

Violence and abuse toward shop staff

Section One: Prevalence and Data

The Home Office Commercial Victimization Survey (CVS) provides information on the crimes committed against business premises in England and Wales. The 2017 CVS, published in May 2018, estimated that there were 8.1 million crimes against the wholesale and retail sector in the 12 months prior to interview. Although this represents an increase on the previous year (there were an estimated 5.2 million crimes in the 2016 CVS), it is not a statistically significant increase in crime. However, when compared to the 2016 CVS, the 2017 survey results showed a statistically significant increase in assaults and threats toward retail and wholesale staff (up from 524 incidents per 1,000 premises to 1,433 incidents per 1,000 premises). This is the highest estimate since 2012.

In addition, the 2018 Crime Report by the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) estimated that there were 13,437 incidents of violence against staff in local shops. Around two fifths (39%) of these incidents resulted in injury. The 2017 'Voice of Local shops' ACS survey reported that 12% of stores had experienced an increase in abuse in the last year.

The available evidence highlights that there has been an increase in incidents of violence and abuse toward shop staff. However, there is a lack of comprehensive data, including on the nature of the incidents, the types of worker affected, the context within which incidents occur, and the types of shop affected. In addition, some incidents may go unreported, and, whilst some police forces use business crime flags to record where a crime takes place in a business setting, the use of these flags and the definition of 'business crime' used is not necessarily consistent.

The following questions are intended to help address gaps in our understanding of the problem and to build a more accurate picture of the nature of violence and abuse toward staff. You are encouraged to focus on information relating to incidents occurring in England and Wales, as crime and criminal justice is devolved to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In your opinion, has the issue of violence and abuse toward shop staff increased in recent years?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

If you agree that the issue of violence and abuse toward shop staff has increased in recent years, please give reasons.

N/A

If you agree that the issue of violence and abuse toward shop staff has increased in recent years, please provide any data which you have to support this (including whether the data includes incidents not reported to the police).

N/A

Please provide any information you have on the nature of violence and abuse which is occurring and specify the type of store you operate/which was affected, for example:

- **the types of incident which are occurring (for example assaults, threats), including whether they involve physical violence and whether they resulted in a physical injury or other harm**
- **when the incidents occurred (for example during the day)**
- **whether the incidents involved a weapon (for example a knife, corrosive substance)**
- **the circumstances within which the incidents occurred, including whether this was in the context of age-restricted sales (for example alcohol, knives) and/or any other contributory factors**
- **information about the perpetrators (for example how many, whether they are repeat offenders, whether they are known to the police, their age, whether they are part of a gang)**

The Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Home Office. The IAS is an independent institute bringing together evidence, policy and practice from home and abroad to promote an informed debate on alcohol's impact on society. Our purpose is to advance the use of the best available evidence in public policy decisions on alcohol.

There is a strong association between the consumption of alcohol and violence and abuse. While intoxication alone does not cause violence alcohol's impact on behaviour means that it is involved in 39% of violent crime in England and Wales, and is associated with more than half of the violence committed by strangers (1), a form of violence shopkeepers are particularly vulnerable to. Research shows that staff dealing with the public, such as those in the emergency services, have experienced a staggering quantity of alcohol related harm and abuse: 96% of ambulance staff have been threatened or abused by intoxicated people, and 76% of police staff have been injured by intoxicated individuals (2). As is detailed in the Association of Convenience Stores Report, two of the three most likely triggers for abuse or violence are alcohol related: refusing to serve intoxicated people alcohol and enforcing age restrictions (3).

1. ONS 2019, The nature of violent crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2018, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/the-natureofviolentcrimeinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2018>
2. IAS 2015, Alcohol's impact on emergency services, http://www.ias.org.uk/uploads/Alcohols_impact_on_emergency_services_full_report.pdf
3. ACS 2019, The Crime Report, https://www.acs.org.uk/sites/default/files/acs_crimereport2019_online_version.pdf

For retailers operating sites in more than one location, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this issue has affected all of your sites equally?

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

If no, are there any common factors between the sites affected (for example specific areas, are urban or rural areas more affected)? Please provide any data you have to support this.

There are factors in the environment that can determine the risk of alcohol-related harm. Both the times alcohol is available for, and the locations it is available in, play a role. Work in Scotland found that neighbourhoods with the most off-licence outlets had crime rates four-fold higher than those with the least, a relationship that persisted when level of income deprivation was accounted for (1). Evidence from both the UK and internationally, has also shown that relaxing licensing laws to increase the time alcohol is available for purchase is associated with an increase in violence (2). Consideration should therefore be given to reversing that relaxation of trading hours and further regulating the geographic distribution of licenses.

Measures to reduce the strength of alcohol consumed have been shown to reduce violence. In England, minimum unit pricing has not yet been introduced and therefore it is currently possible to buy 22 units of alcohol, over 150% of the weekly low risk level, for less than £4. In Ipswich, a 'reducing the strength' scheme, which involved some off-licences voluntarily not selling cheap super-strength alcohol (defined as >6.5 ABV), targeted this problem specifically. Over the course of 12 months crime was reduced within stores that participated in the scheme, furthermore a reduction in violence was seen throughout Ipswich (3). This approach has been taken up elsewhere.

1. Alcohol focus Scotland and CRESH. 2018. [Alcohol outlet availability and harm in Scotland](https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/media/310762/alcohol-outlet-availability-and-harm-in-scotland.pdf). p. 8. <https://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/media/310762/alcohol-outlet-availability-and-harm-in-scotland.pdf>
2. Pova S. et al. 2009. [Hours and days of sale and density of alcohol outlets: impacts on alcohol consumption and damage: a systematic review](https://academic.oup.com/alcalc/article/44/5/500/182556). p. 513. <https://academic.oup.com/alcalc/article/44/5/500/182556>
3. Ipswich Borough Council. 2013. [Reducing the Strength](https://modern.gov.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/documents/s10889/Reducing%20the%20Strength%20information%20pack%20-%201%20Year%20on%202013%202.pdf). p. 10. <https://modern.gov.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/documents/s10889/Reducing%20the%20Strength%20information%20pack%20-%201%20Year%20on%202013%202.pdf>

Does your organisation/the organisation(s) you represent record incidents of violence and abuse which occur in your/their stores?

- Yes
- No

If no, why is this?

Not Applicable

If yes, how are incidents recorded? Please provide any data which has not already been submitted in response to earlier questions.

What are the financial, administrative and other impacts of violence and abuse toward shop staff for your organisation/the organisations(s) you represent? Please include data where this is available and has not been provided in response to earlier questions (for example, estimates of loss of revenue, impacts on staff retention etc).

Section 2: Prevention and Support

In addition to increasing our understanding of incidents of violence and abuse toward shop staff, the Government is also seeking to understand how these incidents can be prevented, including in relation to the training and support provided to staff.

We know that schemes such as ShopWatch, which works to improve communication between retailers and the local police, can help prevent crime and anti-social behaviour. In addition, arrangements such as multi-agency Business Crime Reduction Partnerships (BCRPs), which bring together businesses, the police, and council, can help to ensure a coordinated approach to preventing and tackling these crimes.

In addition, we know that staff training and tools such as Body Worn Video (BWV) can be effective, for example, BWV has been effective in some cases both in terms of preventing incidents and in providing footage used as evidence in prosecutions.

The following questions are intended to help us gather evidence and information about what works in preventing these crimes, including how businesses can support their staff.

Please provide examples of any preventative measure which you have used or considered using, including any evidence of how effective these have been.

Are there any non-legislative preventative measures which the Government/businesses/the police or others could put in place, for example, to raise awareness? Please provide examples.

Are you aware of training/guidance/support which is provided to staff on how to handle potential or actual incidents of violence and abuse? Please provide examples, including any evidence of how effective this has been.

Section 3: Enforcement and the Criminal Justice System

We know that shop workers may be the victim of a wide range of offences while carrying out their duties, ranging from unacceptable behaviour such as using abusive language to the most serious and violent offences. Key offences which may be relevant include harassment, common assault, fear or provocation of violence, putting people in fear of violence, affray, assault occasioning actual bodily harm, threats to kill, and robbery (note: this is not an exhaustive list). The decision about which offence to charge someone with is a matter for either the police or the Crown Prosecution Service.

In addition to criminal offences, a range of civil tools and powers can be used to address anti-social behaviour, for example: Civil Injunctions (which allow the police, local council and other agencies to apply to the court for an injunction against an individual where their behaviour is causing, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress), Community Protection Notices (which can be issued by the police or by the local authority to deal with ongoing issues which are having a persistent and detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality), and Public Spaces Protection Orders (which can be used by councils to deal with a particular nuisance in a specific area by imposing conditions on the use of that area).

In September 2018, we published a cross-Government Victims Strategy. This was the first time we have looked in such detail and in such a joined-up way at how we treat victims in the wake of crime. Our vision is one of a justice system that supports even more victims to speak up with the certainty that they will be understood, protected, and supported whether or not they report a crime, and regardless of their circumstances or background. Our commitments in the strategy include consulting on the revised Victims' Code and the detail of victim-focused legislation -we are planning to publish these consultations over the course of this year. This call for evidence is a further opportunity for us to understand victims' concerns.

We know that some shop staff who experience violence or abusive behaviour may not report incidents, either to their manager/supervisor or to the police. For example, the 2017 CVS found that 40% of respondents who had experienced violence or abuse in the past year had reported the most recent incident to the police. The Government is keen to consider any barriers to reporting and options for helping to overcome these. Where incidents are reported to the police, we would like to better understand victims' experiences of the criminal justice process.

The following questions are intended to help develop the Government's understanding of the reporting of incidents, application of the current legislative framework, and response by the police and wider criminal justice system. This information will enable us to understand whether there are any gaps in current legislation and to consider the case for reform. For multi-site operators or national organisations, you are encouraged to focus on incidents occurring in England and Wales, as crime and criminal justice is devolved to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

These questions are aimed at individuals who have been a victim of incident(s) of violence or abuse whilst serving the public in a retail setting and ask for information to help the Government better understand victims' experiences and how they may be better supported.

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Have you been a victim of violence or abuse within a retail setting?

- Yes
- No

Did you report the incident to your manager/supervisor?

- Yes
- No

If no, why?

If yes, were you satisfied with the response?

- Yes
- No

If not, why?

Did you report the incident to the police?

- Yes
- No

If not, why?

If yes, were you satisfied with the response?

- Yes
- No

If not, why?

Were you made aware of the option to make a Victim Personal Statement (VPS)?

- Yes
- No

Did you make a VPS?

- Yes
- No

If not, why?

Did the police refer you to victim support services?

- Yes
- No

If yes, did you find this helpful?

Please share any further information on your experience of the criminal justice system.

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These questions are aimed at retailers and representatives of retail organisations (including trade bodies and unions)

Are you a retailer or representative of a retail organisation?

- Retailer
- Representative of a retailer organisation
- None of these

Are you aware of any barriers to staff reporting violent or abusive incidents to their manager/supervisor?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what are these and how could they be overcome? Please provide any evidence you have to support this.

Are you aware of any barriers to staff reporting incidents to the police?

- Yes
- No

If yes, what are these and how could they be overcome? Please provide any evidence you have to support this.

Do you have any feedback on the response from the police? Please provide any evidence you have to support this.

Were you/are your members routinely made aware of the option to make an Impact Statement for Business (ISB)?

- Yes
- No

Did you make an ISB?

- Yes
- No

If not, why?

If yes, did you find it useful?

- Yes
- No

If you made a statement, are you aware whether it was used at sentencing?

- Yes
- No

Please share any further information on your organisation's experience/the experience of the organisations you represent of the criminal justice system.

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[Questions for all respondents](#)

Are you familiar with the range of civil tools and powers to tackle this crime (for example, the powers available under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014)?

- Yes
- No

If yes, have you had experience of them being used to prevent/address violence and abuse toward shop staff?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please provide further information about your experience of this.

Are you familiar with the criminal offences which may apply in relation to violence and abuse toward shop staff?

- Yes
- No

If yes, have you had experience of them being applied in this context?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please provide further information about your experience of this.

Section 4: Best Practice

Tackling the issue of violence and abuse toward shop staff requires a coordinated response including from Government, frontline agencies, Police and Crime Commissioners, and businesses themselves.

We know that a range of guidance and best practice is already available, for example, guidance on how to manage and deal business crime is available through the police-led National Business Crime Centre (NBCC), which provides a national repository for the collation and dissemination of good practice.

This call for evidence provides an opportunity for the Government to identify further best practice in addressing these incidents to help establish what works, and to consider potential non-legislative solutions.

Please share any examples you have of best practice, for example, of partnership working between the police and businesses, or deterrent measures which have reduced incidents of violence and abuse toward staff working in your organisation. This can include examples from outside England and Wales (please specify where).

As detailed above, there is evidence for the efficacy of reducing the strength schemes. These are voluntary and involve partnerships between shops, local authorities, and the police. This approach has been used in Ipswich, Portsmouth, and some areas of London. The scheme's voluntary nature can reduce its effectiveness, because participation is not uniform across an area, and consumers can simply switch to non-participating outlets. One evaluation of similar scheme in the London local authorities of Islington and Camden found

that some shops opted not to participate due to fear of losing business to competitors, and some shop owners reported that their participation had cost them business (1).

Another area of potential intervention is through licensing. The 2003 Licensing Act sets the following objectives for licensing:

- Prevent crime and disorder
- Public Safety
- The prevention of public nuisance
- The protection of children from harm

As has been outlined above, reducing the availability of alcohol both geographically and temporally can reduce alcohol related violence. In England and Wales, the density of licenced premises can be considered in local areas only when a 'Cumulative Impact Area' has been declared by the licensing authority. This contrasts to Scotland, where 'over-provision' can be considered in every case of licence application, and to Northern Ireland, where a licence is only granted if a previously existing licence has been relinquished (a 'surrender' approach). It is also worth noting that Scotland has an additional provision within the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 for the consideration of the protection and promotion of public health.

24-hour licensing has been available in England and Wales since 2005. Two options exist for mitigating the consequence of 24-hour licenses, these are: to impose late night levies (LNLs), an extra charge on operating late, and early morning restriction orders (EMROs), a ban on operation between the hours of 12am to 6am. An EMRO can be imposed if the licensing authority believes it would uphold the licensing objectives, and an LNL can be introduced to cover the extra costs that befall services, such as the police, due to the night time economy. These are both largely unused: to our knowledge, there are currently no EMROs in place (2) and only a few LNLs (3).

Under the 2003 Licensing Act, in most cases, a licensed premises will also require an individual with a personal licence in order to sell alcohol (4). They are the responsible for staff who sell alcohol on that premises. A training course is required in order to qualify for a personal licence, but personal licence holders are not required to renew their licence or undergo further training. Furthermore, there are no national mandatory training requirements for those who sell alcohol when acting under the responsibility of the individual holding the personal licence, who need not be present at the time of sale. In Scotland there is a requirement to both 5 yearly refresher courses for holders of a personal licence, and training of all of those who sell alcohol (5).

1. Sumpter et al. 2016. [Reducing the strength: a mixed methods evaluation of alcohol retailers' willingness to voluntarily reduce the availability of low cost, high strength beer and ciders in two UK local authorities.](https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-016-3117-7) <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-016-3117-7>
2. Select Committee on the Licensing Act 2003. 2017. [The Licensing Act 2003: post-legislative scrutiny.](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldlicact/146/14613.htm) Chapter 10, section 452. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201617/ldselect/ldlicact/146/14613.htm>
3. Woodhouse, J. 2019. [Alcohol Licensing: the late night levy.](#) House of Commons Library.

<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN07100#fullreport>

4. Home Office. April 2018. Revised guidance issued under section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705588/Revised_guidance_issued_under_section_182_of_the_Licensing_Act_2003_April_2018_.pdf
5. Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005.
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2005/16/contents>

What, if anything, do you think prevents businesses, the police and/or local authorities from working in partnership to tackle this issue?

Reducing cheap, high strength alcohol.

Reducing the strength schemes are useful, but their voluntary nature restricts their effectiveness. Instead of allowing tailoring to the local situation, the fear of competition from those not taking part makes it hard for some retailers to participate (1). The lack of centralised Government action is making it difficult for local authorities to work in partnership with businesses. The closest national parallel to the reducing the strength scheme would be the introduction of minimum unit pricing (MUP), this sets a floor price, per unit, below which alcohol cannot be sold. Similar to reducing the strength schemes, this would reduce demand for high strength alcohol (by increasing the price of the cheapest options). If introduced, a 50p MUP in England is predicted to prevent more than 700,000 crimes over its first 20 years (2).

Geographic licensing considerations.

In terms of licensing, the impact of cumulative impact areas has been limited: of new licenses, only 8% of those in cumulative impact areas were refused, as compared to 3% outside these areas (3). The current licensing arrangements in England and Wales could be reformed to allow the number of premises to be considered for every application, as is the case in Scotland. Alternatively, the Northern Irish 'surrender' approach, whereby a new licence can only be given out when an existing licence is turned in, could be another way of empowering licensing authorities to regulate the density of premises to reduce, in partnership with the police and businesses, such as shops, that can suffer harm from the night-time economy.

Temporal licensing restrictions.

EMROs, in their current form and with their current level of support, are very difficult for local authorities to implement. It is possible that a reformation of the guidance given by the Home Office, and the provision of training in how to navigate the legal requirements, might allow local authorities to make use of this option. LNLs are significantly under-utilised and do not, in themselves, necessarily reduce the temporal availability of alcohol. However, they could have a role in encouraging establishments to close earlier or plausibly in reshaping the night time economy to encourage business to look at offering non-alcohol based activities. Allowing LNLs to be more flexible by targeting only certain geographic areas rather than the entire area of a licensing authority might increase their use. Currently, the notional options for managing the temporal availability of alcohol are unworkable, which prevents effective partnership between local authorities, police, and businesses.

Better Training.

Given that two of the three most common points of conflict experienced by shopkeepers are related to the application of licensing responsibilities (5) IAS believes that regular and comprehensive training should be required. We support regular refresher courses for personal licence holders, which should include how to handle situations of potential conflict. Furthermore, we believe that training for all those who sell alcohol, even when they do not themselves hold a personal licence, should be mandatory. At the point of sale they need to know how to uphold licensing responsibilities, and how to act quickly in partnership with local authorities and police to both prevent and resolve conflict as safely as possible.

General reform of licensing.

IAS believe that we need a significant review of licensing to either provide new, implementable, and effective tools to tackle temporal availability or improve the accessibility of existing tools. Our full recommendations can be found here (4). Scottish licensing law allows licensing authorities to consider public health in their deliberations, and the IAS believes this should be the case in England and Wales. Involving health services in the discussions can be effective in reducing violence. This is illustrated in the Cardiff Violence Prevention Model, an approach whereby anonymous data is readily shared amongst health services, police, and local Government (6). IAS believes that the inclusion of public health as a licensing objective could be an effective way of bringing more groups into the discussion, notably health providers, when considering the impact of licensing on violence.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, it is our opinion that local voluntary schemes, such as reducing the strength, could have some merit in reducing the violence shopkeepers face. However, these are less effective than mandatory legislative options such as MUP. There is also some scope for licensing authorities to use the existing tools to regulate the availability of alcohol. Central government could promote this by providing more legal training and support to local authorities to enable them to make use of the existing licensing frameworks, such as EMROs. More training should also be required for individuals who are responsible for the sale of alcohol and those who directly sell it. However, there is an urgent need for reform in the licensing legislation itself to give licensing authorities usable powers to take meaningful steps to combat alcohol-related violence and protect members of the public, including shopkeepers who are often at the forefront of the night-time economy.

1. Sumpter et al. 2016. [Reducing the strength: a mixed methods evaluation of alcohol retailers' willingness to voluntarily reduce the availability of low cost, high strength beer and ciders in two UK local authorities](https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-016-3117-7). BMC Public Health. <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-016-3117-7>
2. Angus C et al. 2016. [Alcohol and cancer trends: intervention studies](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/alcohol_and_cancer_trends_report_cruk.pdf). University of Sheffield and Cancer Research UK. Pg 43. https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/alcohol_and_cancer_trends_report_cruk.pdf
3. Home Office. 2018. [Alcohol and late night refreshment licensing, England and Wales, year ending 31st march 2018](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/744442/Alcohol_and_late_night_refreshment_licensing_England_and_Wales_year_ending_31st_march_2018.pdf). Pg 3. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/744442/Alcohol_and_late_night_refreshment_licensing_England_and_Wales_year_ending_31st march 2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/744442/Alcohol_and_late_night_refreshment_licensing_England_and_Wales_year_ending_31st_march_2018.pdf)

[/attachment_data/file/750830/alcohol-late-night-refreshment-licensing-2018-hosb2318.pdf](#)

4. Foster, J. The Licensing Act (2003): its uses and abuses 10 years on. IAS. <http://www.ias.org.uk/What-we-do/IAS-reports/Licensing-Act-2003-Its-uses-and-abuses-10-years-on-Documents.aspx>
5. ACS 2019, The Crime Report, https://www.acs.org.uk/sites/default/files/acs_crimereport2019_online_version.pdf
6. Florence, C. et al. 2011. [Effectiveness of anonymized information sharing and use in health services, police, and local government partnerships for preventing violence related injury: experimental study and time series analysis. The BMJ.](https://www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.d3313) <https://www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.d3313>

Is there any further non-legislative action which government could take to help address this issue?