

Children as young as ten are getting involved in shoplifting and shop worker abuse. How should shop security respond?

1 year ago



Insight from John Nussbaum, director of service – Retail, Kingdom Security, part of [Kingdom Services Group](#)

For FMs of major supermarkets and retailers, the recent rise in shoplifting incidents – and the violence and abuse of staff that comes with it – can lead to a number of problems as they need to protect the health and safety of staff and customers. With thousands of incidents of anti-social behaviour, customer complaints and shoplifting reported already in 2024 from over 600 retail sites nationwide, shops need an effective and considered security response more than ever before.

While MPs are being urged to back changes to the Criminal Justice Bill that would make assaulting or abusing a shop worker a specific standalone offence, security companies across the nation are reporting a surge in incidents against staff and security officers with a worrying rise in pre-teen involvement.

Kingdom Security has processed around 500 to 700 incidents every single week so far this year; incidents of looting, antisocial behaviour and abuse of staff and security. Without a physical security presence, Kingdom says the number would be much higher – potentially pointing to the need for legislative change as well as heightened security arrangements from stores.

The prevalence of incidents has massively increased in the past couple of years, and it's no wonder that national retailer Co-op is heading up calls to crack down on the problem. They're calling for the amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill, in which the abuse of shop workers would carry a sentence of 12 months behind bars or people being slapped with a £10,000 fine.

We've also noticed a really worrying rise in teenagers contributing to this shoplifting and staff abuse, as well as children as young as 10, which is a very difficult situation for everyone involved. Staff may try to have a conversation with the parents if they can, but the situation needs very careful handling as the wrong response can make a situation worse. FMs need to consider security staff that are trained to deal with not only dangerous situations, but also sensitive ones. For example, all security officers, rapid response teams, store detectives and senior leadership teams in security companies should be specially trained to deal with younger people, teenagers and their families.

And if the responsibility to stop this alarming rise also lies with local authorities, the news in October last year of the introduction of the [Retail Crime Action Plan](#) points in the right direction. The plan aims to combat the rise in antisocial behaviour towards shop workers, and setting out the police's commitment to prioritise police attendance of shop crimes if there is violence involved or the shoplifters are being detained by security officers. Since the introduction of the Retail Crime Action Plan, the [NPCC](#) have stated that police non-attendance rate has improved to 38%.

But retail workers need to be protected even before the police arrive and can deal with the situation, as there are many incidents reported where the person who has been shoplifting or abusing staff or security workers has to be let go before the police arrive. Even if police respond more rapidly to incidents and patrol high streets more, the shop security are still the first line of defence and so need to be highly trained to protect customers, staff, and themselves from the threat of violence.

So what's the answer? Police, security officers and staff need to be working together to prevent the abuse of shop workers that is becoming more and more prevalent with shoplifting.

And whilst companies can spend millions on preventative measures to make stores safer, without security that know the best practice for dealing with these volatile situations, shops could become an increasingly dangerous place to work. Highly trained security will help neutralise situations and keep make sure both shop staff and customers feel safe and protected.