# Charity shops hit by £15 million thefts amid rising violence and use of facial recognition tech



The rise of shoplifting in Britain, particularly targeting charity shops, has spiralled into a crisis that is deeply impacting these community-focused businesses. Tone Jarvis-Mack, the founder of The Fertility Foundation, recently shared his harrowing experiences while operating a charity shop in Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire. He revealed that he faces verbal abuse from customers at least twice a week and that aggressive behaviour is becoming increasingly common. This situation is exacerbated by a perception that charity shops, which rely on donations, are not as important to protect against theft. However, each act of shoplifting directly robs these charitable organisations of vital funds needed to support their causes.

Staggering statistics shine a light on the severity of the situation. In the past year alone, charities in the UK have reportedly lost over £15 million to shoplifters, according to a recent study. This survey indicated that 80% of the UK charities surveyed have experienced an uptick in thefts of publicly donated items. Alarmingly, more than half reported an increase in verbal abuse directed at their staff and volunteers, with many feeling it is futile to report such incidents due to a lack of police response—approximately 42% do not bother to notify authorities, believing it to be a waste of time. The overall increase in shoplifting crimes across England and Wales, which surged by 20% year-on-year, mirrors the struggles faced by individual charity shops.

Jarvis-Mack's own harrowing encounter highlights the lengths shop owners must go to in order to protect themselves and their staff. He has resorted to employing a facial recognition system, Facewatch, to identify repeat offenders as a means to combat theft and harassment. Such measures have reportedly led to a reduction in shoplifting incidents within his store, demonstrating the need for innovative solutions in a deteriorating retail landscape.

Moreover, other charity shops share similar sentiments. For instance, Tenovus Cancer Care and Guild Care have reported a significant rise in theft incidents; some stores have even gone so far as to close changing rooms entirely due to rampant shoplifting. The prevalent trend of violence and anti-social behaviour in retail settings has become a shared reality, with many staff members feeling vulnerable on the shop floor. Increasingly, incidents are driven not just by poverty but also by organised crime, exacerbating the challenge for charity stores that are often run by volunteers.

As charities grapple with these challenges, the psychological toll on individuals like Jarvis-Mack cannot be overstated. The stress and fear of physical confrontations have forced some shop owners into seeking medical help for mental health issues, further illustrating the human cost of this retail crisis. In an environment where staff and volunteers should be focusing on their mission to serve the community, instead they are often forced to contend with threats and intimidation.

The British Retail Consortium's alarming figures, which estimate nearly 20 million thefts affecting the retail sector, further underscore the systemic issues at play. The impact of these crimes stretches beyond individual stores; it places a financial burden on the entire charitable sector, which is often already stretched thin. As charities implement new security measures—resulting in around £4 million being diverted from their charitable missions—the cycle of fear and theft continues unabated.

In light of these ongoing challenges, the introduction of technology at retail points is emerging as a necessary strategy. Major retailers are now adopting AI-based monitoring systems at self-checkout stations, designed to deter theft by creating an immediate accountability system for customers. Such measures reflect a growing recognition that proactive, innovative solutions are critical in combating the significant rise in retail crime.

As the UK navigates through this troubling chapter in retail history, the stories of charity shop owners like Tone Jarvis-Mack serve as a stark reminder of the need for solidarity and protection for those serving the community. Each theft represents not only a loss of income but a blow to the mission of charitable efforts that strive to uplift society amidst adversity.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14739815/The-brutal-reality-Britains-shoplifting-epidemic-Tearful-charity-shop-owner-reveals-harrowing-toll-daily-struggle-thieves-violent-customers-attack-him.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-jersey-68303991)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14739815/The-brutal-reality-Britains-shoplifting-epidemic-Tearful-charity-shop-owner-reveals-harrowing-toll-daily-struggle-thieves-violent-customers-attack-him.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/24/shoplifters-cost-charity-shops-15m-year/), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2023-09-29/lowest-of-the-low-the-shoplifters-targeting-charity-shops)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2023-09-29/lowest-of-the-low-the-shoplifters-targeting-charity-shops), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx721l6wl25o)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-68206692), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx721l6wl25o)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14739815/The-brutal-reality-Britains-shoplifting-epidemic-Tearful-charity-shop-owner-reveals-harrowing-toll-daily-struggle-thieves-violent-customers-attack-him.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/24/shoplifters-cost-charity-shops-15m-year/), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-68206692)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/24/shoplifters-cost-charity-shops-15m-year/), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2023-09-29/lowest-of-the-low-the-shoplifters-targeting-charity-shops), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx721l6wl25o)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14739815/The-brutal-reality-Britains-shoplifting-epidemic-Tearful-charity-shop-owner-reveals-harrowing-toll-daily-struggle-thieves-violent-customers-attack-him.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/24/shoplifters-cost-charity-shops-15m-year/), [[4]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-jersey-68303991)
* Paragraph 8 – [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/2023-09-29/lowest-of-the-low-the-shoplifters-targeting-charity-shops), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cq5d8370en5o)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14739815/The-brutal-reality-Britains-shoplifting-epidemic-Tearful-charity-shop-owner-reveals-harrowing-toll-daily-struggle-thieves-violent-customers-attack-him.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/09/24/shoplifters-cost-charity-shops-15m-year/> - A study reveals that charity shops in the UK have lost over £15 million to shoplifters in the past year. The survey indicates that 80% of UK charities have experienced an increase in thefts of publicly donated items. Additionally, more than half of the charities reported a rise in abuse directed at staff and volunteers. Despite these challenges, 85% of charities do not report thefts to the police, and among those that do, only 20% receive a response. To combat the issue, two-thirds of charity shops have implemented new security measures, diverting an extra £4 million away from their charitable causes.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/2023-09-29/lowest-of-the-low-the-shoplifters-targeting-charity-shops> - Charity shops in the UK are facing a surge in shoplifting, with some stores losing an estimated £26,400 annually due to theft. A survey by the Charity Retail Association found that 83% of respondents reported an increase in shoplifting over the past 12 months, averaging a 28.5% rise. Additionally, 42% of charity shops do not report these thefts to the police, citing a lack of evidence or belief in police response. To address the issue, 66% of shops have taken extra security measures, costing an average of £7,833 per charity. Furthermore, 59% of respondents noted an increase in abuse towards staff and volunteers, with an average rise of 33.3%.
4. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-jersey-68303991> - Acorn, a charity shop in Jersey, has introduced a zero-tolerance policy towards shoplifters following a rise in stolen goods. The police reported approximately 150 incidents of theft from shops in 2023 and are collaborating with businesses to reduce these figures. Caroline Kelly from Acorn stated that thefts have increased in recent months, with individuals concealing items under coats or swapping price tags to obtain reduced prices. In response, Acorn has implemented security measures such as zip-tying items and using ink tags to deter thefts. The charity has also set up a shoplifting committee and plans to run a campaign to raise awareness and garner customer support.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-68206692> - Charity shops in Wales are experiencing a significant rise in shoplifting, leading some to eliminate changing rooms and sell items online to mitigate losses. Data indicates a 36% increase in shoplifting incidents in Wales from September 2022 to September 2023, compared to a 32% rise in England. Jenny Langley, overseeing more than 50 charity shops for Tenovus Cancer Care, mentioned that while some thefts are driven by necessity, many are committed by organized criminals seeking profit. Volunteers have reported confronting shoplifters, leading to a range of emotions, and some have had to stop individuals attempting to steal items.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx721l6wl25o> - Guild Care, a charity shop chain in Sussex, has closed most of its changing rooms due to rampant shoplifting and anti-social behaviour. The charity noted a significant increase in such incidents since the COVID-19 pandemic and the financial crisis. Shoplifting in Sussex surged by 52% in the year up to 2024, according to Office for National Statistics figures. Adam Rider, director of retail at Guild Care, stated that shoplifting has become more widespread, leading to the closure of changing rooms and the implementation of new security measures to deter thieves.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cq5d8370en5o> - Charity shops in Greater Manchester are facing a rise in 'brazen' shoplifting, with the highest levels recorded in over 20 years. Home Office figures show more than 18,000 shoplifting crimes in the region in the year to March, a 12% increase from the previous year. Store owners report daily incidents, with some expressing frustration over the police response to thefts under £200. Greater Manchester Police stated that they treat shoplifting as a priority and encourage all businesses to report crimes, regardless of the value of items stolen.