



No One Deserves A Serve: **Survey Report 2023**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2023, the SDA surveyed retail and fast food workers in relation to the nature and prevalence of abuse and violence by customers and the control measures that have been introduced to prevent it.

OVER
4,600
WORKERS
RESPONDED
TO THE 2023
SURVEY

This survey was conducted to build on the results of two previous surveys, conducted in 2016 and 2021. Over 4,600 workers responded to the 2023 survey.

KEY FINDINGS

Prevalence

The 2023 survey found that the prevalence of abuse and violence by customers has not improved since the previous surveys. In the last 12 months:

- » 87% of workers said they had experienced verbal abuse from a customer. Both 2016 and 2021 surveys recorded 88%.
- » Workers experienced an increase in the frequency of verbal abuse over a sustained period of time, rather than just isolated events. Of those who experienced verbal abuse, 76% experienced it on a more regular basis (monthly, weekly, daily) compared with 54% in 2021.
- » 12.5% of respondents said they had been the victim of physical violence from a customer, compared with 8% in the 2021 survey.
- » 9% of respondents said they had been spat on.
- » 10% of respondents experienced customer abuse online, double the results of the 2021 survey (4.75%).
- » 17% of respondents reported that the incidents of customer abuse and violence they experienced were of a sexual nature, compared to 10.65% in the 2021 survey. The prevalence is higher among female workers (19%) compared to male workers (9%), with young female workers at particular risk.
- » Repeat offenders is still a significant issue for workers, with 52% of workers reporting that the same customer was abusive or violent towards them on more than one occasion (compared to the 2021 result of 38.5%).
- » Supervisors and managers experienced more verbal and physical abuse and violence (95.5% and 19.5%) and with greater frequency when compared to all workers and were more often spat on (13.5%).

For the first time, the 2023 survey also asked whether workers had experienced abuse, harassment or violence from a customer that referenced their ethnicity, race or cultural background. 24% of workers responded that they had.

Health Impacts

63% of respondents indicated that their physical and/or mental health was impacted. The most common health impacts included stress, anxiety, loss of self-esteem and confidence, burn out and depression.

Reporting

The survey found a positive increase in reporting practices among workers – almost 70% of workers reported an incident of customer abuse and violence compared to 58.5% in 2021, and 62% in 2016.

Worker Safety, Training & Support

Less than half (48%) of the respondents said 'yes' they felt safe in their workplace, 26% responded 'no' they do not feel safe, and 26% were unsure.

The survey found an improvement in the rate of training provided to workers – 70% of respondents received training (67% in 2021, 35% in 2016). However, a majority of workers (57%) do not feel sufficiently trained, suggesting the need to consider the mode and effectiveness of training offered, particularly online training.

Only 19% of respondents felt like the support provided by their employer for employees who have suffered customer abuse and violence was adequate.

Causes

The top three causes of customer abuse and violence reported by workers are:

- » Inadequate staffing;
- » Customer wait times; and
- » Theft.

Effective Measures

Workers reported that customer signage, incident reporting, increased security and training are some of the more effective changes that have been implemented in their workplace.

Next Steps: Prevention measures workers want

The measures most respondents said were needed to prevent customer abuse and violence included:

- » clear terms of entry (customer will be banned for violent behaviour);
- » improved processes for banning customers;
- » more severe criminal charges for abusive customers;
- » increased security presence in stores and public spaces;
- » increased staffing.

2023 SURVEY

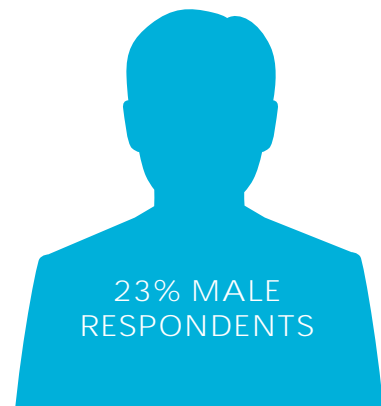
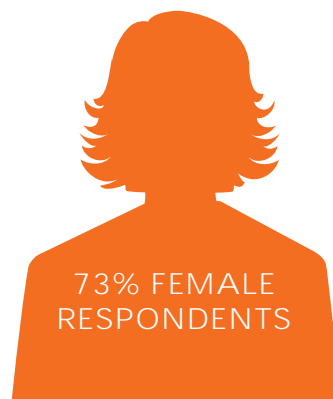
In August 2023, the SDA surveyed retail and fast food workers across all branches about customer abuse and violence.

Over 4,600¹ workers responded to the survey. This is in comparison with the approximately 2,300 responses to the 2021 survey and 6,000 respondents in the 2016 survey.

The purpose of this survey was to build on previous surveys about the experiences of customer abuse and violence towards retail and fast food workers, and also to assess the various strategies adopted to prevent this issue in the workplace.

Of those respondents who completed the survey, 73% were female, 23% were male, 2.6% were other or did not specify. The majority, 95% were retail employees, 5% fast food employees, a small percentage indicated other roles, including pharmacy assistants.

Respondents Age	%
17 years and under	6%
18-25 years	19%
26-35 years	17%
36-45 years	15%
46-55 years	20%
56-65 years	18%
66 years and over	5%



NATURE, PREVALENCE & FREQUENCY OF CUSTOMER ABUSE & VIOLENCE

Verbal

In the last 12 months 87% of workers said that they experienced verbal abuse from a customer. Both the 2021 and 2016 surveys recorded a figure of 88% for this question. Though the result of this survey is marginally less, in practice, it indicates that there has been no change in the prevalence of customer abuse and violence experienced by workers.

Female workers were more likely to experience verbal abuse from a customer (88%) than male workers (84%). These rates are only slightly different from the results of the 2021 survey (89% female, 83% male), indicating no notable change in the experience of verbal abuse by gender.

Young women aged between 18-25 years were most likely to have experienced verbal abuse from a customer (92%), followed by women aged 26-35 years (90%).

Of the workers that experienced verbal abuse, 20% were in the 46-55 years age group, and 19% were in the 18-25 year age group.

¹ A total of 4644 workers partook in the 2023 survey. However, not all respondents provided responses to every question.

For male workers, those aged 26-35 years were most likely to have experienced verbal abuse from a customer (88%). Male workers aged 17 years and under (73%) and over 65 years (69%) were less likely to experience verbal abuse.

Respondents working in retail were slightly more likely to experience verbal abuse from a customer (88%) than respondents working in fast food (84.5%)

Of those workers who reported that they had experienced verbal abuse from a customer in the last 12 months, most indicated that it was on more than one occasion, over half (52%) said it was either weekly or monthly, with 8% indicating it was daily. In comparison to the previous survey, a larger proportion, approximately 76%, of respondents had experienced verbal abuse on a more regular basis (monthly, weekly, daily). This is in comparison with approximately 54% in the previous survey. This suggests that workers experienced an increase in the frequency of verbal abuse over a sustained period of time, rather than just isolated incidents.

Frequency	%
1-2 times	15%
2-3 times	24%
Every month	24%
Every week	28%
Every day	8%
Never	1%

"Mainly just verbal abuse, you are left to feel worthless."

Retail, Sales Assistant,
Female, 46-55

"I've had items thrown at me at the registers. I've had a customer lean across the register to try and grab my shirt. I've had verbal threats made and physical gestures made at me."

Retail, Assistant Store Manager,
Male, 26-35

In terms of frequency, young male workers 17 and under are most likely to experience verbal abuse on a monthly basis (31%). Both male and female workers aged 18-25 report the same level of abuse occurring on a weekly basis (32%).

Workers in fast food were more likely to experience abuse from a customer every week (32%) or every month (32%) than retail workers (28% every week, 23% every month).

"I politely pointed out to a customer in self serve that they'd missed scanning some meat that was under their purchases from outside the store and I was called a bitch and shoved backwards into another customers trolley while they ran from the store without paying for any of their groceries. \$350 worth. It's a weekly occurrence in our store. And there is verbal abuse every day and management does nothing."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 36-45

"I was in the ACO area when 3 customers came through to pay for 2 items although they had items concealed in their pram, I asked if they would please lift the blanket so I could look under it. One female verbally abused me and the male shoved the pram into my pelvis. I was bruised in my pelvis and shin as I had one leg slightly forward."

Retail, Online/Click n Collect, Female, 65+

Physical

12.5% of respondents said that they had been the victim of physical violence from a customer in the last 12 months. This is higher than the previous survey result of 8%. The experience of physical violence was slightly different between female (12%) and male (14%) respondents.

Incidents of physical violence are most prevalent in the 18-25 years age bracket. Young female workers aged 18-25 years reported the highest levels of physical violence (17%). This is followed closely by male workers aged 18-25 years (16%). When considering the older age brackets (26 years to over 65 years), the prevalence of physical violence is higher for male workers; of the 14% of male workers who reported experiencing physical violence in the last 12 months, 72% belonged to the older age brackets (compared with 54% of females who responded that they had experienced physical violence).

Incidents of physical violence reported was the same for retail and fast food.

9% OF RESPONDENTS HAVE BEEN SPAT ON BY A CUSTOMER IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS.

Many incidents of physical abuse occur in response to workers trying to prevent customer theft or asking abusive customers to leave the store. Several incidents include references to knives being wielded at workers.

"I have been pushed when asking banned customers that have sprayed chemicals at other team members and towards myself to leave the store."

Retail, Department/ Line Manager, Female, 36-45

"A man attacked my store manager by choking and punching him."

Retail, Front-end, Male, 18-25

"A man tried to sexually and physically assault me in the cool room. He had a knife on him. He went to jail and is now out on parole. I have an APVO on him but he still comes to my work and the police don't care."

Retail, Sales Assistant/Assistant Store Manager, Female, 18-25

"Had a trolley pushed into me, as I politely asked whether all the items had been scanned."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 56-65

"Punched and threatened to have a knife pulled."

Retail, Replenishment/fill team, Male, 18-25

"Assaulted by three juvenile girls. Now I have everything but the common flu wrong with me. Still off on work cover for past 16 months."

Retail, Department/Line Manager, Female, 46-55

"Having things thrown at me just for telling the customer that they have to pay at the tool shop register."

Retail, Customer Service Employee, Female, 65+

"Verbal, physical, knives shown, things thrown at you, exposure of inappropriate body parts."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 46-55

Sexual

17% of respondents said that they have experienced incidents of customer abuse and violence that was sexual in nature. Concerningly, this is higher than the result of the 2021 survey where 10.65% reported this kind of abuse.

Female workers are much more likely to have experienced abuse or violence from a customer of a sexual nature (19%) than male workers (9%).

Young female workers are most at risk of experiencing customer abuse and violence of a sexual nature. 34% of female workers aged 17 and under and 40.5% of female workers aged 18-25 years said they experienced abuse and violence of a sexual nature. Concerningly, the results for these categories are significantly higher than in the 2021 survey, where 19% of female workers aged 17 and under and 27.5% female workers aged 18-25 experienced abuse and violence of a sexual nature. 25% of the female respondents to this question aged 26-35 years reported experiencing abuse and violence of a sexual nature.

Workers in fast food were much more likely to have experienced customer abuse and violence that was sexual in nature (29%) than workers in retail (17%). This may be explained by the fact that most of the respondents working in fast food were female and in the 17 and under, and 18-26 year age groups, and we know from the data broadly that young female workers are most at risk of experiencing customer abuse that is sexual in nature.

"I had an old guy try to expose himself to me when I was working a late night shift."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 56-65

"There is a grotty old man that asks the girls for sex in exchange of money. After 3 months we finally had him banned from the centre."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 36-45

"Lots I mean lots of men make disgusting comments almost daily to team."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 18-25

"Old men behaving in creepy ways, persons severely under the influence behaving in disgusting manners."

Retail, Front-end, Male, 18-25

"Asking for my number and detailing how he wanted to do things to me and that he liked rough."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 36-45

"I get old unwanted touching, mostly by older men. They also say sexually inappropriate comments, one also asked me to go out with him. I said no but he kept asking."

Retail, Door Greeter, Female, 26-35

*"Do you like the stubble on my chin...next time I'll grow it longer so it will be rougher for your p***y...I called for help over 4 times on the 2 way... I felt threatened on the door...not one staff member attended!"*

Retail, Door Greeter, Female, 56-65

"Customers trying to come on to me, flirt creepily, touch my arm/back/shoulder, wink at me, implying innuendos when I'm trying to help them."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 18-25

"I had a male follow and watch me and touch himself while he watched me."

Retail, Customer Service Employee, Female, 46-55

*"Aggressively sexual, demanding my phone number, asking me to go home with them after my shift, aggressive when I declined. Called me a sl*t."*

Retail, Front-end, Female, 18-25

Online

The proportion of respondents who experienced customer abuse online in the last 12 months (10%) has doubled since the 2021 survey (4.75%). Male workers were slightly more likely to have experienced customer abuse online (11%) than female workers (9%). For both males and females, this has doubled since the last survey.

Workers in fast food were slightly more likely to report experiencing customer abuse online (12.5%) than workers in retail (9.5%)

The examples of online abuse by customers ranged from complaints made via online complaints methods, customer feedback forms/ processes, Facebook pages and finding and contacting staff on their own social media accounts (e.g. Facebook, Instagram).

Many commented that they had been the victims of abuse over the phone, whilst receiving customer feedback or dealing with customer queries. Many examples were of complaints of interactions misrepresented by the customer and some of the abuse included threats of violence.



Racial & Ethnicity-based

In previous surveys, many SDA members provided examples of abuse, harassment, and violence from customers involving references to their race, ethnicity or cultural background. In this survey, we asked respondents questions regarding their race (grouping based on physical characteristics) and ethnicity (which encompasses nationality and cultural background) to get a better understanding of the prevalence of this form of abuse and violence.

5%* of respondents to the survey reported that they were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin, with 4% preferring not to mention.

A majority of respondents, 77%, identified as part of the 'Australian' ethnic group. The top responses were as follows:

Ethnic Group	%
Australian	77%
South-East Asian	4%
Other	4%
Prefer not to say	3%
Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander	3%*
New Zealander	2%
Southern and Eastern European	2%
Middle Eastern	1%

**These figures are the results of responses to two separate survey questions asking the same question. As the number of respondents across questions were not consistent, this results in a slight discrepancy between the proportion of respondents who identified as Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander.*

A majority of respondents, 75%, identified as part of the 'white' racial group. The top responses were as follows:

Racial Group	%
White	75%
Prefer not to say	9%
Asian	5%
Brown	4%
Other	2%

Respondents were asked whether they had experienced abuse, harassment or violence from a customer that included reference to their ethnicity, race or cultural background. 24% of respondents to the question responded 'yes', 69% responded 'no' and 7% were unsure/other.

Workers in retail were more likely to experience abuse, harassment or violence from a customer that included reference to their ethnicity, race or culture (25%) than workers in fast food (17.5%).

The workers most likely to experience abuse, harassment or violence from a customer that included reference to their ethnicity, race or cultural background were those who identified as South-East Asian (56.5%), Southern and Central Asian (52%) and Middle-Eastern (45%).

When considering the questions asked of all respondents, the prevalence of verbal abuse was consistent across racial and ethnic groups. Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islanders were more likely to experience physical violence (18%) when compared to all respondents (12.5%). Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders were also more likely to experience customer abuse and violence of a sexual nature (27%), as were those workers who identified as North-West European (24.5%) and Southern and Eastern Europeans (22.5%), when compared to all respondents (17%).

Workers who identified as other than 'white' were more likely to have been spat on by a customer in the last 12 months (11.5%) compared to 8.5%. This was also the case in relation to online abuse, 13.8% of workers who identified as other than 'white' experienced customer abuse online compared to 9.8% of workers who identified as 'white'.

"Bad jokes on nationality are constant."

Retail, Manager, Female, 56-65

"A lady had apparently been waiting for a long time, however I am unable to confirm. I had clocked on to my shift and walked onto the floor and heard yelling and swearing from a customer pacing in our dining room. As soon as we made eye contact, she started going off at me, urging me to come from behind the counter so she could rip my arms off, then proceeded to call me an "asian c" (I'm one quarter Filipino, my only Asian characteristic is my tanned skin, my eyes are slightly narrower than the average Australian, but not enough to be instantly recognisable as Asian)."***

Fast Food, Asst. Restaurant Manager, Female, 18-25

"I have been called a f** black c*** by a customer. Another customer has threatened to jump the counter and slit my throat. Another customer told me to go suck a c*** and he hoped I died doing it. This is just three times but there have been many more and these were all when I asked for ID because they wanted to buy cigarettes."***

Retail, Sales Assistant, Female, 56-65

"Customer called me a monkey and walked away."

Retail & Fast Food, Male, 36-45

"Guy mimicking my accent, being told they don't want to be served by me because I'm from New Zealand."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 36-45

"They call me stupid African, and some go and make false accusations against me to my manager."

Retail, Front-end, Male, 46-55

"Calling me names, Chinese lady, can you go back to your country."

Retail, Self-serve, Female, 56-65

"They say Indian dog."

Fast Food, Crew Supervisor/Manager, Male, 26-35

"I've had a customer insult me for being openly Jewish."

Retail, Sales Assistant, Male, 18-25

"A guy stole scissors and stood at the end of the registers holding them at my team and myself saying 'you should suffer for your white privilege' while stabbing the air."

Retail, Assistant Store Manager, Male, 18-25

Threatening Behaviour

Most respondents (81%) have felt threatened by a customer in the last 12 months.

Retail Employees		Fast Food Employees	
Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1-2 times	32%	1-2 times	29%
2-3 times	22%	2-3 times	25%
Every month	14%	Every month	18.5%
Every week	10%	Every week	10%
Every day	2.5%	Every day	2.5%
Never	19%	Never	14.5%



PERPETRATORS OF CUSTOMER ABUSE & VIOLENCE

The vast majority, 64%, of both female and male respondents, reported that the perpetrators of customer abuse and violence directed at them over the last 12 months were both males and females. 12% of workers reported that perpetrators were female customers, and 14% were male.

Workers were also asked about repeat offenders. 52% said that the same customer was abusive or violent towards them or a group of employees on more than one occasion. This figure is significantly higher than the 2021 result of 38.5%. The issue of repeat offenders is still a significant issue for workers. Both male (53%) and female (52%) respondents reported similar rates of customer abuse and violence being perpetrated by the same offender.

Young female workers aged 18 to 25 years (57%), female workers aged 36-45 years (55%) and 26-35 years (54%) reported the highest rates of abuse by repeat offenders. The results across all age categories for females were fairly consistent (ranging between 51%-41%). Males aged 26-35 years were also more likely (61%) to have said that the same customer was abusive towards them or a group of employees on more than one occasion.

CAUSES OF CUSTOMER ABUSE & VIOLENCE

When providing examples of customer abuse and violence, there were some common themes cited for why it occurred.

When respondents were asked what was the main cause when thinking about when they have experienced abuse and violence, they indicated the following top ten causes:

Retail Employees		Fast Food Employees
1	Not enough staff (59%)	Customer wait times (74%)
2	Theft (54%)	Not enough staff (62%)
3	Customer wait times (52%)	Intoxicated/drug affected customers (60%)
4	Enforcing store protocols - ID checks, bag checks, docket scans (46%)	Dissatisfaction with service (46%)
5	Intoxicated/drug affected customers (42%)	Stock shortages (40%)
6	Stock shortages (39%)	Refund policy (33%)
7	Refund policy (38%)	Mental Health Impairment (25%)
8	Dissatisfaction with service (33%)	Enforcing store protocols (23%)
9	Mental Health Impairment (23%)	Store environment - noise/lighting/temp (17.5%)
10	Working alone or in isolation (19%)	Theft (16%)

Other reasons that customers reported as causes of abuse and violence included: how bags were packed, customers not understanding how to operate self-serve checkouts, order errors (accidental over-charging), prices of stock. A few respondents mentioned that their disabilities (particularly deafness) were a cause.

HEALTH IMPACTS OF ABUSE & VIOLENCE

Workers were asked whether they suffered health impacts as a result of experiencing customer abuse and violence. 63% of respondents indicated that their physical and/or mental health was impacted. Of those workers who indicated they experienced health impacts, these are the health impacts they indicated:

Health Impact	%
Stress	74%
Anxiety	73%
Loss of self-esteem or confidence	37%
Burn out	36%
Depression	31%
Brain fog/loss of concentration	27%
Impacts on private life	22%
High blood pressure	14%
Body aches/pains	13%
PTSD	11%
Suicidal thoughts	8%
Digestive problems	8%
Other	7%
Physical injury	4%



Overall, male workers experienced health impacts at higher rates than female workers. In comparison to female workers, male workers were more likely to experience stress (78% compared to 73%), physical injury (7% compared to 3%), depression (37% compared to 29%), burn out (41% compared to 35%), suicidal thoughts (12% compared to 6%).

Female workers were more likely to experience anxiety compared to male workers (74% compared to 67%).

Though the rate of physical injury across both male and female was low (4%), the rates of male workers who experienced physical injury were higher across all age categories compared to female workers. Of those male workers who indicated that they had suffered physical injury as a result of customer abuse and violence, male workers aged 26-35 reported the highest rates of physical injury (9%), followed by male workers aged 18-25 (8%). 6% of female workers aged 26-35 and 4.5% aged 36-45 reported experiencing physical injury as a result of customer abuse and violence.

Overall, male workers reported higher levels of stress than female workers. This is highest for male workers aged 26-35 years (85%), compared with female workers of the same age group (82%). Male workers aged 18-25 reported the second highest levels of stress (83%) compared with female workers (81%).

Overall, female workers reported significantly higher levels of anxiety than male workers. This is highest for female workers aged 18-25 (84%), compared with male workers (72%). Female workers aged 26-35 reported the second highest levels of anxiety (81%) followed closely by female workers aged 17 and under (80%). These results show that the prevalence of anxiety experienced by female workers are more concentrated in the younger age groups, however, are consistently high overall (ranging from 84% - 54% across the age groups).

Female workers in the 46-55 age group were more likely than other female age groups to experience health impacts from customer abuse and violence. The most common health impacts for this group is anxiety (71%), stress (70%), loss of self-esteem or confidence (33%) and depression (26%).

Male workers in the 26-35 age group were more likely than other male age groups to experienced health impacts from customer abuse and violence. The most common health impacts for this group were stress (85%), anxiety (73%), burn out (51%), loss of self-esteem or confidence (45%) and depression (42%).

"It has literally gotten to the point where I left the store an hour into my shift because I couldn't stop crying."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 18-25

"Not motivated to leave home because I don't want to deal with people."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 26-35

"Ruminating beyond shift, sometimes for several days."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 56-65

"Impacted my studies severely."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 26-35

"Waking up during the night thinking about what occurred during the last shift."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 56-65

"I recently had an operation to remove a lump in my thyroid which was due to high levels of stress."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 26-35

"I had 3 heart attacks in November 2022. I was 48. Doctors said it's all to do with the increased stress from work. Customer abuse has risen significantly, and bad behaviour has increased causing my health to suffer significantly."

Retail, Manager, Female, 46-55

"Stress in relation to financial worries, as abuse can get to the point where I don't want to come into work, but I need the money."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 18-25

"Loss of enthusiasm to do my job."

Retail, Front-end, Male, 36-45

"It flares up my emotions, and I cycle through a variety of emotions within a short space of time, from anger to sad and anywhere in between."

Retail, Front-end, Male, 18-25

"Since I still go to school sometimes I would think about it at school and at home. And I love my job but customers like that make me want to quit."

Retail, Front-end, Male, 17 and under

"I am currently on anxiety medication. Kepra 750mls twice daily."

Retail, Front-end, Male, 46-55

REPORTING & ACTION TAKEN

Almost 70% (68.5%) of workers said that they had reported an incident of customer abuse or violence to their employer. This reporting rate is higher than recorded in previous surveys (58.5% in 2021, 62% in 2016), suggesting a positive change in reporting practices among workers.

Young workers were much less likely to report an incident (45%) of customer abuse and violence, only 45% of those aged 17 and 60% of those aged 18-25. However, this is an improvement from the previous survey where 29% of workers 17 years and under and 44% of those 18-25 years old reported an incident of customer abuse and violence.

Reporting rates between female and male workers are generally consistent, with female workers more likely to report (70%) an incident than males (65%).

Fast food workers were less likely to report (61.5%) than retail workers (69.5%). This may be explained by the fact that most fast food workers are young workers and the broad results indicate that young workers are less likely to report.

Supervisors and managers in both retail and fast food were more likely than other workers to report an incident of customer abuse and violence, 73% of fast food crew supervisors, 79% of retail department/line and duty managers, 75% of Assistant Store Managers and 80% of front-end supervisors.

Of the 31.5% of workers who said they did not report an incident of customer abuse and violence, 37% said that it was because they thought it was not worth reporting, 24% felt like nothing would happen and 11% reported that nothing had happened when they reported an incident in the past.

Of those who did report an incident, they reported to the following people:

Line or Department Manager	66%
Assistant Store Manager	17%
Other	9%
Police	3%

Workers in retail were much more likely to report an incident to their line or department manager (67%), than fast food workers who were almost equally likely to report to their line or department manager (39%) as they were to report to their Assistant Store Manager (35%).

Of those workers who reported an incident, 35% said that no action was taken in response to the report. This is a lower rate than recorded in the 2021 survey, where 47% of respondents reported that no action was taken, indicating an improvement in the response rate to reports. 13% were unsure of whether any action was taken. Of those who reported an incident and action was taken, these were the actions they said were taken in response to the report:

Manager/supervisor intervened	31%
Customer asked to leave/removed from the store	26%
Police called	16%
Security called	16%
Customer warned	16%
Customer banned	13%
Unsure	13%
No action	35%

In comparison with the previous survey, there appears to be an overall increase in the number of respondents reporting that actions had been taken. For instance, in 2021, 11% reported that security had been called, 10% that police had been called, 20.5% that the customer was asked to leave or removed from the store. The overall increase in actions taken in response to workers' reports of incidents demonstrates there has been some improvement in the steps being taken to respond to workers' safety concerns.

However, 43% of those who reported an incident did not think that the response was satisfactory. This is an improvement from 2021 survey where 48% were not satisfied with the response, and 56% from the 2016 survey. While the overall trend is positive, the recent result still indicates room for improvement.

EXPERIENCE OF CUSTOMER ABUSE & VIOLENCE BY JOB ROLE

In this survey, we asked respondents to indicate their main job role. The objective of this was so that we could get data to assist us to identify if some workers were experiencing customer abuse and violence at a higher rate and frequency due to the job role they performed to ensure that control measures are effectively targeted to those most at risk.

The majority of respondents indicated they worked in a retail front-end/service/register operator role (50%), however we had a good level of responses from other workers in retail and fast food including managers and supervisors.

Job Role	% of respondents	No. of respondents
Retail: Front-end/Service/Register Operator	50.26%	2243
Retail: Replenishment/Fill Team	16.36%	730
Retail: Door Greeter	8.07%	360
Retail: Customer Service Employee (non-front end/registers)	14.21%	634
Retail: Sales Assistant	15.06%	672
Retail: Online/Click n Collect	11.20%	500
Retail: Back Dock	2.44%	109
Retail: Delivery Driver	0.38%	17
Retail: Department/Line/Duty Manager	6.83%	305
Retail: Assistant Store Manager	2.26%	101
Retail: Front-end Supervisor	7.66%	342
Fast Food: Counter/Service	2.98%	133
Fast Food: Drive Thru	2.35%	105
Fast Food: Food Prep	1.75%	78
Fast Food: Crew Supervisor/Manager	1.50%	67
Other* (please specify)	10.58%	472
	Answered	4463
	Skipped	181

*This mostly includes different roles across retail, fast food and pharmacy.

Nature, Prevalence & Frequency of Customer Abuse & Violence

When considering the responses by job role the survey found that respondents who indicated they were in supervisory or manager roles experienced verbal and physical abuse and violence from customers at a higher rate and frequency than other respondents. Retail workers performing front-end/register duties and door greeter duties also experienced higher rates of abuse and violence.

Front-end/register operators, door greeters and front-end supervisors and fast food crew managers were more likely to experience customer abuse and violence that was sexual in nature.

Managers experienced much higher rates of abuse and violence online.

Consistent with the responses regarding verbal abuse, managers and supervisors in retail also reported experiencing abuse, harassment and violence that included reference to their ethnicity, race or cultural background (34%) compared to 24% of all respondents.

Job Role	Verbal	Physical	Sexual	Online
All respondents	87%	12.5%	17%	10%
Front-end/register	92%	14%	19%	8.5%
Door greeter	90%	14.5%	21%	7%
Department/Line Manager	95%	20.5%	17%	15%
Assistant Store Manager	95%	18.5%	16.5%	17%
Front-end supervisor	96.5%	19%	20.5%	16.5%
Store Manager	92%	19%	19%	21%
Fast Food Crew Manager/Supervisor	95.5%	20%	34%	19.5%

Managers and supervisors also reported experiencing verbal abuse from a customer on a more frequent basis. Almost 1 in 5 (17.5%) of fast food crew supervisors/managers experienced verbal abuse every day, compared to 7% of fast food crew members. Retail Managers and supervisors were also more likely to experience verbal abuse on a more frequent basis than other retail staff, with 16.5% reporting they experience verbal abuse every week, compared to just over 10% of other retail staff.

Retail Department/Line/Duty Managers (68%) and Front-end supervisors (70%) were much more likely to experience abuse or violence from the same customer than other workers (52%).

Health Impacts

More managers and supervisors indicated that their experience of customer abuse and violence had an impact on their physical and mental health. They were also more likely than other workers to be experiencing stress, anxiety and burn out, and experienced a much higher incidence of PTSD.

	Store Manager	Department/ Line/Duty Manager	Assistant Store Manager	Front-end Supervisor	Fast Food Crew Supervisor
Stress	93%	82.5%	79.5%	82%	83%
Anxiety	69%	78.5%	86.5%	77%	87%
Burn out	48%	47%	41%	46.5%	45%
Loss of self-esteem/ confidence	48%	40%	45%	37.5%	49%
PTSD	17%	17.5%	19%	17.5%	9.5%

MEASURES INTRODUCED TO PREVENT CUSTOMER ABUSE & VIOLENCE

Respondents were asked to indicate what measures their employer has introduced to prevent customer abuse and violence:

Measures introduced	%
Training on how to deal with customer aggression or de-escalation	54.5%
Incident reporting	40%
Process for dealing with abusive customers	27%
Communication devices/ headsets	25%
Process for banning customers	24% (increase from 17%)
Customer violence and harassment policy	20%
Badges (asking customers to respect staff)	14%
Perspex screens	14%
Increased security	14%

Consultation

Workers were asked whether they were consulted by their employer about measures to prevent customer abuse and violence. The majority, 46%, responded 'no', 35% responded 'yes' and 19% were unsure.

Policies

More than half, 54%, said they were aware of store or company policies aimed at addressing situations involving customer abuse and violence. This is a slight decrease from the previous survey (56%).

Training

70% of respondents said that they had received training in the last 12 months on how to deal with threatening situations that includes abusive or violent customers. This is an increase from the previous survey (67%), and significantly higher than the 2016 survey, where only 35% of workers had received training. This result indicates an improvement in the rates of training being offered to workers.

Retail workers were more likely to indicate they had received training in the last 12 months (71%) than fast food workers (55%).

In this survey, workers were asked whether they felt sufficiently trained to deal with violent and aggressive customers. Unfortunately, the majority of respondents (57%), said that they did not feel sufficiently trained. This was the same in retail and fast food. The results were also fairly consistent for all job roles including managers and supervisors.

Workers were asked about the method that the training was delivered:

Training method	%
Online modules	74%
A combination of in-person and online	11%
Other	8%
In-person	5%
Live online training session (Zoom or other platform)	1%

Workers were also asked to provide comments on the training they had received. Many highlighted the inadequacy of training, particularly online training that they felt was outdated (done a long time ago and not updated), generic (not capturing all kinds of abuse) and inadequate in equipping workers to deal with real-life scenarios. Many respondents also expressed that young workers needed additional training and attention to assist them to deal with abusive and violent situations.

"No amount of training is going to help at the end of the day, the public needs to be taught how to treat workers."

Retail, Sales Assistant, Female, 18-25

"Awful training, state level managers do not care whatsoever."

Retail, Sales Assistant,
Male, 26-35

"It is the same module every time with the same scenarios. But it doesn't tell you what to do after, only report to your line manager. Unfortunately, they are overworked and tend to forget to do extra tasks such as log incidents that weren't major."

Retail, Front-end, 26-35

"I don't think the training was sufficient as it more focused on false intentions of theft and aggressive customers. After so much experience with violent customers and theft (being the main reason why they become violent), I've learnt that if they want to steal, they will. The training focused on 'over servicing' and just because we didn't insert ourselves into a situation where we needed to confront a person who most likely will get violent on us, it's our fault. The training did not say "If the situation escalates, let them go", it was more of a focus on how we go wrong with stopping theft which made everyone feel really angry after doing the module. It didn't focus on the main issue and didn't discuss how some people are violent from the moment they walk in."

Retail, Front-end Supervisor, Female, 18-25

"Just a quick rushed 1 min module."

Retail, Delivery Driver, Male, 18-25

"I would like there to be better supply of badges for team members, like those provided a few years back. Enough for all the Team. In person coaching, because online learning is not sufficient. Real life-threatening issues are very scary and your mind goes quite blank when they occur."

Retail, Front-end Supervisor, Female, 26-35

"Only had 1 lot of online training but it was over 12 months ago and wasn't helpful."

Retail, Front-end Supervisor, Female, 36-45

"Generic online module that's completed during orientation and recertification as well as online zoom call for manager in training."

Fast Food, Counter Service/Drive thru and Crew Supervisor, Female, 18-25

"I have received no training."

Retail, Assistant Store Manager, Female, 26-35

"One module. My lifelong skills and experiences has been my training ground. The younger workers are NOT sufficiently trained."

Retail, Front-end Supervisor, Female, 56-65

"I was given a sheet of paper or two to read over and sign that I understood the details on the document."

Retail, Customer Service Employee (non-front end/registers), Female, 26-35

"Just a module you read and was rushed."

Retail, Sales Assistant, Female, 18-25

"Young staff need to role play with trainers."

Retail, Store Manager, Female, 56-65

"The training we received was good in that we were instructed on how to deal with theft but there is nothing about the day-to-day abuse that can take a toll on mental and physical health."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 46-55

"Not enough in-depth training on how to deal with the abuse from customers. And how to cope with the abuse after it happened."

Retail, Customer Service Employee, Male, 56-65

"The online training doesn't really help with real life situations, because people are unpredictable, and team members do not always come when you call them over the head set. There should be codewords taught for different levels of threats, and we should be confident someone will come."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 56-65

"All training was done online, but I feel I have taught myself after first hand been witness to violent and abusive customers"

Retail, Manager, Female, 26-35

"Online training is not effective and doesn't sink in."

Retail, Manager, Female, 18-25

"We don't get sufficient time to complete training. We do on express checkout and always hurrying up."

Retail, Front-end, Female, 26-35

These results indicate that further consideration is required regarding the quality and mode of training offered to workers on how to deal with violent and aggressive customers.

Safety & Support

In this survey, workers were asked whether they felt safe in their workplace. Less than half (48%) responded 'yes' they felt safe, 26% responded 'no' they do not feel safe, and 26% were unsure.

A significant proportion of workers (44%) responded that they did not think that the support provided by their employer for employees who have suffered customer abuse and violence is adequate. Only 19% of workers felt supported by their employer, 32% were unsure.

Fast food workers were slightly more likely to say the support was adequate (24%) compared to retail workers (19%).

Workers were asked what more their employer could do to support employees if they have been subjected to customer abuse or violence.

Additional measures	%
Ability to take a short break following an incident/when needed	34%
Supervisor/manager follow up or check in	32%
Employee Assistance Programs (including counselling)	15%
Other	19%

More fast food workers said the ability to take a short break following an incident/when needed was something their employer could do to support workers (49%) when compared to retail workers (34%).

'Other' responses included: union counselling services, 'all of the above', more front-end staff/ additional staff so that the victim can take short breaks after an incident, security, informing staff that the options exist and enforcing customer bans.

Workers were asked to rank the most effective changes in their workplace.

The top 10 responses were:

1	INCIDENT REPORTING	8	CUSTOMER VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT POLICY
2	CUSTOMER SIGNAGE	9	PROCESS FOR DEALING WITH ABUSIVE CUSTOMERS
3	INCREASED SECURITY	10	PERSONAL DURESS ALARMS
4	PROCESS FOR BANNING CUSTOMERS	11	COMMUNICATION DEVICES/HEADSETS
5	TRAINING ON HOW TO DEAL WITH CUSTOMER AGGRESSION OR DE-ESCALATION	12	BODY-WORN CAMERAS
6	BADGES (ASKING CUSTOMERS TO RESPECT STAFF)	13	PHYSICAL BARRIERS
7	PERSPEX SCREENS	14	OVERHEAD PA MESSAGES

Workers were asked what they thought their employer could do to prevent customer abuse and violence. Respondents to the question indicated the following:

Measure	%
Clear terms of entry (e.g. that customers will be banned from store for violent behaviour)	76%
Process for banning customers	70%
Increased security	68%
Training on how to deal with customer aggression or de-escalation	50%
Incident reporting	47%
Process for dealing with abusive customers	46%
Customer signage	45%
Customer violence and harassment policy	44%
Increase union participation and involvement in workplace safety	42%
Messages for customers to respect workers on the overhead PA	40%

In this survey, workers were asked what other wider measures they thought would help reduce customer abuse and violence in their workplaces:

Measure	%
More severe criminal charges for abusive customers	78%
Improved security in public places around the workplace	77%
Improved trespass and banning laws	67%
Public education campaign/advertising	55%

NO ONE DESERVES A SERVE CAMPAIGN

70% of respondents have heard of the SDA's No One Deserves a Serve (NODAS) campaign.

Of those who were aware of the campaign, about half (48%) have seen the NODAS badges ('I'm a mother,' 'I'm a son'), 46% have seen campaign materials in store, 37% have seen social media/online posts, 36% have seen TV ads, 22% have seen the Industry Statement committing to a retail and fast food environment free from abuse and violence, 14% have heard radio ads, 13% seen news articles, 10% have seen billboards.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS & NEXT STEPS

The results of the 2023 No One Deserves A Serve survey indicates that customer abuse and violence is still being experienced by retail and fast food workers, and that there has not been significant change since the previous 2021 and 2016 survey results.

Unfortunately, this survey has recorded a greater prevalence of abuse and violence of a sexual nature, particularly for female workers. Additionally, the survey results report an increase in the prevalence of physical violence since the last survey. Physical violence against workers trying to prevent customer theft, and the increased threat of knives by customers are common themes.

Positively, this survey shows that more workers are reporting customer abuse and violence. Additionally, the results suggest that there is an overall increase in actions taken following these reports. Compared to the past, it also appears that more workers are satisfied with their employer's response to the report, but there is still significant room for improvement.

Whilst a majority of workers reported awareness of workplace measures introduced to prevent customer abuse and violence, and have also undergone some form of training, the results indicate that workers feel that current measures are still not enough and that the mode and effectiveness of the training provided requires serious consideration. Consultation with retail and fast food workers could better inform employers of the most meaningful ways to protect workers.

The changes that workers felt were most effective in their workplace remain the same as in the previous survey results:

- » Customer signage
- » Incident reporting
- » Increased security
- » Process for banning customers
- » Training on how to deal with customer aggression or de-escalation

These align with the further measures workers thought were required to be implemented by their employers, particularly, clear terms of entry (that customers will be banned or asked to leave if violent) and a process for banning customers.

In relation to broader measures, most workers indicated that having more severe criminal charges for abusive customers could help reduce incidents of customer abuse and violence, as well as increased security presence, and improved trespass and banning laws. Governments must consider implementing the necessary law reforms and allocate sufficient police resourcing to be able to enforce current and improved laws to better protect retail workers.