# Pensioners increasingly shoplift as cost-of-living crisis hits UK households



As the cost-of-living crisis continues to squeeze household budgets across the UK, a noticeable shift in the demographics of shoplifters is becoming apparent. Security analysts report that pensioners are increasingly taking to shoplifting, a troubling trend attributed to financial desperation. John Nussbaum, director of service for retail at Kingdom Security, observed an alarming rise in incidents where older individuals are caught stealing basic necessities, like small packets of coffee. He remarked, “We’re now experiencing something different – pensioners, people who don’t normally shoplift.” This demographic shift has suddenly created a new landscape in retail security, moving away from the organised gangs typically associated with theft.

The statistics underpinning this shift are stark. According to the Office for National Statistics, shoplifting offences in England and Wales surged by 30% in the year leading up to March 2024, reaching a record high of 443,995 instances—a figure not observed since police recording practices began in 2003. This represents a sharp rise from 342,428 recorded the previous year, mirroring an overall trend that suggests rising financial pressures are driving a broader spectrum of consumers to steal out of necessity.

The British Retail Consortium has estimated that retail crime now costs businesses close to £1 billion every year, with significant implications for the industry as a whole. Retailers, grappling with the fallout, face the dual challenge of rising theft alongside increasing operational costs. In a notable response to this crisis, major retailers such as the Co-op Group have reported substantial losses due to retail crime, amounting to around £80 million in 2024 alone.

Compounding the issue, Nussbaum indicated that retailers often choose to handle shoplifting internally rather than involving law enforcement, especially when older individuals are involved. “It’s not good publicity for a supermarket if it got out that a pensioner had been handed over to the police for shoplifting,” he stated, further illustrating the delicate balance retailers must strike between security optics and community compassion.

In light of escalating thefts, some retailers are adopting advanced security measures. Kingdom Security supports the trial of facial recognition technology at select Asda stores as a potential deterrent and means of identifying habitual offenders. This technology is not without controversy; however, it reflects a broader trend among retailers eager to safeguard their assets amid growing economic pressures. Nussbaum advocates for its wider implementation, asserting that “anything that aids identifying shoplifters, organised gangs, people who could be violent is a good thing.”

In response to the increasing retail crime, the UK government is contemplating new legislative measures. These may include specific penalties for assaults against shop workers and adjustments to the legal thresholds concerning low-level thefts. Such reforms are viewed as crucial to supporting both retail workers and the broader community as retailers navigate this turbulent economic landscape.

Overall, the changing face of shoplifting in Britain encapsulates a grim reflection of the current economic climate, where even those who once held steady purchasing power find themselves resorting to theft merely to survive. This growing reality prompts urgent dialogue around not only retail security but also the social safety nets that are increasingly tested in times of economic strain.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4
2. Paragraphs 2, 3
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4. Paragraphs 2, 3, 4
5. Paragraph 2
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Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25155203.food-retailers-see-massive-rise-pensioners-shoplifting/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/24/shoplifting-rate-england-wales-rises-new-20-year-high> - Shoplifting in England and Wales has surged to its highest level in 20 years, with recorded offences increasing by 30% in the year leading up to March 2024. The Office for National Statistics reported 443,995 incidents, up from 342,428 the previous year. Retailers attribute this rise to factors including the cost of living crisis, which has intensified financial pressures on consumers, leading to increased thefts. The British Retail Consortium estimates that retail crime costs businesses nearly £1 billion annually. In response, the UK government is considering legislative measures to address the issue, including creating a specific offence for assaulting shop workers and revising the threshold for low-level thefts. Additionally, the Co-op Group reported a 14% rise in retail crime losses, amounting to £80 million in 2024, highlighting the significant impact of theft on the retail sector.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/shoplifting-surges-30-england-wales-official-data-shows-2024-07-24/> - Official data reveals a 30% surge in shoplifting offences in England and Wales, reaching the highest level in 20 years. The Office for National Statistics recorded 443,995 incidents in the year leading up to March 2024, up from 342,428 the previous year. Retailers attribute this increase to the cost of living crisis, which has intensified financial pressures on consumers, leading to more thefts. The British Retail Consortium estimates that retail crime costs businesses nearly £1 billion annually. In response, the UK government is considering legislative measures to address the issue, including creating a specific offence for assaulting shop workers and revising the threshold for low-level thefts.
4. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/07/24/shoplifting-offences-record-high-knife-crime-police/> - Shoplifting offences in England and Wales have reached a record high, with 50 incidents recorded every hour, marking a 30% increase in one year. Official figures show 443,995 shoplifting offences in the year to March 2024, up from 342,428 the previous year. This is the highest number since records began in 2003. Retailers attribute the rise to factors including the cost of living crisis, which has intensified financial pressures on consumers, leading to increased thefts. The British Retail Consortium estimates that retail crime costs businesses £1.8 billion annually, with an additional £700 million spent on security measures. In response, the UK government is considering legislative measures to address the issue, including creating a specific offence for assaulting shop workers and revising the threshold for low-level thefts.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/jan/25/shoplifting-rate-england-wales-highest-level-more-than-20-years> - Shoplifting in England and Wales has reached its highest level in over two decades, with recorded offences increasing by nearly a third in a year. Data from the Office for National Statistics revealed 402,482 shoplifting offences in the 12 months up to September 2023, surpassing the previous high of 382,642 in 2018. Retailers attribute the rise to factors including the cost of living crisis, which has intensified financial pressures on consumers, leading to increased thefts. The British Retail Consortium estimates that retail crime costs businesses £1.7 billion annually. In response, the UK government is considering legislative measures to address the issue, including creating a specific offence for assaulting shop workers and revising the threshold for low-level thefts.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/shoplifting-offences-england-wales-police-statistics-b1189819.html> - Shoplifting offences in England and Wales have risen to a new 20-year high, with 469,788 offences recorded in the year to June 2024, up 29% from the previous year. This is the highest number since records began in 2003. Retailers attribute the rise to factors including the cost of living crisis, which has intensified financial pressures on consumers, leading to increased thefts. The British Retail Consortium estimates that retail crime costs businesses £1.8 billion annually, with an additional £700 million spent on security measures. In response, the UK government is considering legislative measures to address the issue, including creating a specific offence for assaulting shop workers and revising the threshold for low-level thefts.