


More protection required for retailer workers as violence is on the rise, according to latest statistics

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Last year the shop-workers' union Usdaw launched its annual Respect for Shop-workers Week (11 – 17 November 2019), and also released interim results from its ongoing surveys within the retail sector. The results showed a number of statistics in relation to violent behaviour suffered by retail workers, including:

- The average shop-worker had been verbally abused, threatened or assaulted more than 21 times in the last 12 months
- 65.01% of shop-workers had experienced verbal abuse
- 41% had received threats from customers
- Approximately 390 assaults on shop-workers occurred every day
- Only 2 in 5 shop-workers had ever seen a patrolling police officer inside the shop they work in

In response to these statistics, Usdaw and the British Retail Consortium have urged the government to tackle the increasing violence within the retail sector and support tougher sentencing.

The Department for crime, policing and the fire service issued a call for evidence on 5 April 2019, encouraging retailers to submit their evidence and experiences of violence towards their shop-workers. The closing date for submissions elapsed on 28 June and it had been hoped that an official response would shortly follow. However, the government response is still anticipated, with the department minister Kit Malthouse announcing that he hopes to publish a full response “as quickly as possible” after the general election.

There are calls within the retail sector to make an assault upon a retail worker a specific statutory offence. Should this be implemented by the government, retail workers would be protected by law against violence in the same way as those working for the emergency services.

Whilst the creation of a new offence appears unlikely given that MPs rejected this suggestion last year, it is hoped that the government's guidance will provide retailers with clear and effective solutions to the increasing problem of violence.

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