# Weymouth shopkeeper highlights rising shoplifting crisis amid unsettling new tactics



A recent incident at an independent shop in Weymouth, Dorset, has brought to light both the audacity of modern-day shoplifters and the challenges facing retail businesses amid a concerning rise in theft. The shoplifting in question involved a woman who utilised a strikingly unconventional method to distract shop staff, donning a very short green dress to optimise her thieving opportunity. CCTV footage revealed her bending down to the lower shelves while flashing her bottom, thereby diverting attention from the criminal act of filling her bag with jewellery valued at up to £1,000, including rings, necklaces, and commemorative coins.

Ian Lambert, the 62-year-old shopkeeper, recounted his initial discomfort, as he felt the need to avert his gaze to avoid being misjudged as a pervert. Upon reviewing the footage, it became clear that this momentary distraction had serious consequences for the business and its suppliers. "It’s not us she stole from,” Lambert lamented, emphasising that the true loss extends to the ordinary individuals attempting to make a living through honest work.

In the wake of the incident, Lambert plastered the town with flyers to raise awareness about the thief's identity and to alert other businesses, although many were removed shortly after. His frustration is symptomatic of a broader issue, as he refrained from reporting the theft to the police due to past experiences of inadequate support. The rising tide of shoplifting has become alarmingly prevalent, particularly in the context of economic difficulties that have emerged since the pandemic.

Recent statistics reveal that shoplifting offences in England and Wales have surged, reaching unprecedented levels. Official data indicate a 30% year-on-year increase, with recorded incidents climbing from 342,428 to 443,995 in a single year – a figure that continues to rise. The Office for National Statistics confirmed that 2024 saw the number of shoplifting offences surpass half a million for the first time, highlighting a decade-long trend tied to economic strain and heightened shopkeeper risks.

The spike in theft is not merely a statistical anomaly but reflects a disturbing reality for independent retailers, many of whom now face daily instances of theft. A survey by the British Retail Consortium disclosed the cumulative losses from theft amount to nearly £1 billion annually, representing not just a financial hurdle, but a direct threat to the livelihoods of those involved in the retail sector. The chief executive of the British Independent Retailers Association, Andrew Goodacre, described the situation as a “deeply troubling milestone,” where stolen stock often represents the hard-earned savings of individual sellers.

Additionally, associated crimes such as street theft have escalated, making store environments increasingly hostile. Statistics indicate a dramatic increase in violence against shop workers, with reported incidents surging to approximately 76,000 in 2023 – a considerable jump from the 41,000 incidents the previous year. This violence, often attributed to the cost of living crisis and associated challenges, poses significant risks to shop owners and employees alike.

Legislative responses are anticipated: the current government is reportedly planning a Sentencing Review that may alter the penal framework surrounding such offences. Proposed changes could eliminate short prison sentences for low-level crimes, including shoplifting, moving towards community service or suspended sentences instead. This shift has raised concerns among business owners who fear it might embolden thieves, aggravating the existing crisis and enabling a culture of impunity.

As this troubling narrative unfolds, the experiences of shopkeeper Ian Lambert serve as a potent reminder of the rising tide of retail crime, illuminating the fragility of small businesses amid a challenging economic landscape marked by theft and insecurity.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14738923/Shoplifter-stole-jewellery-embarrass-owner-Dorset.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14738923/Shoplifter-stole-jewellery-embarrass-owner-Dorset.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14738923/Shoplifter-stole-jewellery-embarrass-owner-Dorset.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14738923/Shoplifter-stole-jewellery-embarrass-owner-Dorset.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
5. Paragraph 5: [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/9df4439e-c33c-4e31-972f-20ba70a86583), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/shoplifting-surges-30-england-wales-official-data-shows-2024-07-24/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/apr/24/shoplifting-uk-crime-retail-police-ons-data)
6. Paragraph 6: [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/722860ca-7466-4aaf-be8f-6ff25426813c), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/shoplifting-surges-30-england-wales-official-data-shows-2024-07-24/)
7. Paragraph 7: [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/apr/24/shoplifting-uk-crime-retail-police-ons-data), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/shoplifting-surges-30-england-wales-official-data-shows-2024-07-24/)
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9. Paragraph 9: [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/apr/24/shoplifting-uk-crime-retail-police-ons-data), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/24/shoplifting-rate-england-wales-rises-new-20-year-high)
10. Paragraph 10: [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/shoplifting-surges-30-england-wales-official-data-shows-2024-07-24/), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/24/shoplifting-rate-england-wales-rises-new-20-year-high)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14738923/Shoplifter-stole-jewellery-embarrass-owner-Dorset.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/9df4439e-c33c-4e31-972f-20ba70a86583> - Shoplifting has surged to its highest level in 20 years in England and Wales, increasing by 30% year-on-year, as per official data. Additionally, street theft, including bag snatching and mobile phone theft, rose by 40%. In the year up to March 2024, police-recorded shoplifting offenses jumped from 342,428 to 443,995. Computer misuse also soared, fueled by a 42% increase in 'unauthorized access to personal information,' while overall fraud dropped by 10%. The crime wave presents a significant challenge for law enforcement, already stretched thin with priority crimes involving violence remaining steady. Despite a recruitment drive restoring police staffing levels, budget deficits from past austerity measures persist. Professor Emmeline Taylor from City University, London, notes reported shoplifting figures are vastly underrepresented, with many incidents unreported due to lack of evidence, diminished police confidence, or fear of reprisals. The British Retail Consortium reported that customer theft incidents doubled and violence against retailers surged. Taylor suggests that offenders feel emboldened, believing they can act with minimal consequences.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/722860ca-7466-4aaf-be8f-6ff25426813c> - Theft and violence against workers in UK's small shops have reached record highs. In 2023, incidents of theft surged to about 5.6 million, a dramatic increase from 1.1 million in 2022. Violence also escalated with 76,000 reported cases, compared to 41,000 the previous year. This increase, attributed to the cost of living crisis and addiction-related crimes, significantly impacts shop owners, causing average losses of £4,946 per store. Retailers are also facing gang-related criminal activities. While the Retail Crime Action Plan, introduced by the police and government, is starting to show positive results, both the Association of Convenience Stores and the British Retail Consortium stress the need for more comprehensive measures, including increased neighborhood policing and better technology to combat crime.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/shoplifting-surges-30-england-wales-official-data-shows-2024-07-24/> - In England and Wales, shoplifting offences surged by 30% in the year leading up to March 2024, reaching the highest level in 20 years. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported 443,995 recorded incidents, up from 342,428 in the previous year. This increase continues a trend of growing shoplifting incidents since the COVID-19 pandemic. Retailers contend the situation is worse, as many shoplifting cases, especially in smaller stores, go unreported due to lack of confidence in police response. Major retailers, including Tesco, John Lewis, and Primark, have highlighted the issue, which reflects similar trends in the US and other regions. The British Retail Consortium estimated the industry's losses from theft at nearly £1 billion annually. The retail workers' union Usdaw expressed grave concerns, with General Secretary Paddy Lillis calling the rise an 'epidemic of retail crime.' In response, Britain's new Labour government plans to introduce a specific offence for assaulting shop workers.
5. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2023> - This rise was predominantly the result of increases in shoplifting offences. The year ending December 2023 saw the number of recorded shoplifting offences increase by over a third (37%) compared with the previous year, with 430,104 offences compared with 315,040 in the previous year. Increases were also seen in police recorded theft from the person offences, up by 18% to 125,563 crimes, and other theft, which was up by 2% to 355,152 offences. There was a slight decrease in vehicle offences to 389,887 offences (down 2% compared with the previous year) which included a 6% decrease in theft from a vehicle to 201,070 offences. This contrasts with a 3% increase in theft or unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle (to 130,903 offences). Police recorded burglary includes both residential and non-residential categories, such as those committed against a business premises, and therefore is broader than the residential burglary captured by the Crime Survey. Although police recorded total burglary remains comparable, a new classification of residential burglary offences from the Home Office was introduced in April 2023 to provide a breakdown of incidents related to the main home and from other buildings that are within the boundary of a dwelling (such as sheds). Police recorded burglary fell 1% in the year to December 2023 (271,449 offences) compared with the previous year and is 70% lower than March 2003 (890,099 offences) when current recording practices began.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/apr/24/shoplifting-uk-crime-retail-police-ons-data> - The number of shoplifting offences recorded by police in England and Wales has risen to the highest level on record, according to official figures, surpassing half a million offences for the first time in 2024. A total of 516,971 shoplifting offences were recorded last year, a 20% increase on the 429,873 in 2023, according to the Office for National Statistics. This is the highest level of shoplifting since current police recording practices began in 2003, although retailers said the official figures 'severely underestimate' the scale of the problem. Crime figures have shown a rise in shoplifting since the pandemic, but it has continued to climb, resulting in an increase in the overall level of theft in England and Wales last year. The rise in shoplifting has been partly seen as the result of squeezed household finances amid high inflation in recent years, but the industry body British Retail Consortium (BRC) has previously blamed it on organised gangs stealing to order. Nearly one in four Britons have witnessed shoplifting, study shows. 'While the ONS statistics show that shoplifting is at record levels, their figures severely underestimate the problem,' said Tom Ironside, the director of business and regulation at the BRC. 'Their figures are equivalent to less than two incidents per shop per year; if you ask most shopkeepers they'll tell you they're lucky if a day goes by without a shoplifting incident.' He added: 'A survey of major retailers by the BRC showed there are over 20m incidents of shoplifting every year – unfortunately many of these go unreported as retailers simply don't have faith that action will be taken by the police.' The trade body has calculated that shop theft costs retailers more than £2.2bn a year and is causing them to spend £1.8m on anti-crime measures.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jul/24/shoplifting-rate-england-wales-rises-new-20-year-high> - The number of shoplifting offences recorded by police in England and Wales has risen to a new 20-year high. A total of 443,995 offences were logged by forces in the year to March 2024, up 30% on the 342,428 recorded in the previous 12 months. The figure is the highest since current records began in the year to March 2003, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which described the latest increases as notable. Shoplifting levels had already reached a 20-year high earlier this year, with the latest figures showing the number of offences recorded has risen even higher. The data published on Wednesday comes after leading retailers raised concerns about the rising cost of theft, and as the Labour government vowed to tackle low-level shoplifting and make assaulting a shop worker a specific criminal offence. The move to create a separate offence follows a long-running campaign from business owners amid rising violence against shop workers. Retailers have said they hope the measures set out last week in the king’s speech to parliament will make it easier for police to investigate and prosecute criminals. The figures also show the number of offences involving theft from the person stood at 131,453 in 2023-24, up 17% from 112,225 in 2022-23. Knife crime offences recorded by police forces in England and Wales in 2023-24 stood at 50,510, up 4% from 48,409 in 2022-23, but below the pre-pandemic level of 51,982 offences in 2019-20.