



**Australian  
Retail & Hospitality sectors:  
workers safety facts & solutions**



January 2025



## The facts around the retail and hospitality worker safety

### Worker safety has become an increasingly urgent issue in Australia's retail and hospitality industries

As these sectors adapt to shifting economic landscapes, new challenges emerge, putting frontline workers at greater risk. Safety and security are no longer optional—they are essential priorities for businesses, workers, and customers alike. Across Australia, media reports highlight the rise of organised retail crime, escalating aggression, and violence targeting retail and hospitality workers.

In the **retail sector**, initiatives like Victoria Police's *Operation STAND* have targeted professional criminal networks, leading to significant results, such as the arrest of 24 offenders on 478 counts of retail crime. Similarly, Western Australia's statistics for the 2023-24 financial year show a sharp rise in shoplifting compared to previous years, underscoring the growing boldness of retail crime.

Industry bodies are also taking proactive measures: the Australian Security Industry Association Limited (ASIAL), in collaboration with Australia's top retail (Shopping Centre Council of Australia, National Retail Association, AACs), pharmacy (The Pharmacy Guild of Australia), and service industry (BSCAA) associations, launched the "*Be Kind in Retail*" campaign to address aggressive behaviour, promoting kindness and respect for the security officers, cleaners, and retail workers who work tirelessly to keep the 2024 holiday season safe and enjoyable.

The **hospitality industry** also grapples with serious safety challenges. Concerns about aggression, harassment, and physical assaults toward hospitality workers are increasingly being addressed through legislative measures. In Tasmania proposed laws introduce harsher penalties for individuals who assault frontline workers, including hospitality employees. The legislation includes mandatory minimum sentences for causing serious harm, signaling a strong stance on protecting workers and deterring offenders.



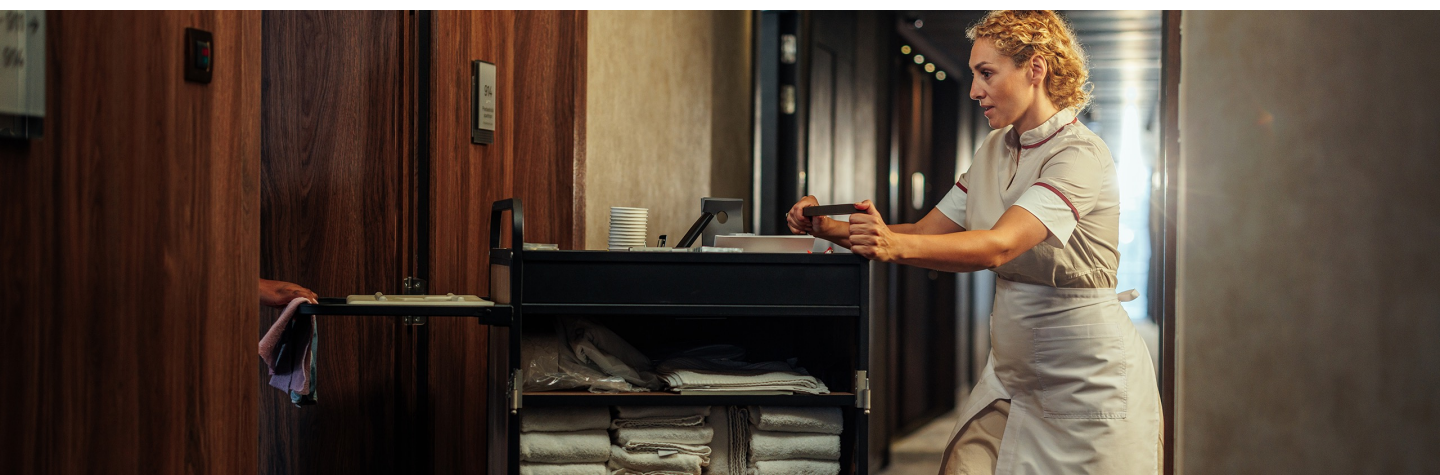
Additionally, workplace harassment has come under increased scrutiny following significant legislative changes. Since December 2022, Australian employers have been bound by a *positive duty* to proactively eliminate workplace sexual harassment under the ***Sex Discrimination Act 1984***. This includes harassment perpetrated by customers, contractors, and external agents—not just internal employees. With the Australian Human Rights Commission gaining enforcement powers as of **December 2023**, businesses are now required to take a proactive stance, implementing measures that ensure safer work environments across all fronts.

While these efforts are commendable, concerns continue to rise. The reality is stark: criminals are becoming more organised and brazen, leaving employees vulnerable to aggression, harassment, and violence in the workplace. This puts significant pressure on businesses to not only protect their workers but also address the human impact of these incidents—an impact that often extends to customers and the broader community.

In response to these challenges, SafeTCard has compiled research and insights from various reports to highlight the safety situation in Australia’s retail and hospitality sectors.

This eBook aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the risks faced by workers while offering actionable recommendations to improve safety and compliance. By understanding the current landscape, we can identify opportunities to prioritise worker safety, strengthen protections, and ultimately enhance the wellbeing of Australia’s retail and hospitality workforce.

Together, we can create safer environments that empower employees and support businesses as they navigate these pressing issues.



# Retail workers

## How crime impacts workplace safety

420

Average number of incidents of violence & abuse each month in supermarkets

85%

of retail workers reported being abused or assaulted at work

75%

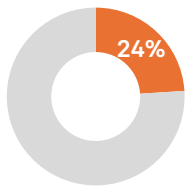
increase in physical assaults

148%

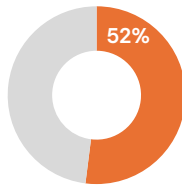
increase in serious reportable events since 2021.

- McKell Institute

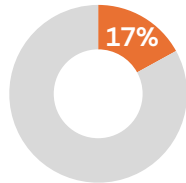
In the last 12 months, workers have reported experiencing\*:



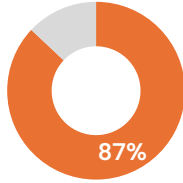
abuse, harassment, or violence referencing their race, ethnicity or cultural background



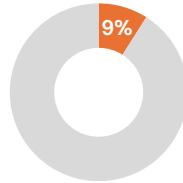
reported the same customer was abusive or violent towards them on more than one occasion



abuse of sexual nature (19% female vs 9% male workers)



verbal abuse (with 76% on a regular basis - monthly, weekly, daily)

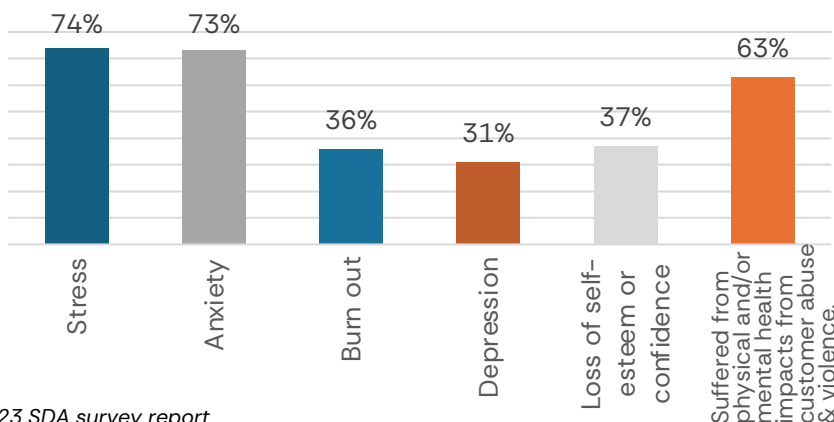


Spat on

34% retail workers have been harassed by a customer.

- University of Sydney & Australia National University study

## Health impacts experienced\*



\*2023 SDA survey report







# Hospitality workers

## How crime impacts workplace safety



3 fatalities in the Accommodation and Food Services sector in 2022.



6,900

serious workers' compensation claims in the Accommodation and Food Services sector in 2021-22.

39%

experienced customer aggression monthly or less often in 2023.



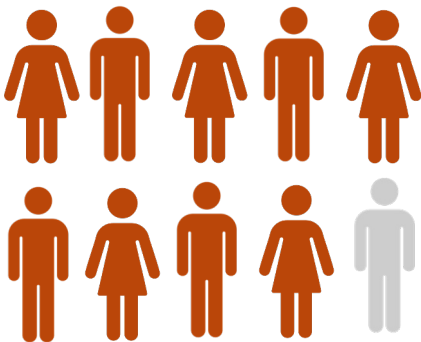
+114%

'critical incidents' YoY in 2023/24.

29.1%

mentioned not receiving any support in 2023-24.

- SafeWork Australia, Sonder



9 in 10

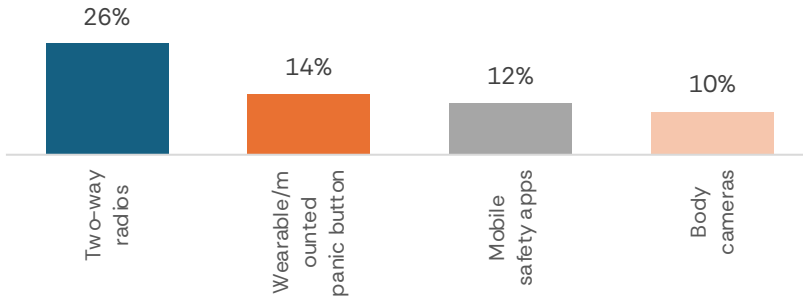
hospitality workers have experienced sexual harassment.

- Sexual Harassment Australia.

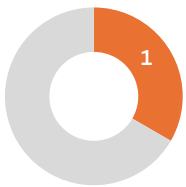
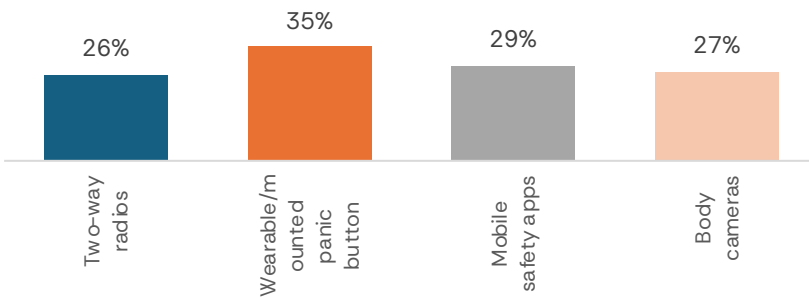
# Workplace safety

## How businesses can help employees feel safer

Types of safety technology currently used in stores\*:



Types of safety technology that would make employees feel safer at work\*:



1/3 employees feel unsafe in the car park and even more feeling unsafe when getting to or leaving work outside of daylight hours\*

Lone worker safety devices can help ease safety concerns for employees entering and leaving their buildings.

Retail and hospitality workers in Australia face an increasingly dangerous environment, with rising incidents of hostile customer interactions and organised crime. As these challenges intensify, there is a growing need for proactive safety measures. Personal safety devices offering wearable alert buttons, mobile safety apps, two-way audio communication, and body cameras, provide workers with immediate access to assistance while deterring threatening behaviour.

By embracing these modern security technologies, businesses can create a safer environment for both employees and customers, fostering confidence, protection, and peace of mind in high-pressure situations.





For more information, visit:  
[www.safetcard.com.au](http://www.safetcard.com.au)

