

KEY MESSAGE FROM JOHN DOUGLAS, MANDATE GENERAL SECRETARY

Everybody is aware that in this time of economic uncertainty many retail workers become the victims of cutbacks including the loss of jobs and reductions in their working week. This unwelcome and added pressure creates huge difficulties for many retail workers and we should remember as consumers that shop workers experience their own personal and financial pressures so they don't need the added stress of verbal or physical abuse while at work. The frightening statistics uncovered by our survey are proof, if needed, that retail workers are at the coal face of consumer anger and many incidents reported to us are based around issues which are completely outside the control of the shop worker. If you feel stressed while shopping, and we all do from time to time, think twice and give shop workers the respect they deserve.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Douglas', with a large, stylized initial 'J' and a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.



BACKGROUND TO VOICES IN RETAIL

In the face of growing concerns expressed by Mandate members across the Irish Retail Sector that serious problems existed regarding the frequency and severity of verbal and physical abuse in the workplace, Mandate conducted a root and branch survey of violence in retail to ascertain the true extent of this deeply disturbing trend.

This Mandate report *Voices in Retail* highlights life experiences of shop workers and the real dangers experienced in their attempts to deliver a high quality consistent service both in an ever demanding and stressful working environment and an ever increasing consumer society.

The Mandate survey involved over 20 major retail businesses and their employees in a sector that accounts for the largest share of employment in the Irish economy with over 200,000 people working in the retail industry.

Mandate's research paints a damning and frightening picture of the current Irish retail sector in relation to workplace abuse, violence, threats and the real life experiences of ordinary working men and women in Irish retail.

Our Activists, members and hundreds of ordinary workers have provided, in their own words, their experiences of life as an Irish retail worker. A selection of these statements appear in this document.

“ I have been cursed at,
roared at and had items
of stock thrown at me.
We need better workplace
protection in our shop
before someone gets
seriously injured.
Retail worker in Cork

RESPECT RETAIL WORKERS CAMPAIGN

The Respect Retail Workers campaign was launched on Monday 8th December 2008 on Dublin's Henry Street. This campaign is one of the most significant campaigns run by Mandate Trade Union in recent years and it is envisaged the campaign will run for some considerable time, based on the huge amount of work ahead to improve the working lives and health and safety in the workplace for thousands of retail workers.

The campaign is aimed at raising awareness of the issue of verbal and physical abuse in the workplace and will target the following audiences but not exclusively:

- Consumers and members of the general public.
- Retail companies and management.
- Government and legislators.
- Opposition political parties.
- Mandate members and their families.
- Other trade unions.



CAMPAIGN AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

There are many strands to the campaign and it will be a substantial and ongoing body of work in pursuit of the following:

- The establishment of a safer and more welcoming retail environment for workers and consumers alike.
- Development of effective workplace policies to deal with violence and abuse.
- Creation of mechanisms to deal with the victims of workplace violence and abuse.
- The promotion of Respect for Shopworkers throughout Irish society.
- To lobby for the issue of retail abuse and violence to be given a higher priority at Government level.
- To engage proactively with all relevant stakeholders on the issue of Respect for Shop workers.

“ I have been spat at by a customer and I was told by a customer to watch my back when I left the store. Most customers are brilliant, it's just a small minority that make our lives miserable.
Retail Worker in Galway

RESPECT RETAIL WORKERS SURVEY

In conducting our research across twenty retail companies we surveyed a cross section of their employees which included both Mandate members and non-members. To date well over 1,000 responses have been received.

Our research shows the following worrying trends:

- **Over 70% of shop workers suffered verbal abuse from a customer in the past year.**

“Some customers give out to you because they are angry or frustrated about a company policy. Proper signage and an improvement in training for managers might reduce the levels of abuse we face every day.”

Retail Worker in Newbridge

- **A further 30% received threats from a customer in the past year.**

“I have been threatened and intimidated by groups of teenagers hanging around at night outside my work. I am fearful that an incident will occur if measures are not taken to protect me and my colleagues.”

Retail Worker in Dublin

- **10% of shop workers experienced verbal abuse every day.**
- **30% of shop workers experienced verbal abuse every week.**
- **41% of shop workers experienced verbal abuse every month.**
- **10 out of every 100 workers reported they had been assaulted by a customer during the course of their employment.**

“ I have first hand experience of customers launching verbal attacks because of company policies that I'm obliged to follow. It gets very depressing at times.
Retail Worker in Limerick

SURVEY RESULTS

Q. Have you suffered verbal abuse from a customer in the last 12 months? (total responses: 1,024)



Q. Have you been threatened by a customer in the last 12 months? (total responses: 995)



Q. Have you ever been assaulted by a customer during the course of your employment? (total responses: 1,010)



Q. Do you feel your employer is doing enough to protect you from abusive customers? (total responses: 961)



“ I personally have had a lot of verbal abuse from youths I have refused alcohol to. They have taunted, threatened and intimidated me.
Retail Worker in Dublin

WHAT ADDITIONAL MEASURES SHOULD YOUR EMPLOYER TAKE TO PROTECT YOU?

Panic buttons straight to the security guards on the street and in the store.

Dublin

If a customer is abusive then I do think more support is required from management.

Dun Laoghaire

The employer should offer staff training to show the staff how to act when threatened.

Tralee

Hire security staff who may be called upon to deal with abusive customers, i.e. escorting them off premises or calling Gardaí for assistance if they persist with abuse and refuse to vacate premises. My employers do not employ security staff so it is left to employees who are not trained to manage potentially dangerous situations to deal with abusive customers to the best of their ability.

Cork

“ Although we have six cameras in a confined working area, we have no male staff members or security guard.
Retail Worker in Cork

More security and more cameras. The shop has often been locked up with no security.

Newcastlewest

We need more security plus a button we can press as the one we have is not working. Why wait until someone gets hurt? Prevention is better than cure. Security is too slow to come to scans. We need more security.

Dublin

Have the appropriate stock in, i.e. baskets, plastic bags and till roll. Have more managers on front-end and also more security too. Panic buttons should be installed on tills in case of emergencies.

Waterford

Management need to make it clear to customers that verbal or physical abuse is not acceptable, and follow this up with appropriate and measured action.

Dublin

Managers should be trained to have respect for employees, and adequate security measures should be put in place.

Cork

“ The management should address situations where customers are abusive and back up staff not customers – they are not always right.
Retail Worker in Dublin

The manager should try not to give out to us in the presence of customer and give us the respect we deserve.

Newbridge

There should be signs up in the shop to say abuse towards staff in any form will not be tolerated. I really think it is an issue that needs to be seriously brought to the forefront and highlighted. Not enough is being done about it at all.

Dundalk

RESPECT RETAIL WORKERS CHARTER

A major part of the campaign is the Charter which sets out minimum objectives, commitments and undertakings by leading employers towards securing a safer working environment for their staff. All leading retail employers have been invited to be a cosignatory with Mandate on the Charter of Respect.

OUR STATED OBJECTIVES ARE:

- The creation of a safer working environment across the Irish Retail Sector ensuring that workers feel respected and valued.
- The improvement of our already high standards of service and courtesy to our customers in a retail environment which is welcoming and safe for everyone.

OUR COMMITMENT:

Abusive behaviour, violence and the threat of violence against our staff will not be tolerated under any circumstance.

WE UNDERTAKE TO:

- Develop and improve on workplace policies designed to safeguard and protect our staff from abuse and violence in the workplace.
- Take punitive measures against the perpetrators of workplace abuse and violence.
- Create support mechanisms for staff who are the victims of workplace abuse and violence.
- Proactively and publicly advise the public of our commitment to the Charter of Respect and the code of conduct and behaviour we expect from all customers.
- Work with all stakeholders, including Mandate Trade Union, towards building a safer and even more welcoming retail environment for workers and public alike.

**THANK
YOU**



RESPECT RETAILERS