

Protection of Workers Bill

Scottish Youth Parliament

Background

As part of the Scottish Youth Parliament’s planned 71st National Sitting, members of the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee were due to ask members of the Scottish Youth Parliament for their views on the Protection of Workers Bill and how it might impact young people. The Sitting was due to take place on 20 March 2020 but was cancelled due to COVID-19 related restrictions. In advance of the Sitting, MSYPs asked their constituents to answer a series of online survey questions to feed into the session. 287 people participated in the survey, aged 12-25. The responses to the #WhatsYourTake survey are summarised below.




Have you experienced or witnessed threatening or abusive behaviour towards retail workers in any of the following situations? Please select all that apply.				
			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes – when working in a shop		16.55%	47
2	Yes – when working in a shop and asking for ID		8.45%	24
3	Yes – As a customer in a shop		26.76%	76
4	No		63.03%	179
			answered	284
			skipped	3

Respondents highlighted the following points in relation to this question:

- I have seen waitresses and bar staff being verbally abused.
- Most scenarios involve intoxication of the “abuser”. There was one situation where I was helping close a shop, and when we asked a customer to go to the checkout (myself, another colleague and a manager colleague). This customer got verbally aggressive and continued to wait outside the store after it was closed, clearly very agitated with being asked to consider paying for their goods.
- I saw an under 16-year old tried to buy an energy drink, when showing her ID, she was told she was too young, she then started to argue with the worker and complain about the shop, she was then told to leave, which she eventually did.
- I work in a retail shop and deal with customers every weekend who are either rude or not very pleasant. As a 19-year old I feel that we should be appreciated more. In my work we do so much for the elderly who come in for our service. If we have not mentioned something or we are “too rough” with shoes we are told straight by a customer. I have had shoes thrown at me and I don’t really come to work to get things thrown at me.
- Sometimes adults disregard my ability to do my job due to my age

- People take out their anger on workers rather than the people behind the decisions that they are angry at. It's not pleasant.
- I was in a shop and a customer asked for help from the worker and the worker helped him with what they needed but the customer instead of being grateful got angry and started shouting at the worker asking for his manager and using strong language.
- This has happened the retail worker states they cannot sell alcohol and have to ask for their supervisor to put through the product. This has also occurred when workers enforce the law that alcohol cannot sold before 10am. Customers can be aggressive, swear and take out their frustration on workers.
- I worked in fast food and had customers talk to me badly when discussing the 5p bag charge and in general when the customer was just unhappy.
- Shouted at for trying to fix a technical issue with my boss, customer was asked to leave on numerous occasions however refused to, left once threatened that security would be called.

Do you think retail workers are more or less likely to be threatened or assaulted at work than other workers who deal with the public (e.g. bus drivers, traffic wardens, paramedics etc) and why?

			Response Percent	Response Total
1	More likely		21.99%	62
2	Less likley		24.47%	69
3	About the same		53.55%	151
			answered	282
			skipped	5

22% of respondents (62 people) said that retail workers are more likely to be threatened or assaulted at work than other workers who deal with the public. Comments included:

- Retail workers are less respected than other professions, unfortunately.
- You will get lots of young people who will try and buy/steal alcohol.
- Retail workers may be held in less high regard, and therefore treated badly or unfairly by the public.
- Shop staff are more likely to be threatened or assaulted because people might be annoyed if they are asked for ID or if they are drunk.
- If a customer can't buy what they want because they have no ID or they don't have enough money.
- Customer more likely to be alone with shop worker

24% of respondents (69 people) said that retail workers are less likely to be threatened or assaulted at work than other workers who deal with the public. Comments included:

- I think that those in jobs where they are trying to enforce regulations and laws (such as traffic wardens or the police) are more likely to face threats and

abuse due to the nature of their role/people more likely to be unhappy with the actions in their roles. I also think solo workers such as bus drivers are more likely to be abused as there are no other official staff around which might make people feel it's easier to get away with treating workers in this way. Many shops also have security whose presence could dissuade such behaviours.

- Retail workers are only selling items, and when confronted with threatening behaviour they merely just agree with the customer which usually settles the situation however other public workers are more likely to be threatened and abused as they have a responsibility for the other members of the public as a priority to keep them safe. They therefore have to intervene and don't have the option to ignore or avoid the situation.
- I have previously worked in a care home and have been abused at my work physically by being spat at or being punched/kicked and verbally abused. I do not see this happen to retail workers as they are not working with vulnerable people on a daily basis and I do believe that both retail and care workers get near enough the same rate of pay, which is concerning and off putting to work in care as I have experienced this myself.
- Paramedics, police officers etc are more likely to face abuse as they are more on the front line and don't know what they will face whereas a retail worker is in a safer environment. They sometimes make physical contact with patients or customers.
- Retail staff are usually backed up by CCTV and other staff members.
- Other workers who deal with the public .e.g. police officers have more power to tell others what to do so this makes it more likely for them to be threatened or assaulted at work than retail workers
- People choose to go into shops, so are less likely to be feeling frustrated or irritated. Also, compared to call centres, the workers are not removed from the customers. In the other situations, people do not choose to use services such as public transport, medical help and parking. People may be stressed on public transport, anxious in a medical emergency and annoyed when parking.
- Bus drivers could have drunk people and they will get assaulted.
- Depending on the job, traffic wardens may have to deal with disagreements from illegal road users and paramedics encounter drunk people or angry/upset victims.
- Other workers who deal with the public are more at risk of drunk or disorderly members of the public committing offences as they are working at night time when people are drinking heavily and out of control whereas retail workers have closed up shop for the night
- Other services have to deal with people who may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs and walking about town and get caught.
- I think people are more likely to behave aggressively/in a threatening manner when in a high stress environment and/or intoxicated. This isn't usually the case when people are shopping.

54 % of respondents thought that retail workers faced about the same likelihood of being threatened or assaulted at work to other workers who deal with members of the public. Comments included:

- Any job that requires working with people will have the same problems regarding certain types of people.
- These workers all have to deal with the same type of angry people sometimes and have to provide to people with a smile even if the people are mean.
- It depends on the customer as most would be respectful. And I think that's the case with any job or trade.
- They are all in customer facing work making it a similar risk. There is an equal chance that anyone could suffer abuse from someone.
- Bus drivers receive abuse daily and so do most retail workers.
- I don't see why retail workers would be treated differently to any other public service job.
- Anybody can be verbally or physically abused so shop keepers aren't different to other workers. Nobody is more or less likely however they are vulnerable to be targeted in equal measure.
- As it is still working with the public and being in contact with the public. And most of the times if a customer is in a bad mood they will take it out on anyone they come in contact with.