retail industry and the customers it serves. Together our membership employs nearly one and a half million employees delivering £180 billion in retail sales.

For our members, other representative bodies and unions, keeping our people safe is a key priority. For us, this is a human issue that covers a public policy problem of epic proportions. It is not a victimless crime. It impacts upon the skilled, passionate, determined individuals who make the industry such a vibrant place to work; it impacts their families; and it impacts on the local communities' retailers serve. No one should go to work fearing violence or threats. Our data below shows that current sentencing laws are simply not working.

It is an area where legislation is desperately needed and would be well-received locally and nationally.

KEY STATISTICS

We have seen an explosive growth in violence against retail colleagues, both paid employees and charity sector volunteers. The statistics are alarming: in the year 2016-17 alone the rate of violent attacks nearly doubled, and the most recent figures show further growth so that on average **115 colleagues are attacked at work every day.** This is despite record spending by retailers on crime prevention.

[Our 2019 Retail Crime Survey](#) showed that:

- Every day, including weekends, 115 colleagues are attacked.
- Knives are the most significant type of weapon.
- The industry spent around £1billion on crime prevention. The nature of the issue is illustrated by the case studies in our Survey.
- Around 80% of respondents describe the police response to retail crime as poor or very poor.

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENT DO?

- **Legislate** - increase penalties and sentences for offenders attacking shopworkers serving the public and review the sentencing guidelines for assault.
- **Policing** - to improve the response from police forces by asking PCC candidates and Chief Constables to **prioritise retail crime in their police and crime plans**. Police forces could also nominate a single retailer lead for each police area to focus on this issue.
- Work with the Home Office and Ministers following the election to ask if some of the 20,000 police officers can be ring-fenced for violence and retail crime.

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CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

- In the last Parliament, Chris Bryant MP successfully introduced a Private Members Bill to give Emergency Workers better protections which received huge cross-party and public support. We think this measure can easily be introduced and implemented in the next Parliament to do the same for retail workers.
- Daniel Johnson MSP has published a Bill in the Scottish Parliament that would allow for stronger sentencing of those who attack retail workers as they perform legally required duties. There is a clear case for the UK Parliament to adopt similar measures.
- The most common causes of violence are managing attempted theft and anti-social behaviour, age checking (a legal duty on the colleague), customers with mental health issues and intoxicated consumers. Recent analysis by the [Centre for Social Justice](#) has highlighted the links between retail crime, including violence, and drug offences.
- The Home Office issued a Call for Evidence on this issue earlier in the year, and a response is still awaited. However, the timing is becoming extremely challenging for our colleagues and the Call for Evidence appeared to rule out this kind of change, despite the industry calling for it.
- In June more than 50 senior retail figures, including the CEOs of many of the UK's most recognisable retailers; Paddy Lillis, General Secretary of USDAW; Robin Osterley, Chief Executive of the Charity Retailers' Association; and Helen Dickinson OBE, Chief Executive of the BRC, [signed a letter](#) calling for legislation in this area. This gives a sense of the widespread support for action here.

SPEAKING SUGGESTIONS

- For the retail industry, this is a human issue that covers a public policy problem of epic proportions. It does not appear to be limited to one type or sector. Even online retailers are starting to see more attacks on their delivery drivers.
- It is not a victimless crime. It impacts upon the skilled, passionate, determined individuals who make the industry such a vibrant place to work; it impacts their families; and it impacts on the local communities' retailers serve.
- No one should go to work fearing violence or threats. Our data shows that current sentencing laws are not working. A single attack is one too many and hardened industry figures regularly tell us they have seen nothing like the current set of problems before – both in terms of scale and severity.
- The most common causes of violence are managing attempted theft and anti-social behaviour, age checking (a legal duty on the colleague), customers with mental health issues and intoxicated consumers. Dr Emmeline Taylor's [report](#) on violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers is important in that regard.

For more information please contact:

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