# Shoplifting epidemic worsens with brazen thefts and rising violence against UK retailers



A recent incident captured on CCTV in Weymouth, Dorset, has highlighted a growing concern about theft in retail spaces across the UK. A female shoplifter, utilising an unusual distraction technique, stole jewellery valued at approximately £1,000 from an independent shop, causing significant distress to the owner and underscoring ongoing issues with rising crime rates in this sector. The footage shows the woman dressed in a striking green mini dress, deliberately bending to access lower shelves, while shopkeeper Ian Lambert found himself in a dilemma—uncomfortably aware of appearing inappropriate if he were to monitor her actions too closely.

Lambert later remarked on the incident, stating that every time she leaned over, she was surreptitiously filling her bag. “I didn’t want to be seen looking at her as I would be the one who would be called a pervert,” he admitted. The thief even thanked staff as she left, opting not to make a purchase. This brazen encounter is not isolated; independent retailers across England and Wales are grappling with a surge in theft, at the same time as calls for more robust policing grow louder.

In official data released by the Office for National Statistics, shoplifting offences have reached alarming levels, with over 516,000 reported incidents in the last year alone—a staggering increase of about 20% compared to previous figures. Such statistics mark the highest rates recorded since monitoring began in 2003 and reflect broader concerns related to the socio-economic impacts of the ongoing cost of living crisis. Experts suggest that many theft incidents go unreported, as retailers feel the police response is inadequate.

These fears were echoed by Andrew Goodacre, chief executive of the British Independent Retailers Association (Bira), who confirmed that the rise in theft not only results in direct financial losses but has created a fearful environment for shop staff. “It’s like being burgled every week," he stated, emphasising the emotional toll on those running small businesses. The estimated losses from theft amount to nearly £1 billion annually for the retail industry, placing further strain on independent shops struggling to survive in increasingly challenging conditions.

Furthermore, the current climate has seen violence against shop workers also escalate, with reported incidents surging to about 76,000 in 2023 alone—up from 41,000 the previous year. This rise has prompted urgent discussions about necessary reforms; MPs warn that policies being deliberated in Parliament could inadvertently exacerbate the situation. Proposed plans to scrap short prison sentences could lead to a further spike in shoplifting and burglaries, as those convicted may simply receive community service instead of incarceration.

Lambert's shop, like many others, is navigating the aftershocks of this alarming trend. After the incident, he posted flyers around the community hoping to identify the thief and alert fellow business owners, although many were inexplicably removed—a reflection of how some community members may wish to shield the offender. “We really have a shoplifting epidemic in this country,” he warned, lamenting that the focus often seems to be more on shielding criminals than protecting innocent businesses struggling to recover.

As the consequences of theft ripple through communities, independent retailers continue to call for improved neighbourhood policing and enhanced security measures. The challenges they face serve as a microcosm of a larger societal issue—one that requires urgent attention from both law enforcement and policymakers to ensure the safety and sustainability of independent businesses across the UK.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2. Paragraph 6
3. Paragraphs 6, 7
4. Paragraph 8
5. Paragraph 9
6. Paragraph 10
7. Paragraphs 10, 11

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## 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> - This article reports a 30% year-on-year surge in shoplifting in England and Wales, reaching the highest level in 20 years. Official data indicates a rise from 342,428 to 443,995 recorded incidents in the year up to March 2024. The increase is attributed to factors such as the cost of living crisis and organized criminal activities. Experts note that many incidents go unreported due to lack of evidence or diminished police confidence. The British Retail Consortium highlights the severe impact on retailers, with customer theft incidents doubling and violence against staff escalating.
3. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingdecember2023> - The Office for National Statistics reports a 37% increase in shoplifting offences in England and Wales for the year ending December 2023, with 430,104 recorded incidents compared to 315,040 the previous year. This marks the highest level since current recording practices began in 2003. The report also notes increases in theft from the person and other theft categories. Despite these rises, overall crime rates remain lower than in 2003, with burglary offences decreasing by 1% and vehicle offences by 2%.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/722860ca-7466-4aaf-be8f-6ff25426813c> - This article highlights a significant rise in theft and violence against workers in the UK's small shops, reaching 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. The increase is attributed to factors such as the cost of living crisis and addiction-related crimes, significantly impacting shop owners with average losses of £4,946 per store. Retailers are calling for more comprehensive measures, including increased neighborhood policing and better technology to combat crime.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/shoplifting-surges-30-england-wales-official-data-shows-2024-07-24/> - Reuters reports a 30% surge in shoplifting offences in England and Wales, reaching the highest level in 20 years. Official data shows an increase from 342,428 to 443,995 recorded incidents in the year up to March 2024. Retailers contend that 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.
6. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/yearendingseptember2023> - The Office for National Statistics reports a 32% increase in shoplifting offences in England and Wales for the year ending September 2023, with 402,482 recorded incidents compared to 304,459 the previous year. The report also notes increases in theft from the person and other theft categories. Despite these rises, overall crime rates remain lower than in 2003, with burglary offences decreasing by 1% and vehicle offences by 2%. The data highlights a notable increase in theft offences, including shoplifting, in the period under review.
7. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/crimeinenglandandwales/latest> - The Office for National Statistics provides data on various crime categories, including domestic abuse, sexual assault, stalking, harassment, and theft offences. The report indicates a 4% decrease in homicides, a 4% increase in offences involving knives or sharp instruments, and a 17% decrease in offences involving firearms. Robbery increased by 4%, and shoplifting offences rose by 23% to 492,914 compared with the previous year. The data offers insights into crime trends and the prevalence of different offences in England and Wales.