

VIOLENCE & AGGRESSION

SCOTT KYLE anticipates the arrival of new training modules to equip retail staff and their line managers to better handle violent and aggressive behaviour from customers.

ShopCare is a Charitable Trust, working in partnership with ACC to reduce workplace harm across the retail Sector and its associated supply chain. ShopCare serves to enable its community to improve its health, safety, and wellbeing performance by working together for combined positive outcomes and a whole system shift.

Our work is providing a better understanding of the impact that violent and aggressive behaviour (VAB) is having within the retail sector and the significant consequences of these type of incidents on our frontline staff, their whānau, organisations, and the broader community. This is seen to include worker anxiety, poor mental health, illness, physical injury, increased sick leave, absenteeism, low staff morale and increased staff turnover.

The retail industry is a vital part of the economy and includes all physical retail outlets, such as supermarkets, petrol stations, hardware stores, pharmacies, electronics and home appliance stores, dairies, department and clothing stores, and many more. The retail sector employs about 200,000 people spread over almost 28,000 businesses and accounts for 9.6% of all jobs, according to Retail NZ's sector overview. Furthermore, retail employs a relatively high number of women, youth, older workers, and ethnic minorities – groups which may be more vulnerable to violent and aggressive behaviour.

THE STATISTICS

NZ Police statistics show an overall decrease in key crime categories, with an increase in retail victimisation. The data shows a 115% increase between 2018 and 2023 for crime occurring within retail or at a service station, with robbery increasing by 13% compared to the same period last year, including a potential shift to violent offending.

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Also, the recent Retail NZ Retail Crime Report shows that from the retailers who participated, 92% stated they were affected by crime in the 12 months prior to August 2023. And the estimated total cost of retail crime was over \$2.6 billion, which equates to more than 1% of New Zealand's GDP.

SHOPCARE'S FOCUS

Key areas of focus for Shopcare include work design (which covers equipment and environment), changes to the "way we work" through processes, and worker participation to address psychosocial risk factors and workplace culture.

In addition to these, training is an important part of the VAB Toolkit and typically includes collateral to equip frontline workers with the right knowledge and skills to avoid getting into a situation where aggression could be an issue, and how to de-escalate or remove themselves from a situation involving aggression or potential violence.

Frontline team member training is where ShopCare – along with our key strategic partner for on-line training, Red Seed – is currently revamping and designing content that will be offered to our sector and wider. This will equip frontline team members on the practical steps they can take to keep themselves safe in a potential VAB situation, as well as outline the most appropriate support that line management should offer the individual and their teams before and after an event.

The content has been developed with input from several experts in this field. ShopCare has collaborated extensively on the content with the NZ Police National

Retail Investigation Support Unit (NRISU), WorkSafe, and senior security leaders within the retail sector.

NEW ONLINE TRAINING LIBRARY

The first phase of our new on-line ShopCare training library/content will commence with VAB training and will be available from late February/early March 2024 to provide a base competency that ensures that we reach as many frontline team workers and their managers as possible, as well as the New Zealand community more broadly.

Other sectors that might benefit from the VAB training are frontline teams in the hospitality and public sectors, who are also experiencing an increase in VAB incidents.

Online VAB training modules will be accessible through the ShopCare website shopcare.org.nz, with the plan to be initially free of charge for a period of 12 months to our sector groups so we can capture as many people as possible. The modules will cover these topics:

- Situational Awareness.
- Managing an Angry Customer.
- Staying Safe.
- Supporting your Team.

This approach is only achievable due to the key partnerships, dedication and hardworking collaboration with ACC, NZ Police National Retail Investigation Support Unit (NRISU), WorkSafe, Auror, Retail NZ, First Union and Red Seed. ■



Scott Kyle is strategic programme manager for the ShopCare Charitable Trust.