'It's not part of the job': Violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers

A review of evidence and policy

September 2019

Research Report

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Contents

Violence

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.

– World Health Organisation

Acknowledgements

Foreword

by Jo Whitfield,
Retail Chief Executive,
The Co-op

Nothing is more important to me than protecting our colleagues at the Co-op. I've worked in retail businesses for more than 20 years and I've never seen such high levels of violence and abuse, often involving a weapon, directed towards shop workers.

In just the first 90 days of 2019, at the Co-op we saw more than 2,500 incidents of which 650 involved violence. One in every four of those incidents involved a weapon. I know that other shop workers in other retail businesses face the same level of violence and abuse. This is an issue for us all and reflects the issues in society. We are a Community retailer at the heart of High Streets.

To be clear, this isn't about numbers and it's not about money. It's absolutely about people and the lasting effects crime can have on their lives and their loved ones too. The physical injury and the emotional trauma can stay with them for years. It's the experiences and bravery that we hear first-hand that make all of us at the Co-op determined to do everything we can to protect our colleagues from harm.

The research carried out by Dr Emmeline Taylor and presented in this report is hugely important. She captures the horror of what is happening to far too many shop workers and why it happens. Importantly, and perhaps as shockingly, she also makes clear that we risk such violence and abuse becoming an acceptable social norm.

The recommendations made are wide ranging and rooted in robust and rigorous research. Dr Taylor has provided an evidence base which government, businesses, law enforcement and trade unions can use to develop a strategy to protect all shop workers.

It is not acceptable to be verbally abused, to be threatened or to be attacked at work. Everyone has the right to come to work and be treated with respect and feel safe. We're determined to make sure that they can and this research is a vital part of making that happen.

Jo

Executive Summary

- Violence and aggression in shops can have far-reaching and devastating consequences for shop workers, their customers and the communities that they serve.

- Multiple indicators irrefutably demonstrate that the frequency and severity of violent incidents in the retail sector have been increasing significantly across England and Wales.

- Assaults and threats committed against the wholesale and retail sector have increased almost three-fold from 524 incidents per 1,000 premises in 2016 to 1,433 in 2017 according to the Home Office's Commercial Victimisation Survey (CVS).

- The British Retail Consortium estimates that industry spend on crime control is at a record level, surpassing £1 billion per annum for the first time in the 2017–18 financial year. In addition to industry-led initiatives, the sector needs government action to stem the tide of abuse against shop workers and address the underlying causes that are known to result in violence.

- The true scale of retail crime remains unknown due to severe under-reporting to the police. As a result, it is often overlooked in police strategic plans.

The context of violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers

- We identify four main scenarios in which violence and abuse are becoming prevalent: encountering shoplifters; enforcing legislation relating to the sale of age-restricted goods and other prohibited sales; hate-motivated incidents; and armed and unarmed robberies.

- Encountering shop thieves is the number one trigger for violence and verbal abuse in the retail sector, accounting for 25% of incidents.

- There is a strong relationship between substance misuse, shop theft and the use of violence and aggression by drug-affected offenders who are desperate not to be detained. It has been estimated that 70% of shop theft is committed by frequent users of Class A drugs.

- Major legislative changes including the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (ASBCPA 2014) have had huge ramifications for retail crime, creating an environment in which violence and aggression can flourish.

- Shop theft is considered to be a gateway crime, which, if unmonitored and unpunished, can escalate in frequency and seriousness before leading on to other criminal activity, including violence.

- Shop workers report being under increasing pressure to enforce sales restrictions under the Licensing Act 2003 and this is creating situations in which they are facing heightened levels of violence and abuse. The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 introduces more age-restricted sales without any protection for shop workers tasked with enforcing them.

- Robbery has increased, with 5% of premises experiencing this crime type in 2017 compared with 3% in 2012.

- Shop workers report concerns about an increasing number of hate incidents that they or their colleagues are experiencing.

Impact and effect of violence on shop workers

- Data on the rate and severity of physical injuries inflicted on shop workers are currently not collected in a detailed and robust manner.

- The British Retail Consortium's (BRC) Retail Crime survey (2019) recorded more than 42,000 violent incidents across the industry in 2018. This equates to 115 shop workers being physically attacked every day, with many more verbally abused and threatened.

- Shop workers report severe mental health consequences from violence, including long-lasting anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

- The strain of constant abuse and fear of physical violence is causing some shop workers to change their shift pattern, their place of work or, in the worst cases, terminate their employment entirely.

Drivers and determinants of violent crime

- The increase in violence in our shops is part of a bigger picture – violent crime has been rising across England and Wales at a concerning rate.

- Local authority budgets were cut by £18 billion between 2010 and 2015. Reductions in spending on social services and the police have contributed towards rising levels of violence, it has been claimed.

- Evidence suggests that the use of heroin and crack cocaine, alongside New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), is rising in England and Wales. Both shop workers and offenders overwhelmingly identified drug addiction as a direct cause of violence in shops.

- Spending on drug and alcohol treatment services has fallen by more than 18%: from £877 million in 2013–14 to £716 million in 2017–18.

- There is a clear need to address the widening gap between demand for and provision of public health services, particularly in relation to drug and alcohol treatment and mental health provision.

- Drug-affected offenders are being dealt with by inappropriate community orders or short custodial sentences that do nothing to target the root causes of their criminal behaviour. The number of drug treatment orders has halved in the four years to 2018. Significant opportunities to assist drug users to transition to a drug-free life are being missed.

- Prolific drug-affected offenders report a lack of rehabilitation and support to assist them in the transition to a drug-free life.

- Short prison sentences are ineffective and return the highest recidivism rates; almost two-thirds (65%) of prisoners released after sentences of less than 12 months reoffend within a year. The majority of prolific offenders do not see prison as a deterrent.

- There has been a substantial and continued rise in officially estimated rough sleeper numbers: the national total has increased by 169% since 2010. Many organisations such as Crisis, identify that the longer someone experiences rough sleeping for, the more likely it is they will develop complex needs, including additional mental and physical health needs, substance misuse issues and have contact with the criminal justice system.

- Between 2010 and 2018 there has been a 20% drop in real terms in police funding in England and Wales, which has led to 21,000 fewer police officers. Shop workers identify a lack of police resource as one reason for the high rate of under-reporting of crimes – both property crimes and violent crimes – in shops. The recent pledge by the Prime Minister to recruit 20,000 more officers acknowledges the problems caused by an overstretched and under-resourced police force.

A public health approach to tackling violence

- It is important that the industry, government and communities work together to tackle the root causes of violence, not just the symptoms. Only by doing this will we be able to break the cycle of violence and reduce the impact that it has on individuals, their families and our communities.

- Just as other types of violence, such as knife crime, are being framed as public health crises, there are benefits to approaching violence towards shop workers through this policy lens. Violence is preventable, but it is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted approach. A public health approach treats violence as an infection, which can be cured.

- A social-ecological model (SEM) identifies risk and preventative factors for violence across four levels with violence prevention strategies being designed and implemented at primary, secondary and tertiary stages.

Recommendations

1. **Conduct a Post-Implementation Review of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (ASBCPA) 2014.** Reducing criminal behaviour to monetary value alone has downplayed the seriousness of theft, enabling it to escalate into more serious and repeat offending. Thieves claim that they can steal with relative impunity so long as they stay below the £200 threshold. This clearly sends the wrong message. It is recommended that the ASBCPA 2014 is revisited with a view to ascertaining the direct impact that it has had on rates of shop theft, reporting levels, police response, use of court time, and conviction rates.

2. **Publicity campaign promoting zero tolerance of violence towards shop workers.** Launch a joint industry and government publicity campaign to reinforce a message of zero tolerance of violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers. Similar campaigns have successfully raised awareness about the levels of violence experienced by frontline workers. For example, Transport for London (TfL) has delivered public awareness campaigns aimed at deterring abuse of staff and fully supporting legal action. This is carried through posters, local newspapers, the TfL website and targeted campaigns supported by British Transport Police (BTP) and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The poster and press release led campaign warned would-be perpetrators 'Don't take it out on our staff'. [1]

3. **Change expectations regarding age-restricted sales.** Reframe current age-related schemes to shift the emphasis on to the customer to prove they are old enough to purchase age-restricted items, such as alcohol, knives, aerosol paint and tobacco. Government, Trading Standards and industry bodies must endorse any new scheme if it is to be effective. Furthermore, it should be underscored by a public awareness campaign to change expectations in relation to proof of age.

4. **Assaults on Retail Workers (Offences) Bill.** Introduce legislation to make certain offences aggravated when perpetrated against retail workers in the course of their employment. Retail workers exercising their duty to uphold the law regarding age-restricted sales should be given additional government-backed support to do so.

5. **Measuring hate-motivated offences in shops.** As one of the main public-facing sectors, there is anecdotal evidence that shop workers are enduring heightened levels of hate-motivated offences. It is recommended that future iterations of the Home Office's Commercial Victimisation Survey (CVS) include questions to measure the level of victimisation and identify trends in offences over time and across locations. Only by understanding the true scale of the problem can businesses and the police work together to develop appropriate solutions and better support employees.

6. **Drug testing on arrest for shop theft and violence against shop workers.** The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Lead for Drugs should encourage wider use of drug testing on arrest to support police forces in monitoring new patterns around drugs and crime. This will help provide an early opportunity to identify and refer offenders into compulsory treatment and break the cycle of crime.

7. **Streamline reporting incidents to the police and improve accuracy of data.** Currently shop workers reporting a crime have to input all of their details for each offence resulting in a lot of repeated work. Typically, there will be many aspects of a crime report that could be pre-populated to relieve the burden on stores that experience volume crime. Better reporting will provide more accurate data regarding the frequency, nature and severity of verbal abuse, violence with injury, and violence without injury in a retail setting. This in turn can improve intelligence and evidence-gathering, enabling industry and police resources to be effectively targeted where they are needed most. In addition, consistency in definitions and recording practices are needed across the 43 police forces of England and Wales. This could potentially be developed and coordinated by the National Business Crime Centre.

1. Introduction

Violence and aggression in shops can have far-reaching and devastating consequences for shop workers, their customers and the communities that they serve. Hundreds of thousands of working hours are lost each year due to injuries – both physical and mental – and many shop workers are now making the difficult decision to leave a job that they once enjoyed. All too frequently, shop workers are suffering physical injuries, as well as chronic and life-changing mental health consequences of violence, such as long-term anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many attest that the level of violence in the retail sector has reached 'epidemic' proportions. The testimonies that are contained within this report highlight the shocking impact of violence on shop workers, their families and the communities which they serve. It is evident that government action is urgently needed to protect employees and send a clear message that violence and verbal abuse will not be tolerated in our shops.

1.1 Measuring violence and abuse towards shop workers

Multiple indicators and sources demonstrate that the frequency and severity of violent incidents in the retail sector have been increasing significantly across England and Wales.

• The Home Office Commercial Victimisation Survey (CVS) 2017[3] estimates that assaults and threats towards retail and wholesale staff are at the highest level since 2012. They have almost tripled compared to 2016: from 524 incidents per 1,000 premises to 1,433 incidents per 1,000 premises. In addition, the CVS reports that robbery has increased, with 5% of premises experiencing this crime type in 2017 compared with 3% in 2012. This is against a backdrop of 8.1 million incidents of crime against the wholesale and retail sector in 2017 (a substantial increase on the 5.2 million crimes estimated in the 2016 CVS).

• The British Retail Crime survey (2019) recorded more than 42,000 violent incidents across the industry, estimating that 115 shop workers are physically attacked every day, with many more verbally abused and threatened.[4]

• The Crime Report 2019 by the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) estimated that there were 9,782 incidents of violence against staff in local shops, 41% of which resulted in injury. 83% of staff in convenience stores have experienced verbal abuse.[5]

• The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers' (Usdaw) Freedom from Fear report (2018) shows that more than 280 retail staff are violently attacked every day. The survey also reveals that 64% of workers had experienced verbal abuse at least once in the previous year and 40% had experienced threats of physical violence.[6]

1.2 Police-recorded data: the tip of the iceberg

The available data all point to an intolerable increase in incidents of violence and abuse against shop staff, yet it is likely to be a gross underestimate of the true scale of the issue since many crimes are never reported. Employees attribute this to several reasons: they say they are struggling to find the time to report the sheer volume of incidents using the current police reporting system; they fear reprisals from offenders; they lack confidence in the criminal justice system in its current state; and they do not want to take up valuable and severely overstretched police time and resources.

Any business will attest to the amount of paid time it currently takes to report the quantity of incidents occurring and so, although all indicators point to an increase in offences, the reality is that the figures currently recorded by the police are just the tip of the iceberg. Illustrating this, the government's own figures show that just 36% of retailers reported their most recent incident of shoplifting to the police. Nor are incidents of violence and verbal abuse adequately reported to the police.[7] For example, Usdaw's survey of violence and abuse against shop staff 2018[8] reveals that 57% of shop workers who experienced violence, threats or abuse at work did not report the incident to their employer – including 20% who were physically attacked. Similarly, despite its seriousness, according to the Home Office CVS 2017, only two-thirds (65%) of victimised premises reported incidents of robbery to the police.

1.3 The impact of violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers

Although useful for providing some insight into the nature of the problem, such indicators do not adequately convey the impact of violent crime on staff and customers. Behind each and every statistic is a person who has directly experienced violence while simply doing their job. The ever-present threat of violence takes a huge toll on shop workers. It can slowly chip away at self-esteem, cause or amplify mental health issues, and all too often result in shop workers leaving paid employment. Ultimately, violence and verbal abuse fray the fabric of our communities.

When shop workers are fearful every time someone walks through the door, yet are too scared to report incidents to the police through fear of reprisal or because they lack confidence in the criminal justice system, it is clear that something more has to be done.

Businesses have a responsibility to protect their employees through adequate security provision and appropriate training. The British Retail Consortium estimates that, despite the wider business conditions retail faces, spending on crime control across the industry is at a record level, surpassing £1 billion per annum for the first time in the 2017–18 financial year.[9] In addition to industry-led initiatives, government action is urgently needed to stem the tide of abuse against shop workers and address the underlying causes that are known to result in violence.

> *In the last 12 months I know of colleagues who have been physically injured with axes, needles, machetes and knives in unprovoked attacks. I know of colleagues that have been dragged through their store, who have had knives held to their throats, or been made to kneel down with guns or other weapons held at their head. They have been screamed at, threatened, and left scared to travel home from work. The impact of these incidents last a lifetime, not just on those directly involved but it affects their colleagues, their families and their communities.*
> *(Resilience and response worker, female)*

> *I always imagine the worst. I'm constantly thinking: 'When is he coming back? Am I going to get smashed again? Am I going to get stabbed this time?'*
> *(Store manager, assaulted in store, male)*

> *Sarah works as a manager in a busy convenience store located on a 'well-known violent and drug-affected' high street. Every day on her way to work she sees the devastating consequences of drug addiction and homelessness.*
> *'You walk down the street and you see about twenty heroin addicts. There are beggars and a lot of homeless people. People are passed out on the pavement, used needles are scattered on the floor. There is a lot of crime in this area.'*
> *But the crime doesn't stay on the street. Sarah explains that shoplifting is a significant issue in her store and that in recent times she has grown very concerned about the welfare of her colleagues who frequently encounter aggressive and violent thieves. Determined to try and protect her fellow shop workers she engaged the local police.*
> *'I worked really hard to get the police on board to help us tackle the amount of crime we were experiencing in store. Eventually we managed to arrest this one guy who frequently steals from the shop and also supplies heroin to the local addicts.'*
> *Relieved that the police quickly compiled sufficient evidence to arrest the offender, unfortunately Sarah's fears only escalated following the arrest.*
> *'At court he was given a community order. He knew it was me that had provided the evidence to the police that led to his arrest and now he has taken a personal vendetta against me. Just last week he punctured my car tyres with a screwdriver and he threatened to be waiting for me when I close up the store. I can't walk to my car on my own any more. I'm always looking over my shoulder.'*

This report draws upon the experiences of two distinct cohorts of people: shop workers who have been severely impacted by the frequency and/or severity of incidents occurring at their place of work and perpetrators, who provide vital insight into how and why they became violent and/or verbally abusive in a retail setting. Importantly, the stories of both groups signal actionable recommendations for government, industry and communities on how to tackle the upsurge in violence occurring in shops. It is hoped that their stories – as distressing and unpalatable to read as they are – will begin to humanise the impact and consequences of 'retail crime' and set in motion meaningful change. Some of these case studies include language that some people might find offensive. Nevertheless, it has been included, because we believe it is important to be transparent about what victims of violence and verbal abuse experience in reality.

1.4 Structure of the report

The remainder of the report is divided into chapters. **Chapter 2** provides insight into the context surrounding violence and abuse towards shop workers in England and Wales. This section identifies the triggers commonly associated with the onset of violent offences in-store. Although each incident is unique, there are some commonalities between them. We identify four main scenarios in which violence and abuse are becoming prevalent:

• encountering shoplifters,

• enforcing legislation relating to the sale of age-restricted goods and other prohibited sales,

• hate-motivated incidents,

• armed and unarmed robberies.

These contexts and triggers are examined in detail, paying particular attention to store policies, government legislation and police practices that are found to influence the frequency of their occurrence.

Chapter 3 examines the impact and effect of violence on shop workers. Drawing on real-life accounts of both victims and perpetrators, it highlights the devastating consequences that the increasing number of incidents have on individuals, businesses and communities. Violent attacks result in physical harm – from broken bones to stab wounds – and there are many examples of life-changing injuries being inflicted on shop workers. In addition, and remarkably undocumented until now, is the enduring emotional trauma of experiencing violence and abuse at work.

No crime happens in a vacuum. From outlining the consequences of violence, the report turns to understanding the underlying causes of violence in society in **Chapter 4**. There are long-established key drivers of crime, including drug and alcohol abuse, mental health, social inequality, homelessness and poverty. A recent parliamentary inquiry directly linked prolonged austerity measures to increasing rates of violent crime. Between 2010 and 2015, local authority budgets were cut by £18 billion, with youth services, social care, early intervention and housing services particularly affected.[10] In conjunction with dramatic cuts to social investment that are found to contribute to escalating violence, an ineffective and inappropriate criminal justice response to retail crime in all its forms is perpetuating criminal activity.

Eight successive years of budget cuts to Britain's police forces have stretched resources to breaking point. It is not surprising, then, that the police detection rate for crime affecting shops and their workers is just 1 in 500.[11] Furthermore, major legislative changes have been made in how retail crime is dealt with and this has had huge ramifications. For example, downgrading theft of goods with a value of £200 or less to a summary-only offence has signalled to some offenders that they can steal with relative impunity.

Prolific and drug-affected thieves report that they will use any means necessary to avoid apprehension, including serious violence. In the few cases that are prosecuted and proceed to court, offenders describe receiving sentences that do nothing to address the underlying reasons for their offending behaviour. In particular, drug-affected offenders report a string of short custodial sentences with no rehabilitation component. Missed opportunities to intervene characterise the criminal justice system. It is clear that the way in which the criminal justice system responds to crime in the retail sector requires significant and urgent change.

Chapter 5 presents a case for a public health approach to tackling escalating violence and abuse towards shop workers. Public health is, above all, characterised by its emphasis on prevention; rather than simply accepting or reacting to violence, its starting point is the strong conviction that violent behaviour and its consequences can be prevented. Just one incident of violence with injury is estimated to have an economic and social cost of £13,900; as such, any preventative measures can return a substantial return on investment.[12] It is important to focus resources on the root causes of violence, not just the symptoms. The factors that contribute to violent incidents – whether they are factors of attitude and behaviour or related to larger social, economic, political and cultural conditions – can be changed.

The report makes several recommendations. We believe that implementing them will make a marked difference to levels of violence and verbal abuse in shops, improve victims' and perpetrators' experience of the criminal justice system, and divert offenders away from ineffective punitive sanctions towards rehabilitation and meaningful change. The overarching recommendation is that violence in shops should be approached as a public health issue. Violence is preventable, not inevitable.

2. The context of violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers

> *You never get used to it, but it happens so often now that your feelings get diluted. If you saw a road accident on your way to work you would be shocked, but if you saw a road accident every day on your way to work, then over time you begin to think 'there goes another one' and you learn to carry on. The first one is absolutely shocking.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

> *I have been punched in the face by a shoplifter, threatened with a needle by a guy on drugs, been spat at, and suffered verbal abuse more times than I can remember. Recently a man threatened to bite my nose off. I have become accustomed to thinking this is just part of the job, but actually – no, it isn't.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

Shop workers have become major targets of workplace violence. They frequently encounter people who are heavily intoxicated, drug-affected, homeless, suffering mental health issues, on their way to or returning from stressful jobs and long commutes, and those who are intent on stealing and getting away with it. The sheer frequency of incidents in recent years has resulted in some shop workers reporting that it's become a regular – even expected – part of the job.

The Home Office Commercial Victimisation Survey (CVS) 2017 shows that assaults and threats committed against the wholesale and retail sector has increased almost three-fold from 524 incidents per 1,000 premises in 2016 to 1,433 in 2017.[13] More and more frontline shop workers are now finding themselves in threatening and violent situations. This is not acceptable.

The immediate antecedents of violence and verbal abuse directed at shop workers are outlined below. The four main scenarios in which violence is becoming more prevalent in shops are:

> encountering shoplifters,

> enforcing legislation relating to the sale of age-restricted goods and other prohibited sales,

> hate-motivated incidents,

> armed and unarmed robberies.

It is not surprising that shop workers report feeling anxious about working on the front line in retail, and many are now leaving the industry to seek employment in less threatening environments.

2.1 Encountering shoplifters

According to the Home Office CVS (2017), wholesale and retail premises experienced an estimated 8.1 million crimes (a substantial increase on the 5.2 million estimated the previous year). Of these, 81% of incidents were thefts and, specifically, nearly two-thirds (63%) were theft by customers. This equates to 5.1 million incidents of shop theft – approximately 14,000 incidents a day.

14,000 incidents a day

While this figure itself should be concerning, by all accounts it is a gross underestimate – some sources calculate a more realistic figure to be 38 million shop theft offences in 2017 (the issue of under-reporting is explored in Chapter 4).[14]

38 million shop theft offences in 2017

Yet, at the same time, the number of arrests for shoplifting has fallen by 17%, and the number of perpetrators charged has plummeted by 25%.[15] It is little wonder that shop workers describe the current situation as 'soul destroying'.

Individuals engaged in shop theft are increasingly resorting to violence, threats, intimidation and abuse directed at staff. Being challenged or apprehended for shop theft is the number one trigger for violence and verbal abuse in the retail sector – accounting for 25% of incidents (having grown from 15% of incidents in 2016 to 21% in 2017).[16] The current elevated rates of shoplifting multiply the likelihood of incidents in which thieves become aggressive.

We get shouted at all of the time, we get threatened all of the time. It's so common it's just seen as part of the day job now but it shouldn't be. If I was going to work in an office I would never have anything like this happen to me, but because I'm in a public-facing environment people seem to think it is acceptable.
(Store manager, male)

In my time in retail I have been punched, head butted, grabbed round the throat, threatened with needles and verbally abused more times than I can count. The sad reality is that in some stores this kind of criminal behaviour is almost a daily occurrence and we as colleagues are almost becoming immune to being victims of it.
(Store manager, male)

It has just been accepted that colleagues are verbally abused, physically abused, threatened, it is just one of those things. There's no police response any more. The police might say they'll put a picture out on a wanted gallery but we don't hear anything back. We know they're stretched to the limit.
(Store manager, male)

A few months ago a shoplifter told me that he would throw acid in my face.
(Shop worker, female)

I had a scuffle with a shop worker on the high street. I broke his arm. He got me in the back of [the store] and said he was gonna give me a banning letter. He said 'I've just gotta phone it in to the manager', but instead he called the police. We ended up scuffling in the office; we went through the door, fell down a set of stairs, and he broke his arm. To be honest with you, at the time I didn't feel that bad because he had got me in there under false pretences. I would never have gone up the stairs quietly. I would have run off.
(Prolific shoplifter, male)

Drug-affected offenders and theft

Drug addiction and acquisitive crime have always gone hand in hand. The Home Office estimates between a third and a half of all acquisitive crime is committed by offenders who use heroin, cocaine or crack cocaine. More specifically, it has been estimated that 70% of shop theft is committed by frequent users of these drugs.[17]

There is a strong relationship between substance misuse, shop theft and the use of violence and aggression by drug-affected offenders whose fear

of withdrawing makes them desperate not to be detained. Offenders report that they will resort to violence if they think it is the only option for them to escape.

You need to get away because you're on drugs. When you're rattling [withdrawing from drugs] the last thing you're going to do is let them detain you. So you're not going to go anywhere with the staff or the security guard. You're getting away – no matter what – because you're gonna be rattling. You've got the three-day rattle coming so you know that you are in trouble. You need to get the goods and get away.
(Offender, male)

If I got caught I would do anything to get away. The way I saw it is that I was fighting for my life – I know I'm not getting bail so my freedom was on the line.
(Prolific shoplifter, female)

'Dirty needles'

Some drug-using offenders will threaten staff with a 'dirty needle'[18] in order to avoid apprehension for theft. This appears to be a tactic more likely to be used by females who think they could otherwise be physically overpowered by shop workers and security guards.

I had an incident just a couple of days ago. A woman was filling her handbag up with meat and went to walk out with it. I asked her to put it back and she said: 'I've got needles on me. I've got hepatitis; I'm going to stab you. Come any closer and I'll bite you.'
I grabbed the meat that was in her hand and she slapped me in the face before running out of the store. We called the police and gave them a description and said it was all on CCTV. They didn't come out. It's awful but we have come to expect that as normal because the majority of times they don't come out – these incidents are so common now and the police are over-stretched. There has to be some deterrent for shoplifters – it's not OK that someone can come into the store, brazenly steal, threaten to bite a colleague or stab them with a needle, slap a colleague in the face and then walk out with the stolen items. For nothing to happen, it is soul destroying.
(Store manager, male)

If they're grabbing me to the extent that I can't get away, I know that if I get a dirty needle out then they'll let me go. I'm not saying I'll use it, but when they see that needle – no one wants HIV or AIDs – so I get away. Once you show them that needle then they let you go. I know a girl that got locked up for that. She put tomato sauce in it saying it was blood. [w]

(Female offender)

Shop theft and legislative changes

Major legislative changes to how retail crime is dealt with have had huge ramifications. The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (ASBCPA 2014)[19] made theft of goods from a shop worth £200 or less (retail value) a summary-only offence that would not be pursued by police. Instead, if caught, the offender can enter a plea via post.[20] It has been estimated that 90% of cases of shop theft involve property worth under £200 and so the vast majority of perpetrators are not required to attend court in person. [21] [22]

Following the introduction of the ASBCPA 2014, some forces implemented their own assessment guidelines that effectively meant that only the most serious retail crimes would be investigated. For example, citing huge budget cuts amounting to £1 billion between 2010 and 2021, the Metropolitan Police – the largest police force in the UK – advised in their Crime Assessment Policy that they wouldn't investigate any losses under £50 in value unless a suspect was already identified.

The Met will continue to have to take extremely difficult decisions unless the government does the right thing … and gives our police service the funding they need to keep us safe. [23]

Sophie Linden, Deputy Mayor for London.

These changes in legislation and police policy affect retailers disproportionately. Stores that sell fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs) – such as packaged foods, beverages (including alcohol), toiletries, over-the-counter drugs, and other consumables – are more likely to suffer low-value high-volume thefts.

The Home Office CVS (2018) found that food and grocery items were most commonly stolen in theft incidents; in 2017 nearly a third (30%) of all shoplifting incidents involved food and grocery items,[24] just over half of which (53%) were typically low-value items (such as milk or bread). So not only do shops such as supermarkets and convenience stores suffer a much higher volume of incidents, they are also far less likely to receive a police response to reports of theft than shops that stock higher-value durable goods.

The progressive downgrading of store theft has been seen as a 'licence to steal' by some shop workers and offenders. Offenders are acutely aware of the current legislation and say that they feel they can now steal with impunity so long as they do not surpass the values stipulated in legislation and police guidance.

We had a guy coming in three times a day. He would clear a whole shelf each time and then go off to sell it. The police weren't able to help because the law changed a few years ago; they don't have to do anything for theft under £200. They don't have to investigate it. In the end, I logged every single incident and when I had got 20 of them I reported it to the police in the hope that they would do something. Although individually they were under £200, linked together they were much much more. The offender was prosecuted but he only got a slap on the wrists – just a banning order from my shop. The law change is just stupid. It gives a green light to anyone to steal; they might as well broadcast: 'so long as it's under £200 you can have whatever you want.'

(Store manager, male)

The situation has got completely out of hand because the shoplifters know the police no longer have the resources to deal with them. It leaves all of us so vulnerable. The media have not helped the situation by telling the public that unless it's more than £200 stolen from stores it won't be investigated. What sort of message is that sending out?

(Shop worker, male)

Times have changed. Years ago, I used to get arrested if I was caught shoplifting; one set of officers would pick you up, and another officer would go and collect all of the evidence. Now if you get caught they just say you're banned. The shop knows full well that you're not gonna get nicked. The police don't want to arrest you because they don't have time for the paperwork.

(Prolific shoplifter, female)

I've been sat in the back of the police van and they just say 'ok, off you go.' They don't follow it up anymore because they don't want the hassle.

(Prolific shoplifter, female)

Now it's like they don't even phone police unless it's over £100 so they know that you're going to get away with it. You do anything to get away, you have to. It's not like it's affecting the shop workers' wages, is it, so they aren't going to do anything. I wouldn't put my arse on the line for a shoplifter. The store has insurance. I was sat in the shop for over an hour the other day waiting for the police to come and in the end they just had to let me go. They couldn't hold me any longer because the shop was shutting and they wanted to go home. It's all the cuts, innit. The police officers don't want the paperwork.
(Heroin user and prolific shoplifter, male)

'No challenge' policy

Due to the frequency with which their employees were assaulted as a result of encountering a store thief, the Co-op, like many stores, has implemented a 'no challenge' policy. This stipulates that employees should not challenge or attempt to apprehend shoplifters. Instead, shop workers are provided with training and encouraged to focus on capturing evidence such as CCTV footage and a description of the perpetrator's appearance. Some shop workers are very positive about the clear message from senior management that their safety is valued far more than stock and money.

The best thing about the training is that it clearly states that we are more important than the stock and cash. We have to remain calm and just call the police. If it's a robbery – lock the door, push the panic button and call the police. The best thing we can do is to get a good description, try and remember if the offender has anything distinctive about them, an accent, and remember which direction they ran off in. That is a good thing about the Co-op – they are very clear that we are not to chase after people. It's only money or some stock.
(Store manager, male)

Of course I understand that our safety is worth much more than the stock. But I can't help but feel really angry that people can just come in here and take whatever they want for free when we are working so hard to earn a living.
(Team manager, male)

Focusing on capturing evidence of in-store crimes has been regarded as best practice. However, in conjunction with the directive in the ASBCPA 2014 and individual police force guidance that reduces the likelihood of the police responding to theft incidents, it has contributed to a retail environment in which some thieves believe that they can steal with impunity. As part of this study, we have heard evidence that thieves, well aware of the current law enforcement climate, will sometimes even audaciously goad staff as they steal.

The 'no challenge' policy removes the onus from shop workers to protect stock and therefore limits the number of potential confrontations between shoplifters and employees. The majority of employees interviewed in this study welcome the 'no challenge' policy, but have some very real and understandable concerns that, in conjunction with changes in police policy and legislation, to be seen 'doing nothing' could lead to more theft, and by extension, violence and abuse.

The policy is to let them go. I understand why, but it's a hard one to take because, in my opinion, it can invite more trouble. If the shoplifters know that you're not going to come after them then they will just come in and steal more and more.
(Store manager, male)

Even though you're working for a large company you still feel this is my space, my shop, my team, my community. And you want to protect it.
(Store manager, male)

Although best practice, the 'no challenge' policy does not fully alleviate the dangers that shop workers face from determined thieves; even in the absence of any attempt to challenge or apprehend them, some thieves will become violent.

Margaret has worked for the Co-op for 27 years and was victim to an unprovoked violent attack by a man who was stealing coffee.
'It was about 2:30pm on a Sunday afternoon. I was working in one of the aisles doing reductions on some of the stock. I became aware of glass clinking in the next aisle and it sounded a little unusual, so I walked around to the next aisle to see what it was. I came face to face with a large gentleman. He said, "get out of my way" and before I knew it he had shoved me hard in the chest.
The impact literally sent me flying. He didn't give me any time to move. It just all happened so fast; there was no warning whatsoever. I had a bruised chest where he had thumped me and I had a badly bruised hip where I had landed on the floor. It turned out he had £36 of instant coffee in his bag, but I didn't know that at the time. I just came around the corner and inadvertently blocked his way. My boss was really good and told me to go home but I wasn't going to leave three ladies in the shop without me and I don't like a fuss.
I thought I was alright until the following Sunday

when I had trouble with another shoplifter who was being abusive. She was trying to steal something and was calling me all sorts of names. She called me a "bitch" and said she was going to make sure I lost my job. It soon got to the point where I didn't want to go out on the shop floor anymore. I contacted my boss and said, "you know, I'm really not in the best place at the moment". I like to think I'm quite tough, but this unprovoked incident really affected me. I have worked in retail for 27 years and I never thought this would happen to me.'
(Store manager, female)

The current lack of law enforcement in concert with legislative changes has created a fertile ground for shop theft to flourish. Thieves are becoming more prolific and more brazen as they calculate the risk of formal apprehension and punishment to be virtually non-existent. It has been estimated that the current average risk of being caught is around 1 in 500.[25]

Retailers report that the vast majority of thefts committed against their business (79%) are by repeat offenders who aren't being dealt with by local police forces.[26]

While the changes in legislation were introduced with the aim of relieving the burden on the police, they have had the adverse effect of encouraging shoplifters. This, in turn, produces a heightened risk of violent altercations if the offender comes into proximity with a shop worker or security guard.

They walk in the store, pick up what they want and walk out – it's so brazen it is unbelievable. If you challenge them they start kicking off. It's as if it's their right to steal so long as it's less than £200.
(Team leader, male)

You don't go to work to get abuse. I've been sworn at, verbally abused and threatened. There should be a zero-tolerance approach to aggression and abuse for those that are public facing.
(Store manager, male)

Shoplifting has the most lenient consequences compared to burglary, robbery and all them kind of crimes – that's why I kept doing it. Even though I was getting caught back then and going to jail like two or three times a year it was only a couple of months here and there.
(Prolific shoplifter, female)

It is clear that the ASBCPA 2014 is disempowering shop workers and the police, as well as encouraging thieves to steal with relative impunity. The epidemic

levels of theft, particularly committed by drug-affected individuals, are putting staff at heightened risk.

It is recommended that the emphasis on the value of goods be removed from the legislation. Theft is theft and there is evidence to suggest that calculating offenders are simply stealing more frequently in order to circumvent the law.

> **Recommendation: Conduct a Review of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (ASBCPA) 2014.** Reducing criminal behaviour to monetary value alone has downplayed the seriousness of theft, enabling it to escalate into more serious and repeat offending. Thieves claim that they can steal with relative impunity so long as they stay below the £200 threshold. This clearly sends the wrong message. It is recommended that the ASBCPA 2014 is revisited with a view to ascertaining the direct impact that it has had on rates of shop theft, reporting levels, police response, use of court time, and convictions rates.

> **Recommendation: Publicity campaign promoting zero tolerance of violence towards shop workers.** Launch a joint industry and government publicity campaign to reinforce a message of zero tolerance of violence and verbal abuse towards shop workers. Similar campaigns have successfully raised awareness about the levels of violence experienced by frontline workers. For example, Transport for London (TfL) has delivered public awareness campaigns aimed at deterring abuse of staff and fully supporting legal action. This is carried through posters, local newspapers, the TfL website and targeted campaigns supported by British Transport Police (BTP) and the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The poster and press release led campaign, warned would-be perpetrators 'Don't take it out on our staff'.[27]

With retail crime at an all-time high, it is apparent that the sanctions imposed on offenders are not working. They do not deter and they do not rehabilitate. Offenders themselves admit that they simply get a 'slap on the wrist' – and that's if they are pursued, which is increasingly unlikely.

Shop theft is often a gateway crime, which, if unmonitored and unpunished, can escalate in frequency and seriousness before leading on to other criminal activity, including violence.[28] The Ministry of Justice reports that 45% of prolific offenders began their criminal careers with theft offences (mainly shoplifting).[29]

Offenders claim that prison sentences do little to address the reasons for their criminal behaviour. This is explored more in Chapter 4, which examines the Criminal Justice System response to retail crime.

> *Prolific offenders were most likely to have started their criminal career with more minor offences, such as theft (mainly shoplifting).*[30]
> *Ministry of Justice, 2017*

2.2 Enforcing legislation relating to the sale of age-restricted goods and other prohibited sales

It is estimated that more than 1 in 5 violent attacks on shop workers are triggered by age-restricted sales.[31]

Licensing Act 2003
There are now more than 50 types of products that are restricted by law. The law dictates that shop workers must take 'reasonable precautions and exercise due diligence' to test the age of individuals seeking to purchase age-restricted goods and services, such as tobacco, alcohol, knives and solvents.

The Licensing Act 2003 stipulates that it is the physical seller of the product who commits an offence by selling to a person under the legal age; if shop workers don't enforce the law, they are personally liable for breaking it.[32] As such, shop workers can feel under considerable pressure, especially when a customer becomes threatening and abusive.

> *The world is changing. You don't know what people have got on them now whether that's a knife or a needle. That's when we are put in such a difficult position regarding the law. We just don't know what's going to come back at us. Things have got a lot worse.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

In response to age-restricted sales, many retailers have implemented the 'Challenge 25'[33] scheme, endorsed by the Retail of Alcohol Standards Group, the government and Trading Standards.

The responsibility placed on shop workers to challenge a customer's age or refuse a sale can result in some individuals directing aggressive and verbal abuse at them.

> *We face most of our abuse when verifying a person's age when buying age-restricted products. My team are extremely vigilant with Challenge 25, but as a result of this, receive a lot of verbal abuse. Colleagues have been reduced to tears due to this abuse. One man threatened to rape me, and another time, I was punched in the face by a fully grown man and suffered jaw injuries.*
> *(Store manager, female)*

There are also some voluntary codes applied by retailers to restrict the sale of some products. For example, although at present there is no legal restriction on the sale of high-caffeine drinks, some companies, including the Co-op as part of their social responsibility mandate, have imposed a voluntary ban on the sale of 'energy drinks' to under-16s. Customers wishing to purchase these products might also be asked to present proof-of-age documentation. It has been estimated that 1 in 20 of the age-restricted violent and aggressive incidents in 2018 involved young people attempting to buy high-caffeine drinks.[34]

Alcohol sales and intoxication
In addition to age-restricted sales, it is also an offence to serve alcohol to a person who is already intoxicated. Once drinkers have consumed alcohol to a level where they are showing signs of intoxication, their normal judgement is impaired. Therefore, it is up to the server – not the customer – to decide whether or not they should be served. It can be difficult to know when someone is drunk, and the alcohol threshold will vary between different people. This makes it a very difficult task for shop workers, and refusing service to someone under the influence of alcohol or drugs heightens the likelihood of an altercation. It has been estimated that refusing sales of alcohol to someone who is drunk and dealing with people under the influence of alcohol or drugs accounted for 21% of incidents in 2018.[35]

Enforcing age-restricted sales, refusing alcohol sales and dealing with people under the influence of alcohol or drugs accounted for 43% of incidents in 2018.

The Offensive Weapons Act 2019 was enacted in May 2019. It introduces further restrictions on the sale of some products, including prohibiting the sale of corrosive substances (acid) to under-18s and strengthening the processes for the online sale of bladed articles, bladed products and offensive weapons.

While retailers and unions are supportive of these legislative changes to tackle the rise in violent attacks, better protection for the shop workers responsible for enforcing them must also be introduced in concert. There is a very real risk that making shop workers legally responsible for enforcing this new Act in addition to the 50+ items that are also restricted will put them in increased danger of threats and actual violence.

> *I was on the till and a customer wanted to purchase a 4-pack of lager and I asked for ID. The customer said they didn't have any so I said, very politely, that unfortunately I couldn't sell them the alcohol. The customer then started with a tirade of expletives directed at me – some general but some very personal and specific to me. The store was busy and the customers, who were standing in line watching, were aghast. That is not what I go to work for.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

Not surprisingly, shop workers want to see a change in the culture regarding age-restricted sales that shifts the emphasis away from them having to ask for proof of age towards an expectation that all customers are required to volunteer it.

> *I think the government needs to change how age-restricted sales are performed. In most other places in the world, the onus is on the customer to prove their age. It should not be the shopkeeper's responsibility to ask them to provide it. If the responsibility is taken off the person on the till it will reduce the level of abusive language and violence.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

> *People don't seem to realise that we have a right to refuse. They think they have a given right to buy no matter what state they are in.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

> *It's the threats that can have the greatest impact. Like, 'wait until you finish work'. It can be terrifying.*
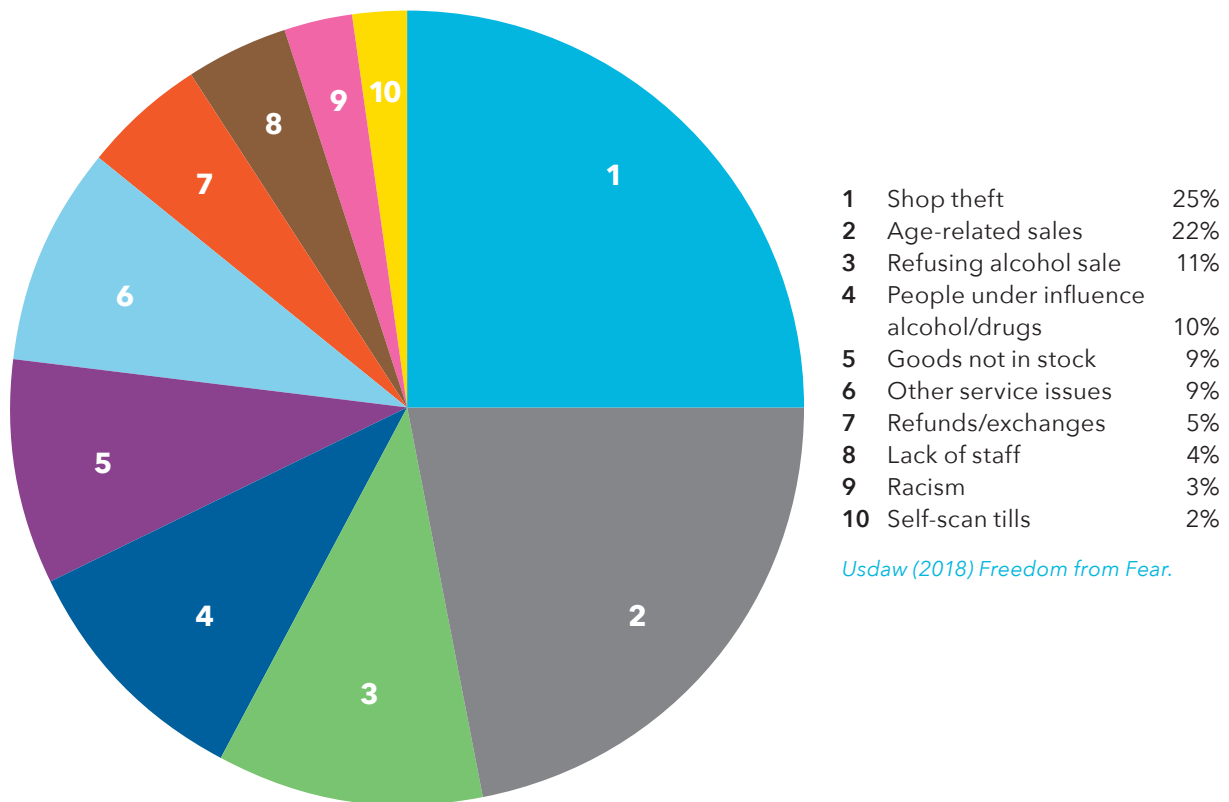> *(Shop worker, female)*

A recent survey revealed that 85% of respondents believe that the government owes a duty of care to shop workers who enforce important laws restricting the sale of certain items like alcohol, acid and knives.[36] It is recommended that this duty of care be, at a minimum, twofold: (1) to drive a shift in public expectation regarding proof-of-age requests, and (2) to introduce legislation to make certain offences aggravated when perpetrated against shop workers in the exercise of their duty, similar to the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018.[37]

> **Recommendation: Change expectations regarding age-restricted sales.** Reframe current age-related schemes to shift the emphasis on to the customer to prove they are old enough to purchase age-restricted items, such as alcohol, knives, aerosol paint and tobacco. Government, Trading Standards and industry bodies must endorse any new scheme if it is to be effective. Furthermore, it should be underscored by a public awareness campaign to change expectations in relation to proof of age.

> **Recommendation: Assaults on Retail Workers (Offences) Bill.** Introduce legislation to make certain offences aggravated when perpetrated against retail workers in the course of their employment. Retail workers exercising their duty to uphold the law regarding age-restricted sales should be given additional government-backed support to do so.

Triggers for violence and abuse

1	Shop theft	25%
2	Age-related sales	22%
3	Refusing alcohol sale	11%
4	People under influence alcohol/drugs	10%
5	Goods not in stock	9%
6	Other service issues	9%
7	Refunds/exchanges	5%
8	Lack of staff	4%
9	Racism	3%
10	Self-scan tills	2%

Usdaw (2018) Freedom from Fear.

2.3 Armed and unarmed robbery

The prevalence of robbery has increased, with 5% of premises experiencing this crime type in 2017 compared with 3% in 2012 (a statistically significant increase).

There were 297,000 incidents of robbery (including attempts) in 2017 according to the Home Office CVS.[38]

Over the past two decades, armed robbery has undergone substantial changes in target selection and modus operandi. As banks and financial institutions have installed sophisticated security, armed robbers have turned their attentions to 'softer targets'. The sale of cigarettes and other readily exchangeable goods, the high volume of cash transactions, and their often relative isolation or longer opening hours compared to other businesses in the vicinity have resulted in a corresponding increase in armed robbery in convenience stores, service stations, off-licences, supermarkets and restaurants.[39]

The reality is that any business with cash or high-value items on the premises can expect to be targeted.

The situational dynamics of robberies in the UK have changed, with offences becoming correspondingly more spontaneous and desperate.

Last year on two separate occasions my store was held up. On the first occasion in March 2017 they came in just before closing time with their faces covered. They managed to get behind the kiosk and they held a knife up to the young chap and threatened him. They demanded 'open the till'.
But you can't just open the till because it has to be mid-sale so he was quite shaken up. He was quick thinking and rang through a sale. The robbers took the contents and then they did a runner.
The police were called and they took fingerprints but nothing ever came of it. We felt very vulnerable, almost like we were just waiting to be struck again. And then it did happen again in October 2017. On this occasion somebody came in masked up and went from the customer side of the till point with a screwdriver.
The police were called again and they took the CCTV footage and statements and fingerprints but nothing has happened. No one has been caught.
(Store manager, male)

Robbers deliberately employ strategies of violence or the threat of violence to force victims to hand over money, cigarettes, alcohol and other goods. Robberies can be particularly scary and intimidating for shop workers, who might be physically hurt or threatened. Often demands are made of them that can be difficult to fulfil under duress, such as opening cash tills and safes.

Most robbers are armed with some form of weapon, most commonly a knife, but also firearms, hammers and syringes. Robberies are particularly volatile situations, particularly when offenders are under the influence of drugs or heavily intoxicated.

Convicted armed robbers report that if anything does not go according to plan (which is typically ill-conceived to begin with) or if they believe that the robbery is taking too long, then this will dramatically increase the likelihood of them using violence.[40]

2.4 Hate-motivated incidents

It is clear that shop workers frequently experience challenging customers, but few incidents are as distressing and difficult to manage as personal attacks that aim to maximise hurt and humiliation – particularly when it occurs in a busy shop setting in front of customers and colleagues.

There were 94,098 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales in 2017-18, an increase of 17% compared with 2016-17 (80,393 offences).[41]

There have been increases in all five of the centrally monitored strands of hate crime (race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, transgender status), continuing the upward trend since 2012-13. Although some of these increases are thought to be driven by improvements in crime recording by the police, following a review by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), there have been notable increases in hate crime following certain events such as the EU Referendum in June 2016 and terrorist attacks in 2017.

The number of race hate crimes increased by 14% (up 8,566 to 71,251 offences) between 2016-17 and 2017-18 and is the most commonly recorded strand of hate crime across all police forces. Over the same period, religious hate crime increased by 40% (up 2,387 to 8,336 offences). It is thought that the sharp increase in religious hate crimes is due to a rise in these offences following the terrorist attacks in 2017.

As part of this study, we heard reports from shop workers about incidents in which they, or their colleagues, had been on the receiving end of verbal abuse that targeted their membership (or perceived membership) of a certain social group or race. Such hate incidents[42] can be particularly traumatic for victims. Furthermore, this type of abuse can often take place over a prolonged period of time.

It is reassuring that the majority of forces record hate crime as a 'priority response' and this should be encouraged.[43] However, there is a concern that when a hate incident occurs in a shop and, in particular, as part of a theft incident, that its seriousness is missed.

People just don't hold back. It's disgusting – some people will say anything to staff to do with the colour of their skin, their gender, anything … It can be very upsetting. It can take a while to come back from a personal attack. It's daily – it's racist abuse, it's gender abuse – everything under the sun.
(Store manager, male)

My colleague has a disability – curvature of the spine. They will say 'that's the f**king hunchback'.
(Team leader, male)

All of my team have suffered completely unprovoked verbal abuse. One colleague in particular was targeted and told repeatedly to kill herself, for if she didn't the youth was going to tell her family things that they said would make them kill her. This was shouted at my colleague, amongst a lot of name calling, to the point that she would be in tears. As a result of this incident she took time off work because it was affecting her mental health. In the end she left the business entirely as she felt she couldn't risk being put in that situation again. Her livelihood had to change due to one person's actions, for which they suffered no consequence.
(Store manager, female)

It is essential that all police staff are aware of the potential for hate crime to escalate into a critical incident. Police forces need to work with businesses to encourage victims to report incidents at the earliest opportunity. Following an offence, the College of Policing Hate Crime Operational Guidance (2014) provides details on how to support victims.[44]

There was a group of young men who would come into the shop and say all kinds of bad words. They would swear at us and use the 'F word'. One of the girls wore a hijab and they would come in and say to her: 'I'm going to rip your hijab off you.' She was really upset. They used to come back again and again and targeted her because of the hijab. Mentally, it made her very unwell and she would be crying in the shop. It was very hard for us and very hard for her – very hard for her. She had been working there for a long time but she started to feel very unsafe and so she left the job.
(Store manager, female)

> **Recommendation: Measuring hate-motivated offences in shops.** As one of the main public-facing sectors, there is anecdotal evidence that shop workers are enduring heightened levels of hate-motivated offences. It is recommended that future iterations of the Home Office's Commercial Victimisation Survey (CVS) include questions to measure the level of victimisation and identify trends in offences over time and across locations. Only by understanding the true scale of the problem can businesses and the police work together to develop appropriate solutions and better support employees.

2.5 Other triggers

Demonstrating the triviality of some situations that result in aggressive and violent altercations, some shop workers also reported that customers would become violent or abusive if items were out of stock, they had accidently been charged the wrong amount or other services in the store (such as ATMs, lottery machines or bill-paying facilities) were not functioning.

> *Another cause for people becoming aggressive is if something isn't working – the cash points not working or the Paypoint system is not working – we deal with a lot of bills and phone top-ups and if that's not working it's not our fault. We will have logged the call and we're waiting for an engineer to come out and fix it. I'm not a cash point engineer – I can't go and fix – but then they will be shouting at us and giving us abuse for that.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

> *I've had it when something has been out of stock – 'This shop is f**king shit ra ra ra'. What's the need for the language? It's not our fault.*
> *(Shop worker, male)*

> *We get verbal abuse every day. It could be over nothing. I was serving a guy recently who had a basket full of shopping and I was scanning it. I put a bottle of juice just near the edge of the counter and without knowing it I knocked it over. He said: 'I've had f**king enough of this. You're chucking all the stuff. Your attitude absolutely stinks.'*
> *I'd done nothing wrong I just knocked something over. It didn't drop or smash. A customer intervened, 'leave it, mate' so then he started having a go at the customer 'You f**king c*nt'.*
> *It was quite bad. There was a queue of customers all watching. I'm just used to it now but I shouldn't be. It happens every day.*
> *(Team leader, male)*

> *Recently I was on shift with another young supervisor, and when we asked two males for ID when trying to buy cigarettes, we got called 'stupid', 'fat' and 'ugly', among other things. One of the men tried to climb over the kiosk and was swinging his fists at us. Things like this happen frequently. Sometimes it'll be that we're closing – when we're meant to close – or just for not having something in stock.*
> *(Shop worker, female)*

3. The impact of violence on shop workers

The attack really affected me mentally. I've had two major anxiety attacks. I had a panic attack last Friday when I was in the shop. It just hit me like a wrecking ball – I could hardly stand up. I was dropping things. It was horrendous. I was really in a bad way. I didn't know what was happening; it was extremely scary. Some colleagues thought I was joking about. One of the older ladies thought 'he's having a laugh', but when I burst into tears she realised I wasn't.
(Store manager, male)

The impact and consequences of violence can result in life-changing injuries. The reports of violence shared by shop workers as part of this study revealed instances, for example, where employees had suffered broken bones, been stabbed with knives, lacerated with smashed bottles, have lost sight due to eye injuries, and been punched. Yet the impact of violence and verbal abuse stem far beyond physical symptoms; violent encounters can leave long-lasting and life-changing emotional and mental health impacts on victims.

3.1 Physical injuries

Data on the rate and severity of physical injuries inflicted on shop workers are currently not collected in a detailed and robust manner. However, numerous data sources do suggest that violence with actual injury is becoming both more severe and more frequent. For example, the British Retail Crime survey (2019) recorded just over 42,000 violent incidents for the industry in the previous year alone. This equates to 115 shop workers being physically attacked every day, with many more verbally abused and threatened. Some of these incidents result in extremely serious injuries.

We had a shoplifter come into the store, clearly high on drugs. He had a medieval mace on a chain and was swinging it around and began attacking a colleague and myself. The mace struck my colleague in the face and ripped apart her cheek, tore off her nose, and damaged her eye so much she lost sight in that eye.
(Shop worker, male)

One of the most horrific incidents I have been called to took place in the summer of 2017. I had a phone call from my Area Manager to attend a local store as one of our colleagues had been attacked. I left immediately and managed to get there quite quickly.
Nothing could have prepared me for what I saw. When I arrived at the store, the Team Manager was being given first aid for a stab wound to his back and lower neck. He was trembling and losing consciousness. He had attempted to stop a shoplifter and as he had done so a bottle smashed on the floor. The shoplifter picked up the broken bottle and used it to attack my colleague, inflicting serious damage. I have never seen so much blood – the entire shop floor was covered in it. My colleague was rushed to hospital by ambulance but has suffered lasting damage to his back and nerves. He has since left the business. The image of that day was quite horrific and one I still think about often. I can only imagine the impact that it had on him.
The offender was caught by police and sentenced, but I know he is back out in the community and offending again.
(Shop worker, male)

I was hospitalised for over a week with broken ribs and a collapsed lung after being kicked to near death by three shoplifters who stole a £10 bottle of spirits.
(Shop worker, male)

I was on the phone to the Team Leader running the shift that night when armed robbers stormed into their store. The sound of a terrified colleague in the background and the phone call ending abruptly is something that will stick with me forever.
I have never got to a store so quickly.
When I arrived there was utter devastation and a look of complete terror still visible on my colleagues' faces. For one colleague, this was the second armed robbery she had experienced in four months. Their lives had been ripped apart. I'll never forget how harrowing it was watching the CCTV with the police late that night.
(Store manager, male)

115 shop workers are physically attacked every day

3.2 Mental health consequences

There is a well-established link between violence and mental health effects on victims.[45] In the short term, victims might experience a range of emotions including fear, anger, confusion and even feelings of guilt and shame. Other effects can include shutting people out, difficulty sleeping and low self-esteem. Long-term mental health effects of violence can include depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

PTSD is caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events. It can occur after various kinds of trauma and is characterised by re-experiencing phenomena, numbing or avoiding situations associated with the violent event, and symptoms of increased stress and anxiety. The disorder may begin immediately after the trauma or onset may be delayed for weeks, months or even years. PTSD is estimated to affect about 1 in every 3 people who have a traumatic experience.[46]

> *Rebecca was 21 years old at the time. She had been working on the shop floor when a guy in his thirties came in and picked her up by her jacket. He then pulled her by her hair down one of the aisles to the office where he demanded that she emptied the safe. He then went back to the front of the store, threatened the girl behind the till and ripped the cash drawers out before leaving. Rebecca was in a very bad way. She was very shaken up. She tried to carry on for two weeks but then she handed in her notice. The GP said it was PTSD and she's not been able to work since. She's on medication and is just stuck at home. I know she's using Lifeworks (counselling) and she said it's really helping her but she's still too scared to leave the house.*
> *(Store manager)*

> *My colleague was tidying up the magazines. It was 6:20am on a Thursday morning in December. I remember it was very quiet and it was dark outside. All of a sudden a young lad ran in with a large kitchen knife and a scarf over the bottom of his face. He jumped over the tills and told my member of staff to open the till. She said, 'I can't open the till. I'm not management.'*
> *He hesitated before jumping back over the kiosk and then left the store empty handed.*
> *My colleague was in so much shock. She was scared and having nightmares. Her GP signed her off work for four weeks due to post-traumatic*

> *stress. She's been in the business for 30 years and had never had anything like that happen before.*
> *(Store manager, female)*

3.3 Impact on employment

For some shop workers, the strain of constant abuse and fear of physical violence results in them changing their shift pattern, place of work, or even terminating their employment. This can have huge and wide-ranging impacts on their confidence, self-esteem and career prospects, notwithstanding their income.

> *I moved store because it was getting too stressful for me. Honestly, I am now thinking of getting off the shop floor altogether now to do something else. It is definitely not a safe place to work. I've moved store and so far it's not happening here – yet – but who knows when it is going to start.*
> *(Shop worker, female)*

> *After the robbery most of the employees left, and I left that store because of that incident. It is a very, very high-risk store.*
> *(Store manager, female)*

> *Simon has worked in retail for 22 years. His store in Essex suffered two violent armed robberies in 2018. He describes the emotional impact on staff morale and how such events can devastate what was once a positive working environment.*
> *'It was 7pm on a typical cold winter's night. I was carrying out evening duties; stacking the shelves ready for the next day's trade and tidying up when I heard the scream. I rushed out from the aisle and there was a man dressed all in black swinging a hammer at my colleagues, Katy and Amy.*
> *I managed to get myself between them and he swung the hammer at me. It was terrifying.*
> *Katy left the job straight away. It was her second robbery here. She's got family and her husband said, "I don't want you working there anymore because it's creating too much worry at home." Amy didn't leave straight away. She was signed off sick for a couple of weeks and we did a phased return. I kept her off evenings because I knew she was worried and anxious about being in the store at that time. But emotionally she just couldn't do it. Four weeks later, she left. I knew that it put her in a lot of financial difficulty but emotionally she was completely broken.'*
> *(Store manager, male).*

> *As a team we do not feel safe. I'm about ready to walk out but what about my career? I have bills to pay.*
> *(Store manager, male, has worked for the Co-op for 20 years).*

3.4 The aftermath of violent incidents

It is important that victims are provided with the right support following a violent attack, including access to specialist counselling services. Victims require reassurance that steps will be taken to ensure that the offence will not happen again. This can include actions taken by their employer to address any security deficits that might have been identified, access to specialist counselling and support services, as well as having confidence in the way that the police respond to the incident.

Participants in this study were positive about the procedures that the Co-op had put in place to respond when a violent incident took place. The approach, derived from best practice, combines practical and emotional support for affected colleagues with the installation of evidence-based situational crime prevention measures where relevant and appropriate.

After a serious incident, the Co-op's Retail Support Centre assists colleagues by taking over operational administration. Depending on the incident type there is a suite of support ranging from guarding to counselling depending on colleague need.

A recurrent theme, however, was the inability of the police to attend incidents, investigate, and ensure that victims were kept aware of any progress as a result of persistent budget cuts. This issue is explored further in Chapter 4.

> *The Co-op did everything they could. To the point where the Area Manager visited my colleague's house while she was off work to see if she was okay. He went that extra mile. We had counselling from Lifeworks and we had a security guard in store for four weeks while things got back to normal.*
> *(Store manager, female)*

> *The Co-op is very good now as they have a dedicated response team. We are given the name of a contact person. They called me daily to ask how the colleagues and I were. They also installed a security guard for seven days. I felt I had the support of the company. The store is also getting refurbished soon – ICCTV remote monitoring and the front door moved as part of the refurb.*
> *(Store manager, male).*

> *It would make a huge difference to know that if someone threatens or assaults a colleague then there will be swift repercussions. I have been in retail for 20 years and the difference in what I see with regards to the response to crime over that time is massive.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

3.5 Situational Crime Prevention

Effective crime control is not just about responding after an incident has taken place. It is about proactively taking steps to limit the likelihood of crime occurring in the first place. It is well established that opportunity plays a part in criminal behaviour, so taking steps to make it harder for criminals can reduce the frequency and severity of crime.

Situational crime prevention is focused on 'opportunity reduction' strategies[48] that include increasing the effort that is required by criminals to commit an offence, increasing the perceived risks and reducing the rewards.[49] This can involve a range of security devices and measures, including good CCTV coverage, alarms, appropriate signage, cash-minimisation strategies and staff training.

The British Retail Crime 2019 survey indicates that the industry spend on crime control is at its highest-ever level, surpassing £1 billion per annum for the first time in the 2017–18 financial year. This is four times the 2015–16 figure.[50]

In addition to industry-led initiatives, government action is urgently needed to stem the tide of abuse against shop workers and address the underlying causes that are known to result in violence.

The Co-op has taken its responsibility to tackle crime in all its forms seriously, with a particular focus on violence and verbal abuse in recent years as the rise in these incidents has become apparent. The approach has been to alleviate the burden placed on police across three main aspects of crime – prevention, detection and investigation –as funding cuts have severely limited resources.

The Co-op are currently in contract with SECOM, a security business that specialises in technological innovation, providing security solutions to the retail sector. SECOM runs the remote monitoring centre for Co-op store security, which involves monitoring CCTV feeds from the 600 highest-risk Co-op stores, using patterns of activity to predict when extra attention is needed. The roll-out to a further 400 stores is underway and will be completed by the end of 2019.

Once an incident-support button has been pressed in-store, SECOM operators can broadcast warnings to and throughout stores during incidents, helping to diffuse situations. Employees have been issued with headsets, enabling them to communicate with colleagues around the store and alert them to any potential offenders on the premises. They are also currently trialling body-worn cameras for frontline employees.

There is clearly a lot that retailers can and should be doing to protect their employees and create as safe a working environment as possible. However, any solution will be limited if it is not supported by a robust and credible approach from government. The Co-op will continue to invest in evidence-based crime-control solutions but no amount of CCTV cameras or security guards can solve the problem. Government action is urgently needed to tackle the root causes of violence and verbal abuse.

4. Drivers and social determinants of violent crime

> *Drugs, alcohol, homelessness, low income, lack of opportunity, lack of things for young people to do – they're the causes.*
> *(Store manager, female)*

> *That's the sort of society we live in at the moment and it's getting worse and worse. Offenders seem to get away with it so they do it more and more. The government are not dealing with it in the correct way.*
> *(Store manager, female)*

The available data all point to significant increases in incidents of violence and abuse towards shop workers, but this increase in violence in our shops is part of a bigger picture – violent crime has been rising across England and Wales at a particularly concerning rate.

The police recorded 1.4 million 'violence against the person' offences in the year ending March 2018; an increase of 19% compared with the previous year (1.1m offences).[51]

Police-recorded homicides have increased by 37% since 2014, following downward trends during the previous decade.[52]

Knife crime has increased by 71% between 2014 and 2018. The number of murder victims aged 16 to 24 rose by 45% in the year to March 2018 leading the Home Affairs Committee to describe youth violence as a 'national emergency'.[53]

The reasons for the dramatic increase in violent crime in recent years are not yet fully understood. The underlying causes of violence and verbal abuse in society are multiple and complex, with contributing factors identifiable from individual to societal levels. What is abundantly clear, however, is that dramatic cuts in public spending have resulted in devastating consequences for some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals and communities across England and Wales.

Funding cuts have been extensive and wide-ranging and include social services provision that is known to prevent or tackle criminal behaviour, including youth services and early intervention programmes, drug and alcohol treatment services, mental health provision, and education. This signals the need for concerted government action to invest in preventative measures, with enhanced interventions to support the communities most at risk of violence.

4.1 Turning the tide on community disinvestment

A recent parliamentary inquiry directly linked prolonged austerity measures to a recent rise in violence. Since 2010, public services have undergone £18 billion worth of spending cuts, with youth services, social care, early intervention and housing services particularly affected. The average local authority has reduced spending on services such as social clubs and youth workers by 40%, and some places have seen funding cut by 91% in three years.[54]

£18 billion worth of spending cuts

There are now 14 million people in the UK living in poverty – more than 1 in 5 of the population.[55] Those suffering extreme financial vulnerability are increasingly reliant on the UK's 2,000 food banks that distributed a record 1.6 million packs of food supplies in the past year.[56]

There has been a continued rise in officially estimated rough sleeper numbers, with the national total having increased by 169% since 2010.[57]

There have been large reductions in spending on already inadequate drug and alcohol treatment services – falling by more than 18% in just four years from 2013–14 and 2017–18.

It is estimated that councils now spend around £1 billion per year less on youth justice and youth services, in real terms, than they did in 2010–11.[58]

The Ministry of Justice reports that 29% of offenders currently starting community sentences say they have mental health problems, 33% misuse drugs and 38% misuse alcohol.[59] Without tackling these issues the cycle of crime will only continue, getting progressively worse.

In parallel to sweeping cuts to social services, between March 2010 and March 2018 police forces in England and Wales lost more than 21,000 officers, according to Home Office figures.[60] Fewer police resources have made it difficult for forces to respond

when offences occur, notwithstanding delivering proactive strategies to tackle the root causes of crime in all of its forms.

Against this backdrop of austerity measures that have severely impacted some of the most deprived and vulnerable areas of England and Wales, this chapter focuses on the following key factors that contribute to rising violence and abuse towards shop workers:

> Rising drug addiction and alcohol misuse in concert with reduced service provision

> Increasing levels of homelessness and rough sleeping

> Police funding and resources

> Ineffective and inappropriate criminal justice responses.

It is recognised that these issues are often interrelated and situated in broader societal health, economic and social policies that create high levels of inequality between groups in society.

Causes of crime affecting communities

4.2 Rising drug addiction and alcohol misuse in concert with reduced service provision

Underlying factors that lead to violence are often multifaceted and intertwined, but one of the most prominent drivers of violence and verbal abuse is undoubtedly drugs.

Evidence suggests that the use of heroin and crack cocaine use, alongside New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), is rising in England and Wales, due to a mix of supply and demand factors.[61]

The Home Office estimates between a third and a half of all acquisitive crime is committed by offenders who use heroin, cocaine or crack cocaine. This covers crimes such as theft, burglary and shoplifting. As outlined in Chapter 2, encountering a shoplifter is the main trigger for violence and abuse towards shop workers.

Both shop workers and perpetrators overwhelmingly identified drug addiction as a direct cause of violence in shops. It should be recognised that drug use is intertwined with other criminogenic factors such as homelessness, unemployment, and mental health issues, but the need for prolific theft to fund a Class A drug habit combines with the fear of withdrawing if the drugs aren't secured in time to create a dangerous cocktail. There are several ways in which illicit drugs relate to retail crime:

• Substance abusers steal goods to sell and use the money generated to buy drugs. If they are apprehended they might become verbally abusive or violent. There appears to be a trend of threatening employees with a 'dirty needle' that is claimed to be infected with HIV or hepatitis.
• Individuals under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol become more aggressive and commit offences while in a heightened state of emotion or experiencing psychosis.
• Offenders commit robberies in order to get money to buy drugs. The ACS Crime Report 2018 estimates that 32% of robberies are motivated by drug or alcohol addiction.[62] Additionally, some armed robbers report taking drugs immediately before a hold-up in order to give them the confidence to commit the robbery.[63]

Crack and heroin addicts admit that they are particularly dangerous if they think they are going to be detained. This is because they are worried about withdrawing while being held in the shop or later detained in a police station without any access to drugs.

> You're sitting at the back of the shop [having been detained for theft] and your head starts playing games. You start to think if I do this – if I kick off I'm out of here. I could just go 'bang', and knock him out and I'm out of the door. You're waiting for so long for the police you're thinking of how to get away. That's when you use the violence.
> (Prolific offender, male)

> I would kick off to try and get away. None of us are violent people, we're just drug addicts.
> (Offender, female)

> I'll tell you what's causing it [retail crime], that's easy – heroin and crack. Heroin gets you out there grafting [stealing] first thing in the morning, but it's crack what keeps you robbing all day.
> (Offender, male)

New psychoactive substances (NPS)

The synthetic cannabinoids collectively known as 'spice' are made up of a range of amphetamines and other laboratory-created chemicals. The substance is sometimes dubbed the 'zombie drug' because of the effect it can have on users, who are often seen staggering around. There are many variations of NPS and legislation struggles to keep up: as some compounds become controlled, new compounds emerge and become prevalent.

What is spice?

> Spice was originally a brand name of a drug that was marketed and sold as a 'legal high' along with other brand names like Black Mamba, Annihilation, Exodus Damnation and Happy Joker. They contained a non-psychoactive herbal smoking mixture that had been mixed with one or more of a group of drugs known as Synthetic Cannabinoid Receptor Agonists (SCRAs). Spice (and Mamba) are now used as nicknames for any type of herbal mixture that has been coated with an SCRA. They are potent in very small doses – a pinch of spice the size of a matchstick head is an active dose.

> We get people coming in that have done spice saying that they are going to murder everyone. When we approach them they threaten to inject us with dirty needles.
> They tell us to 'f*ck off' and they literally laugh as they steal the meat. I find it so hard that there is no support. There is nothing I can do. I have spent so much of my time trying to work with the police but it seems the problem is just too common.
> (Store manager, female)

> Mamba has completely wrecked the system. The last two prison sentences I did were completely different – different to any jail time I have ever done before. Mamba is cheap and it goes a long way. Twenty pounds of Black Mamba is enough for 150 people; you just need a tiny sprinkle. It makes you hallucinate – it makes you paranoid – you think everyone is out to get you – it makes people very violent. The prisons are so understaffed that they can't control the situation. Everyone's on it. I saw about four people in prison last time stop breathing after taking mamba and one of them died. He died on his knees in his cell. I looked through his door in the morning and there he was, dead on his knees.
> (Prolific offender and heroin user, male)

Funding for drug and alcohol services

There has been a fundamental change in how drug treatment services are organised. Prior to 2012, the NHS and local authorities jointly commissioned services, but the Health and Social Care Act changed this, making local authorities solely responsible for commissioning drug treatment and their spending was no longer ring-fenced.[64]

There has been a 13% reduction in the number of adults in contact with drug and alcohol services between 2010–11 and 2017–18.[65] This decrease in service reflects parallel government cuts on spending on drug and alcohol treatment services, falling by £161 million (18%) from £877 million in 2013–14 to £716 million in 2017–18.[66]

With reduced central government funding, councils have had to make dramatic savings across all public services and these cuts have heavily impacted on drug and alcohol service provision. As a result, many drug users will take desperate measures to escape detention. Knowing that they will have no access to drugs unless they are on the street, they show

a reckless disregard for their own safety, and the safety of anyone who could potentially detain them.

There is an urgent need to address the widening gap between demand for and provision of public health services, particularly in relation to drug and alcohol treatment services and mental health provision.

You know what is it? Why we can't let ourselves get arrested? When you go to the police station now they've stopped all medication so you know that you're gonna be in trouble [going to begin withdrawing]. You ain't getting nothing [e.g. methadone]. You're in trouble, put it that way. 'Cos it [withdrawing] does hurt. It really does hurt. So that's how desperation comes in because you know that you've gotta feed that habit. So that's what it is. Before, getting nicked wasn't that bad because you'd get your medication and that's all you care about but now you are getting nothing. So you're getting away from them guards no matter what.
(Offender, male)

It was naivety that got me into heroin and it was all downhill from there. Once the stealing starts and you've burnt all your bridges you've got no other options. You're waking up in the morning feeling ill – you got no script – the easiest thing, the only thing, to do was shoplift.
(Offender, male)

In one store, I dived through the upstairs window and cracked all my head open. The window was there and I climbed up, stood on the table, and just dived … because I knew I'd be rattling if I didn't get away.
*(Offender, male)*

I'll pull dirty needles on them, yeah. I'll do anything just to get away.
(Offender, female)

In 2017 the government's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) warned that disinvesting in drug treatment would be likely to result in increases in the number of drug-related deaths and the level of drug-driven crime. These predictions appear to be playing out. In 2019, the number of deaths from heroin is at the highest level since comparable records began. In the past five years, death rates have doubled in England, Wales and Scotland. It has been estimated that, on average, in 2016, every five hours someone died after using heroin and/or morphine.[68]

The widespread failure to provide adequate drug rehabilitation is fuelling property and violent crimes, not just in retail but more broadly.[69]

Drug-related deaths in the UK, 2006–16
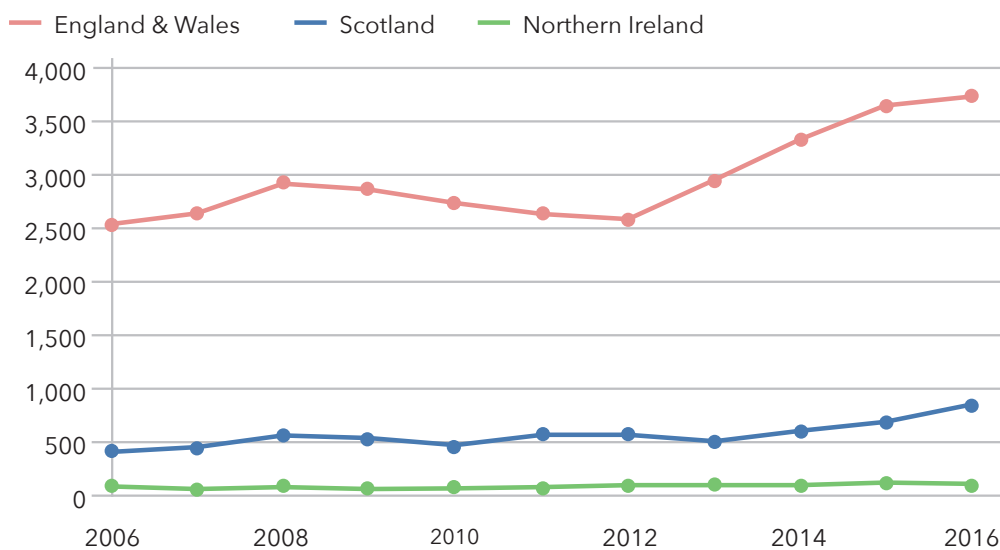
Source: Office for National Statistics, National Records of Scotland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Drug-treatment orders have fallen from over 16,000

in 2007–8 to just 4,889 in 2018. There is an appalling lack of affordable rehabilitation facilities. The situation has become so dire that drug addicts say securing a place in a rehabilitation facility is akin to winning the lottery.

> *I thought it was only celebrities and rich people that could go to rehab. I didn't even consider it as an option.*
> *(Prolific offender, female)*

> *I've finally got my golden ticket! It costs £18,000 for three months for me to go to rehab. No one can afford that. Simon [police officer] has managed to get me a place – I don't know how he did it. He negotiated the cost and got me funding. He says I deserve it and I'm worth it. I'm not going to waste this opportunity – I am very, very lucky. It's like winning the lottery.*
> *(Prolific offender, female)*

The lack of service provision means that the causes of crime are never resolved. An unacceptable cycle of crime has been allowed to develop for many drug-affected individuals – prolific theft and illicit drug use are harbingers for violence and aggression. Yet these are not inherently violent or aggressive individuals. In the clutches of addiction and desperate for their next fix, they are willing to resort to 'anything' to prevent themselves from being detained.

Given the strong link between the use of Class A drugs and violence, more needs to be done to target these offenders and divert them into meaningful rehabilitation programmes that tackle their addiction, as well as the underlying reasons for their substance misuse.

Not only do drug-addicted offenders commit up to half of all acquisitive crimes, prolific offenders are becoming even more prolific. Offenders with 36 or more previous convictions or cautions are responsible for an increasing proportion of theft offences dealt with by the criminal justice system – growing from 39% in 2010 to more than 60% in 2018. Over the same period, the even more prolific cohort of offenders – those with more than 60 previous convictions – has doubled.[70]

> *If there were no drugs there would be no robbing; no theft, no crime. Not for me anyway.*
> *(Offender, male)*

The economic cost of drug-fuelled crime

The cost of drug-fuelled crime is significant – stolen property, insurance claims, police resources, court costs and prison costs.

The most recent estimate of the annual social and economic cost of Class A drug use in England was £15.4 billion, for the year 2003–4.

£15.4 billion, for the year 2003–4

Of this, problematic drug use (defined as use of heroin and/or crack cocaine) accounts for 99% of the total, and the costs of Class A drug-related crime is 90% (estimated £13.9 billion) of that total.[71] Clearly this figure will be far higher 15 years on.

According to Public Health England, any heroin or crack addict not in a treatment programme commits crime costing an average of £26,000 a year. Alongside these figures is the immeasurable damage caused to families and communities.

Drug-affected offenders and the criminal justice system

Drug-affected offenders are being dealt with by inappropriate community orders or short custodial sentences of less than six months. At present, most offenders cycle through the criminal justice system repeatedly – passing from being sentenced back to arrest. The revolving door of prison is spinning at a dizzying pace for some of these offenders and custody offers little by way of deterrence and nothing in terms of rehabilitation.

> *I have 138 previous convictions. Mainly shoplifting and a few assaults. I would wake up and go robbing, buy drugs, and then back out and do it all again. I think it's mad how shoplifters get thrown in prison. I think they should get help. When they go to court they should put them into rehab instead of putting them into a cell. They come back out with nowhere to live, no help, no money, and they are back to square one again.*
> *(Prolific offender and drug user, female)*

Many offenders admit that they will engage in criminal activity as soon as they leave court in order to get drugs because they do not have access to rehabilitation.

> *When you get out of court – you're rattling. If you ain't got no medication the first place you're going, the first place I'm going is into a shop [to steal]. You ain't got no choice.*
> *(Prolific offender, male)*

Diversion from prison: steering vulnerable offenders towards treatment and rehabilitation

Drug-treatment orders have fallen from 8,734 in 2014 to 4,889 in 2018, and alcohol-treatment orders have also halved, despite evidence to suggest that offenders who are sentenced to community-based drug and alcohol treatment are likely to reoffend at a much lower rate than those sentenced to short custodial sentences. Adults released from custodial sentences of less than 12 months have a proven reoffending rate of 64.9%.[72]

> *Stop the drugs and then we stop the crime.*
> *(Prolific offender and heroin addict, female)*

> *When you serve a short sentence you lose your place to live, your benefits are stopped, and then you come out you're an even bigger strain on the system. There are no winners.*
> *(Heroin user and prolific offender, male)*

The CSJ Second Chance Programme

Focusing on breaking the cycle of crime for drug- and alcohol-affected offenders, the Centre for Social Justice outlines the practicalities and economics of what they term the Second Chance Programme: ma two-year programme aimed at rehabilitating the 'most prolific drug-addicted offenders'. The programme comprises three key elements: a secure phase, a residential phase and a supportive phase.[73]
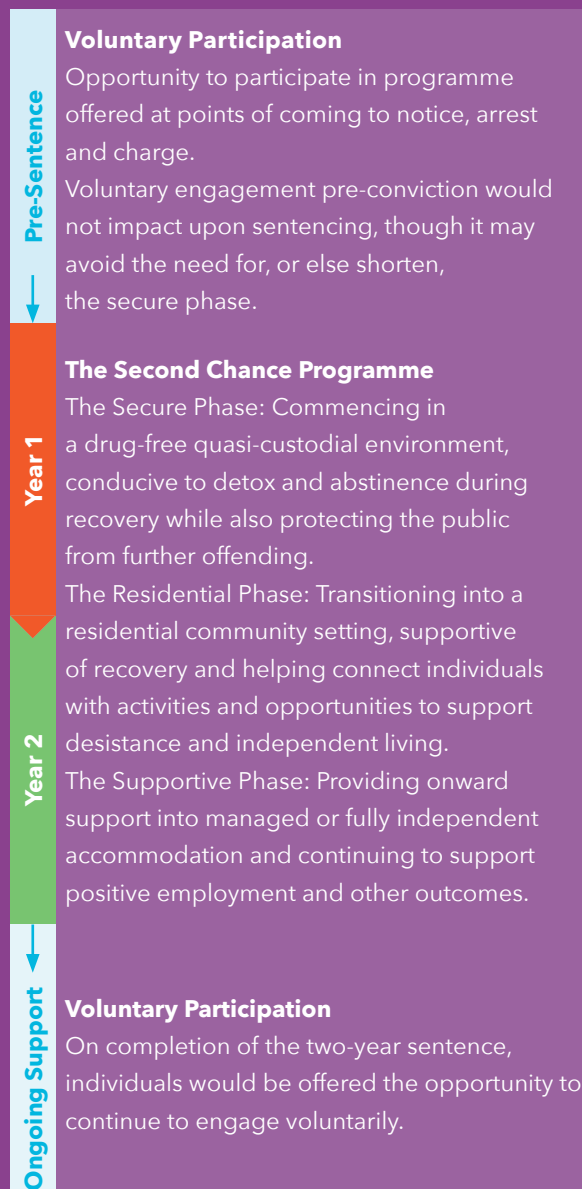
The offence of shop theft by a prolific drug-addicted offender would offer a key opportunity to intervene. Following arrest for shop theft or similar offences, offenders would be DIP-tested in custody to establish the current use of opiates or crack cocaine. The opportunity for voluntary self-referral into the Second Chance Programme could be made known to eligible offenders while in police custody.

The 'secure phase' of the programme would take place in a controlled quasi-custodial environment. This phase is focused on detox and abstinence. The staff would include a mix of seconded prison officers, probation officers, trauma counsellors, drug workers and other multidisciplinary staff. The second, 'residential', phase would see participants transitioning to a community-based residential centre where they will begin to (re)gain the life skills to live a pro-social and drug-free life in a controlled environment.

On successful completion of the two-year programme, the supportive phase provides the opportunity for individuals to continue to engage with services on a voluntary basis.

Given the high recidivism rates that short custodial sentences return, it is clear that prison is not a cost-effective solution for drug-affected criminals. There is an opportunity to explore ways of steering more offenders into drug and alcohol treatment and securing long-term change in their patterns of behaviour.

The Second Chance Programme developed by the Centre for Social Justice (2018)

Pre-Sentence

Voluntary Participation
Opportunity to participate in programme offered at points of coming to notice, arrest and charge.
Voluntary engagement pre-conviction would not impact upon sentencing, though it may avoid the need for, or else shorten, the secure phase.

Year 1

The Second Chance Programme
The Secure Phase: Commencing in a drug-free quasi-custodial environment, conducive to detox and abstinence during recovery while also protecting the public from further offending.
The Residential Phase: Transitioning into a residential community setting, supportive of recovery and helping connect individuals with activities and opportunities to support desistance and independent living.

Year 2

The Supportive Phase: Providing onward support into managed or fully independent accommodation and continuing to support positive employment and other outcomes.

Ongoing Support

Voluntary Participation
On completion of the two-year sentence, individuals would be offered the opportunity to continue to engage voluntarily.

> Recommendation: Drug testing on arrest for shop theft and violence against shop workers. The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) Lead for Drugs should encourage wider use of drug testing on arrest to support police forces in monitoring new patterns around drugs and crime. This will help provide an early opportunity to identify and refer offenders into compulsory treatment and break the cycle of crime.

4.3 Increasing levels of homelessness and rough sleeping

There has been a substantial and continued rise in officially estimated rough sleeper numbers, with the national total having increased by 169% since 2010.[74]

Whilst government figures calculate the number of people sleeping rough in England at 4,677 in 2018, research conducted by the housing charity Shelter puts the estimate significantly higher, suggesting that at least 320,000 people in Britain are homeless. The estimate suggests that nationally 1 in 200 people are now homeless, representing a year-on-year increase of 13,000.[75]

Homelessness is a complex issue and entrenched homelessness can present some particular issues. It is important to recognise that drug use and addiction and criminal behaviour may be a symptom of homelessness as well as an underlying cause. Rough sleeping is often associated with activities such as begging, street drinking and anti-social behaviour.

There have been some concerning developments in the way that local authorities have responded to homelessness. In particular, the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (ASBCPA) 2014 was introduced to replace disparate powers that had evolved to tackle a range of anti-social behaviour with six new and much broader powers. They include the following powers which may be used to deter anti-social behaviour:

• Civil injunctions
• Criminal Behaviour Orders
• Community Protection Notices
• Dispersal powers
• Public Spaces Protection Orders

The use of this Act to target homeless populations is controversial. Many voluntary sector organisations claim that it criminalises homelessness, placing already vulnerable people in an even more vulnerable position. There are also valid concerns that enforcement simply displaces rough sleeping and associated activity such as begging to other areas. More concerning, cracking down on begging might result in tactical displacement, whereby offenders engage in acquisitive crime rather than relying on hand-outs.

There were 1,320 prosecutions under the Vagrancy Act 1824 in England and Wales in 2018, up 6% on the previous year. The use of this Act in relation to people who sleep rough is particularly contentious; there have been widespread calls to repeal the legislation from several charities and NGOs (including Crisis, St Mungo's and Homeless Link). The government has committed to reviewing homelessness and rough sleeping legislation, including the Vagrancy Act 1824.

4.4 Police funding and resources

It is well known that dramatic changes have occurred to the police forces in England and Wales in recent years, mostly triggered by huge reductions in funding and resources.

Some aspects, such as neighbourhood policing, have been particularly hard hit as a result of the cuts, as well as by the need to transfer officers from frontline territorial policing into specialist roles and anti-terrorism.

There were 119,958 officers in the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales as at 31 March 2018. As was the case as at 31 March 2017, this is the lowest number of police officers since comparable records began in 1996. Records earlier than this are not directly comparable but this is the lowest number of officers since 1981, when there were 118,102 officers.

Change in the number of police officers, as at 31 March 2009 to 31 March 2018, compared with the previous 12 months, England and Wales
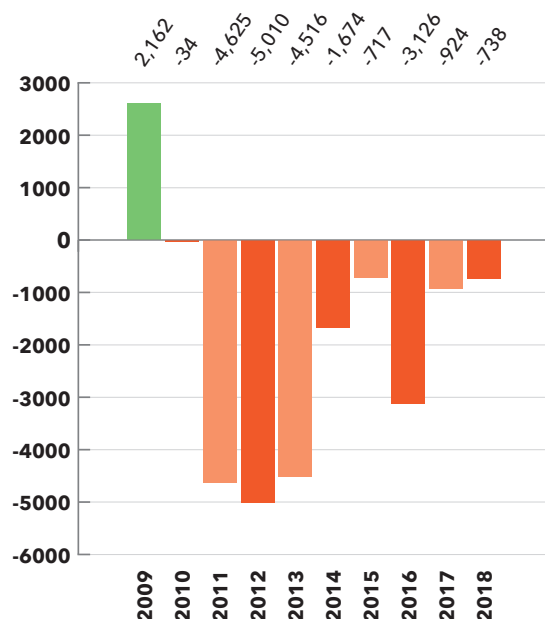
The loss of 21,000 police officers (in addition to 18,000 police staff and 6,800 police community support officers) has had a detrimental impact on crime rates, community safety and public security.

In July 2019, the new Prime Minister pledged to recruit 20,000 police officers, in effect reversing cuts made to frontline law enforcement since 2010, when the Conservative coalition came to power. This is certainly a step in the right direction, but tackling serious violence is not a law enforcement issue alone. By its own admission in the Serious Violence Strategy (2019), the government accepts that 'big shifts in crime trends tend to be driven by factors outside of the police's control – like drug trends and markets, changes in housing and vehicle security, and so on.' Alongside realistic funding for police forces, there needs to be better investment in community services to prevent crime occurring in the first place.[76]

Violence is often predictable and preventable and early intervention to stop incidents escalating is key. Businesses need to be able to work in partnership with the police to prevent low-level anti-social incidents escalating to staff assaults. All too often, experienced shop workers see the warning signs and report feeling helpless as issues escalate until the predicted assault occurs.

I'm a firm believer in the broken windows concept – you have to deal with the minor things in order to stop them from escalating.
(Store manager, male)

We had been having some trouble with some youths in the store coming in stealing, a group of four or five of them. I had advised staff not to approach them as they had become very verbally abusive to us before. I had seen them come in and I had pressed our monitored security system. The system at the time wasn't working 100% – usually they should be able to speak over the tannoy but this time they could only watch. So I was in the office on the phone to them explaining what was going on at the time. As I was on the phone I was keeping my eye on the CCTV of the store. I looked up and saw on the monitoring screen that my colleague was on the floor. I ran straight out to see what was going on. They had pushed him over to the floor. As I came into the aisle they were shouting lots of abusive language and were being very aggressive. I helped my colleague up and tried to escort him out of the way while trying to get the group out the store. As we got towards the entrance one of the youths started pushing me and then he threw a punch towards my colleague. I got in the way

and split them up. As I did that one of the other youths swung a punch and hit me in the head. Some of the local residents got involved and were taking pictures of the youths. They were very supportive of us. We ushered them inside and then locked the door until the youths had moved on. I had sent my colleague out of the back because he was very shaken up. While I was on the phone to the police he collapsed. We called an ambulance and the paramedics came out. He was okay but it was the shock of everything. They checked me over following the hit to the head and they took me to hospital to monitor me. I was very pale and my blood pressure was all over the place. After the adrenaline had subsided I realised I was in a lot of pain. I was concussed and had to have someone with me for 48 hours.
It caused a considerable impact on myself. I have bi-polar disorder and it really flared up my anxiety attacks and I was worried about coming into work. I didn't take any time off but I did seek counselling. It was very hard to deal with.
Now if I see shoplifters or groups of teenagers it flares up again. It took a long time to feel safe again and there are still lots of times when I do not feel safe at work. It took the police about a month to follow up on the incident. The group have been given a curfew order and they are not allowed in certain areas or near our store. But they came back a couple of nights later with baseball bats and stood across the street. We had to lock the store.
(Store manager, male)

4.5 The huge scale of under-reporting crime

There is always the opportunity to dismiss rising crime by attributing it to better reporting. This approach is particularly shrewd, as it transmogrifies a negative perception into a positive one. It is has been claimed in the Home Office (2019) Serious Violence Strategy:

Crime statistics are complex and easily misunderstood. The complexity is due to two main factors. Firstly, the police have made significant improvements to the way they record crimes; and secondly, victims have increasingly come forward to report previously `hidden' offences like domestic and sexual abuse. This means that the number of crimes reported to and recorded by the police has risen, irrespective of trends in actual criminality.[77]

It is certainly desirable to achieve the most comprehensive reporting rate possible, but the figures suggest that, for retail crime, the trend is moving in the opposite direction: shop workers are reporting a lower proportion of offences than ever. Estimates for the scale of under-reporting shop theft range from a conservative 1 in 100 to 1 in 1,000.

As outlined in Chapter 1, there is a huge chasm between police-recorded figures and the actual rate of crime occurring on retail premises. This makes it very difficult for the police to allocate resources where they are most needed.

At a strategic level, 63% of police and crime plans make no reference to business crime and 83% make no reference to the business community.[78]

Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) (2018)

Shop workers attribute this to several reasons: they say they are struggling to find the time to report the sheer volume of incidents using the current police reporting system; they fear reprisals from offenders; they lack confidence in the criminal justice system in its current state; and they do not want to take up valuable and severely overstretched police time and resource. Taking an hour or more to report the crime, complete a statement or assist the investigation comes at a direct cost to the business, on top of the losses already incurred through the incident.

> *I knew at one point I could do whatever I want because the police weren't coming.*
> *(Offender, male)*

> *It's too much trouble to call the police. It just gets kicked into the long grass. We don't expect much to come from it.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

Some police forces – for example, Nottinghamshire Police – have announced that they are no longer able to investigate shop theft unless violence has been involved. The bar of acceptable behaviour has been

raised and the changes in the law have signalled to professional thieves that they can operate relatively consequence-free.

However, many shop workers claim that the police frequently do not attend even when violence has been threatened.

> *I feel completely let down by the police. There is no support. There is no attendance to our calls. I have received a few letters saying, 'will you please burn off the CCTV'. You do it but then they don't collect it. Even when there has been the threat of a knife they still don't attend.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

Overstretched resources have significantly affected levels of crime in the retail setting, with perpetrators of theft and violence operating with what many shop workers perceive as complete impunity.

> *Obviously they cut down the police and if you speak to them they say it is terrible. When you think about it from their point they can only do the emergencies. Even armed robbery is not an emergency. Unless someone dies it is not an emergency.*
> *(Store manager, female)*

> *Police presence has reduced dramatically; there needs to be more local community support officers. The police we have are very nice but they are really stretched. They need to be given more power and resources.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

> *I had to ring the police four times. They said 'we're sorry we can't come to you. We're at other incidents'. It's not like I'm in a village in the middle of nowhere, it's a big town. I was just amazed that there was literally nobody to respond. The cuts have been very severe.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

> *Unless he comes back and does what he said he was going to do (slit my throat) then the police wouldn't bat an eyelid so I didn't report it. The police force in our area, well, it's pointless even having a police force if I'm honest. All the time we report things and they don't respond. They say they are so stretched that there is nothing they can do.*
> *(Store manager, male)*

Much of the criticism that shop workers express is not aimed at the police per se, but rather is born of frustration that the police no longer have enough resources to assist with serious incidents, even when the evidence is provided to them. There is a great deal of sympathy among shop workers and the community for the difficult funding environment within which the police are now operating. The downward trend in officer numbers needs to be reversed.

A self-perpetuating spiral of under-reporting

As part of its serious violence strategy launched in April 2018,[79] the government has provided £100 million for policing this year, a third of which will be used to fund Violence Reduction Units. Any level of funding is, of course, welcome but this figure is minuscule compared to the magnitude of the cuts inflicted on police forces across England and Wales. It has been estimated that the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) alone is currently having to make savings of £1 billion. Further undermining the capacity of this funding to make any meaningful change is its short-termism, with the funds having to be spent in this financial year.

One of the major issues of government policy in recent decades, and arguably a key factor in the current violent climate being experienced, is that political decision making is characterised by short-term strategising. Many of the crime issues that are being experienced now were set in motion several years ago. In order to reverse the rising trend in violent crime, a longitudinal and sustainable strategy must be developed that is protected from electoral changes.

Annualised funding allocations might serve to alleviate political pressures about high-profile issues, but they can only ever result in short-term strategies that deliver short-lived impact.

> **Recommendation: Streamline reporting incidents to the police and improve accuracy of data.** Currently shop workers reporting a crime have to input all of their details for each offence resulting in a lot of repeated work. Typically, there will be many aspects of a crime report that could be pre-populated to relieve the burden on stores that experience volume crime. Better reporting will provide more accurate data regarding the frequency, nature and severity of verbal abuse, violence with injury, and violence without injury in a retail setting. This in turn can improve intelligence and evidence-gathering, enabling industry and police resources to be effectively targeted where needed most. In addition, consistency in definitions and recording practices are needed across the 43 police forces of England and Wales. This could potentially be developed and coordinated by the National Business Crime Centre.

4.6 Prison

The prison population of England and Wales passed 80,000 for the first time in December 2006 and 85,000 in June 2010. In November 2011 the prison population reached its highest level of just over 88,000. As at 30 June 2019, the total prison population was 82,676 in England and Wales.[80]

In 2017-18 the average direct cost per prison place was £26,274 in England and Wales.[81]

The average custodial sentence for a shop theft is 1.7 months, which, when automatic release is factored in, is equivalent to 26 days, at most.[82] This is enough time to do irreparable damage to any protective and pro-social factors that might be present in the offender's life (stable accommodation, family bonds, even paid employment), but not long enough to initiate any programmes to target their criminogenic needs.

Short prison sentences are ineffective, returning the highest recidivism rates; almost two-thirds (65%) of prisoners released after sentences of less than 12 months reoffend within a year.[83] A strategy to target the relatively small cohort of drug-affected prolific offenders and direct them into compulsory treatment is long overdue.

Prison is not seen as a deterrent for the majority of prolific offenders.

It's worse getting out – back to the shit.
(Female, prolific offender)

I used to lock myself up on purpose. I used to get to a point in my life where I just thought this is f**ked and I would just go and get nicked.
(Male, prolific offender)

They just put you in jail and they don't get to the root of the problem. Instead of locking me up, try and get me a drug treatment place. If I don't take drugs I don't commit crime. Rehab – that's what they need to focus on. Instead of banging people up in prison they need to see it as an illness. It's not a choice. The government need to focus more on getting people into treatment and into dry houses. You get nothing in prison – they cut all the funding back. You wouldn't even see your drug worker in the jail. I used to do all the courses in there but on my last sentence there was nothing. I said 'what's going on?' and they said 'we've had all of our funding cut'. If the government wants to stop people committing crime then they need to help the addicts.
(Prolific offender and heroin user, male)

Drugs in prison

There are more drugs in prison than there are out here. I used to go to jail and see that as rehab but now you can use all the way through your sentence. If you're banged up in your cell for 23 hours – sometimes 24 hours – a day, of course you're going to use. You need to get offenders out of their cells and into treatment. Then get them clean, see what skills they've got, and get them a job.
(Prolific offender and heroin user, male)

There has been a shift in the type of drug being used in prison towards psychoactive substances.

It has been claimed that existing detection and treatment programmes were not designed to respond to these substances. Synthetic cannabinoids collectively referred to as 'spice' (outlined above) have become substantial problems in prison in England and Wales. For example, the number of seizures of spice rose from 408 in 2015 to nearly 3,500 in 2016.

Prison and mental health

Jenny has worked for the Co-op for 12 years and is a store manager at a branch that she describes as being located in a 'run-down area' typified by overt signs of drug use. She has experienced four robberies in the past four years, all of which have involved weapons: one with a hammer and three with knives. Not only has the trauma of these incidents taken their toll on her and the shop workers who were confronted with such high-level violence, they have also become unwilling participants in the devastating consequences of the symbiotic relationship between drug addiction and crime. She explains her 'mixed emotions' on learning the outcome for one of the perpetrators:
'The case has been dropped now because… I'm sorry… one of them was put on remand – the guy with the hammer – and because he'd been involved in so many offences he was looking at a long stretch. He … he committed suicide. He committed suicide in prison. It was drug related and obviously he's not getting his drugs in prison so he, you know. I have very mixed emotions.'
(Store manager, female)

Violent crime is far more complex than dichotomies of 'offenders' and 'victims' lead many to believe.

People in prison are more likely to suffer from mental health problems than those in the community.

Prison can exacerbate mental health issues through separation from family and friends, boredom and loss of autonomy. These difficulties are being intensified by a deteriorating prison estate, long-standing lack of prison staff and the increased prevalence of drugs in prison.

There were 325 deaths in prison custody in the 12 months to September 2018, of which 87 were self-inflicted. This represents a 12% increase in prison suicides. In addition, in the 12 months to June 2018, there were 49,565 incidents of self-harm, up 20% from the previous year.[84] Suicide and self-harm are also more common in prison than in the community, and complex social and personal issues such as substance misuse or histories of trauma are more common among the prisoner population.

Reports last year from the Public Accounts Committee, National Audit Office and the Joint Committee on Human Rights all raised concerns about the mental health of those in prison. They highlight a lack of data about prisoners with mental health problems and note the impact of poor prison environments, lack of prison staff and the prevalence of drugs within prisons on prisoners' mental health. It has been found that prisoners miss an average of 15% of medical appointments, largely because of a lack of staff to escort them.[85]

There were 120 self-inflicted deaths in prison in 2016. Of those who took their own life in prison between 2012 and 2014, 70% were known to have a mental health condition. A substantial proportion of prisoners are also known to self-harm and the number of self-harm incidents among prisoners has risen significantly. Just over 12% of men in prison and 28% of women in prison self-harm. The number of self-harm incidents in prisons has increased by 73% to 40,161 incidents in 2016, the highest in any year on record.

Record high numbers of self-inflicted deaths and incidents of self-harm in prisons are a damning indictment of the current state of the mental health of those in prison and the prison environment overall. More excuses are not good enough. The Ministry of Justice, HM Prison and Probation Service and NHS England have a duty of care to those in prison, yet do not know where they are starting from, how well they are doing or whether their current plans will be enough to succeed.[86]
Public Accounts Committee (2017)

Improving the mental health of prisoners is a difficult and complex task, but it is an essential step to reducing reoffending and ensuring that those who are released from prison can rebuild their lives in the community. This requires better systems of assessing and detecting mental health issues on entry, providing adequate service provision in a timely manner, and managing drug withdrawal appropriately. Any amount of illegal drugs in the prison estate is unacceptable, but by its own admission, the government claims that prisons are now 'awash with drugs'.[87]

Tackling violence requires a multiple-strand approach, involving a range of partners across different sectors. The following chapter advocates a multi-agency public health approach to violent crime. Rather than viewing violence through a criminal justice lens, a public health model factors in all of the contextual elements that we know are contributory factors, including drug addiction, mental health, housing, adequate youth services and early intervention, unemployment and worklessness.

5. A public health approach to tackling violence

The factors that contribute to violent responses – whether they are factors of attitude and behaviour or related to larger social, economic, political and cultural conditions – can be changed. Violence can be prevented. This is not an article of faith, but a statement based on evidence.
(World Health Organisation)

It is important to focus energies on the root causes of violence, not just the symptoms. Only by doing this will we be able to break the cycle of violence and reduce the impact that it has on individuals, their families and our communities.

Any comprehensive violence-prevention strategy must address the underlying societal factors that are well-established correlates of crime. The root causes of violent crime share similar risk factors with other types of crime and anti-social behaviour, as well as correlating with poor life outcomes such as low educational attainment, poor health and unemployment.[88] By addressing violent crime risk factors, therefore, interventions can bring a multitude of benefits to individuals, communities and wider society.

Just as other types of violence, such as knife crime,[89] are being framed as public health crises, there are benefits to approaching violence towards shop workers through this policy lens. A public health approach to tackling violence means looking at violence not as isolated incidents or solely as a police enforcement problem. Instead, this approach looks at violence as a preventable consequence of a range of factors, such as adverse early-life experiences and harmful social or community experiences and influences.

Violence is preventable, but it is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted approach. A public health approach treats violence as an infection, which can be cured. In particular it attempts to harness policies that address social determinants of violence in order to limit its occurrence and stop it from spreading.

Developing a strategy to reduce violence against shop workers

Define the problem
↓
Identify risk and protective factors
↓
Design strategies from evidence-based practice
↓
Implementation and evaluation

5.1 Define the problem: improving data collection and reporting of violence and abuse towards shop workers

The first fundamental principle of any approach to reducing violence is that any intervention is based on the systematic collection and analysis of data about the magnitude, scope, characteristics, consequences and location of incidents. In other words, the first step in preventing violence is to understand the 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where' and 'how' associated with it.

Current data sources are insufficient to adequately identify the prevalence, type and geographical location of offences. Police-recorded data are not a reliable measure of crime. The Home Office Commercial Victimisation Survey sample size is too small to produce sub-national estimates of crime and, furthermore, does not report on violence with injury.[90] Other surveys conducted by industry bodies typically have small non-representative samples or only cover a subsection of the industry.

In the absence of reliable and specific data on the prevalence, type, context and geographical location of violent crime. it is not possible to allocate appropriate levels and types of resource to tackle the problem. Accordingly, reporting levels to the police need to be improved. Currently, due to the high levels of under-reporting outlined in Chapters 1 and 4, there is a disconnect between the actuality of offences and police-recorded data. This leads to inappropriate and ineffective policy responses and allocation of resources. The means to collect more accurate data on the frequency, nature and severity of verbal abuse, violence with injury, and violence without injury in retail settings is needed.

The social–ecological model
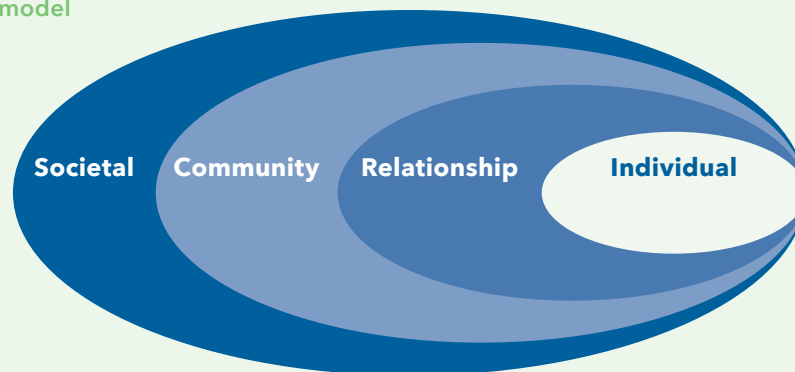
The Social–Ecological Model[93] illustrates the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community and societal factors. It is based on evidence that no single factor can fully explain why some people and groups are at a higher risk of violence, while others are more protected from it.

> The first level identifies individual biological and personal history factors that increase the likelihood of becoming a perpetrator of violence. Some factors that have been established through scientific research include age, education, income, drug and alcohol use, history of abuse. Prevention strategies at this level promote attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that prevent violence. Specific approaches may include education, training and enhancing life skills.

> The second level examines close personal relationships that may increase the risk of violent offending behaviour. A person's family, friends, intimate partners and peers influence their behaviour and contribute to their experience. Prevention strategies introduced at this level could include parenting or family-focused prevention programmes, early-intervention mentoring and peer programmes, and promoting pro-social and respectful healthy relationships.

> The third level examines community contexts in which social relationships occur, such as schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods, and seeks to identify the characteristics of these settings that are associated with becoming perpetrators of violence. Prevention strategies at this level impact the social and physical environment – for example, by improving economic and housing opportunities in communities, as well as the cultural climate, processes and policies within school and workplace settings. Tackling violence and the root causes of violence requires collective action by local communities, local government, police, voluntary groups and other key stakeholders.[91]

> The fourth level examines the broad societal factors that help create a climate in which violence is encouraged or inhibited. These include economic and social policies that can establish and/or maintain inequalities between people. Other large societal factors include the availability of weapons, the availability of illicit drugs, and cultural norms that support violence as an acceptable way to resolve conflicts.

5.2 Identify risk and protective factors

With adequate data collection and reporting mechanisms in place to define the problem, it will become clearer which geographic locations and communities are experiencing particularly heightened levels of violence and abuse towards shop workers.

Once the problem is better understood, it is important to identify what factors protect people and communities or put them at risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence. In terms of violence against shop workers, the immediate antecedents of incidents have been identified as: encountering shoplifters; enforcing legislation relating to the sale of age-restricted goods and other prohibited sales; hate-motivated incidents; armed and unarmed robberies (see Chapter 2). However, in addition to the immediate context, violence is the product of multiple levels of influence.[92]

Changing cultural norms and perceptions about retail crime

Rules or expectations of behaviour – norms – within a cultural or social group can encourage violence or create an environment in which it is normalised or goes unchallenged. Interventions that challenge cultural and social norms supportive of violence can prevent acts of violence and have been widely used.

> *Every single day there is antisocial behaviour. There is shoplifting, swearing, throwing things, spitting, kicking things over.*
> *(Store manager, female)*

A poll of 1,095 adults, commissioned by the Co-operative Party, revealed that, while the majority of respondents (55%) disagreed with the statement 'Retail crime is a victimless crime because big companies are insured against their losses', almost a quarter (24%) agreed. There is clearly the need to change perceptions of crime against retailers. Although it might be retail businesses that suffer the financial consequences of retail crime, it is individual shop workers – not their employers – who directly experience crimes that take place in the shops.

> *For me it was sort of like no victims – if you get me – I wasn't robbing off people and I thought it was the lesser evil.*
> *(Prolific offender, male)*

> *I always used to think it's a victimless crime but it's not. What about people in the shop? They get terrorised … stabbed with dirty needles and that … they're only doing their job at the end of the day. But when you're on drugs you don't care.*
> *(Prolific offender, male)*

5.3 Design strategies from evidence-based practice

Strong, reliable data and a credible evidence base is an essential part of a public health approach to violence prevention. Findings from the research literature and data from needs assessments, community surveys, stakeholder interviews and focus groups are useful for designing prevention programmes.[94] There is a rich and detailed evidence-base relating to crime prevention, but it is clear that an effective solution requires multi-agency partnerships. Violence prevention generally falls into three categories: primary, secondary and tertiary.

Primary prevention

Primary prevention strategies are directed at stopping problems before they materialise. They focus on both social and situational factors.

> Social crime prevention addresses factors that influence an individual's likelihood of committing a crime, such as poverty and unemployment, poor health and low educational performance. Examples of prevention include school-based programmes (for example, truancy initiatives) as well as community-based programmes (for example, local residents' action groups which promote shared community ownership and guardianship).

> Situational prevention addresses the environment (for example, the use of technological devices such as CCTV, the design and layout of stores using, for example, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, and enhanced guardianship such as employing security guards.

Secondary prevention

Where it is not possible to prevent violence from the outset, early intervention should be undertaken to mitigate further escalation. In essence, secondary prevention strategies for tackling violence are aimed at changing the life path of individuals who have been identified as being at a high risk of embarking on a criminal career. There might be several indicators of this, including displays of antisocial behaviour, poor or no school attendance, or increasing levels of alcohol or substance abuse. The idea of secondary prevention is that through the application of rapid and effective early interventions, individuals and groups can be directed away from crime and towards more pro-social activities and values.

Tertiary crime prevention

Tertiary crime prevention focuses on the operation of the criminal justice system and deals with offending after it has happened. The primary focus is on intervention in the lives of known offenders in an attempt to prevent them reoffending. Examples include community youth conferencing schemes, incapacitation and individual deterrence through community-based sanctions and treatment interventions.

Evidence-based policies and strategies are those that are well designed, build on previous knowledge, are informed by a theoretical model (risk/protective factors), guided by formative research and successful pilots, and are multi-faceted and address several factors associated with violence. Violence-reduction strategies often require a long-term approach and therefore need to be protected from the unpredictability of electoral changes if they are to produce lasting and sustainable change.

5.4 Implementation and evaluation

Once prevention programmes have been developed from an evidence base, they can be implemented and adopted more broadly.

As part of implementation, it is important to evaluate programmes and initiatives to ensure that they are achieving their objectives, and to the level anticipated. The root causes of violence and verbal abuse are complex; what works in one context might not be suitable or effective in another. Dissemination techniques to promote widespread adoption of effective strategies include training, networking, technical assistance and evaluation.

Appendix: References

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16   Usdaw (2017) Freedom from Fear: Shopworkers at the sharp end as violence is on the increase.

17   Centre for Social Justice (2018) Desperate for a Fix. Above cite.

18   A 'dirty needle' is a needle or sharp that has been used and therefore could potentially be contaminated with infections that can be spread through blood or bodily fluids, including hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV.

19   This threshold was set at £200 because the data at the time suggested that it captured the vast majority of cases heard in the magistrates' courts, as well as 80% of the much smaller number of cases that go to the Crown Court. For example, research for the Sentencing Advisory Panel in 2006 showed that 90% of cases of shop theft involved property worth under £200.

20   Although Home Office guidance stipulates that the 'guilty plea by post' is not appropriate in cases involving aggravating factors (such as violence, hate-motivated incidents or the possession of a weapon), the emphasis on the value of goods may obscure these other factors.

21   Some thieves can be issued a fixed-penalty notice (FPN) of £80.00 (plus a £5.00 offender levy). This is only if the stolen goods have been recovered and are still in a good enough condition to be resold, or the retailer has been compensated. If the penalty is accepted, but not paid within the 28-day period, the penalty increases by 50% to £120.00. A court will also be involved to enforce the penalty notice as if it were a fine imposed by that court. The £5.00 offender levy will not increase, but still requires payment. If the offer of a penalty notice is declined, the police officer can take other action, including prosecution.

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32   Failure to comply with trading standards law can lead to enforcement action and to sanctions, which may include a fine and/or imprisonment. In most police force areas, the offence of selling alcohol to a person under 18 years of age can be dealt with by a £90 penalty notice and in some areas can be addressed by an education scheme – i.e. retraining the offender to prevent further sales.

33   Challenge 25 is a scheme that encourages anyone who is over 18 but looks under 25 to carry acceptable ID when they want to buy alcohol. Challenge 25 builds on the Challenge 21 campaign introduced by the British Beer and Pub Association in 2005.

34   Usdaw (2018) Freedom from Fear. Above cite.

35   Usdaw (2018) Freedom from Fear. Above cite.

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   • A tough new law to increase criminal sentences for anyone convicted of using threats or violence against a shop worker – 41%
   • A reversal of police cuts to put more officers back on the high street – 31%
   • More investment by retailers in CCTV and other security equipment – 14%
   • More financial support for community groups that tackle the causes of crime – 9%

37   The Assaults on Retail Workers (Offences) Bill was introduced by MP Alex Norris as a Private Members' Bill (under the Ten Minute Rule). The Bill had its first reading in the House of Commons in October 2018; it was withdrawn in November 2018. https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/assaultsonretailworkersoffences.html

38   Home Office (2018) Crime against businesses. Above cite.

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40   Taylor, E. (2017) 'On the Edge of Reason? Above cite.

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42   A hate incident is one that is perceived by the victim, or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person's (actual or perceived) race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender status.

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