



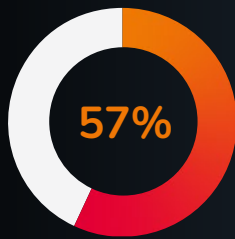
Not Part of the Job: The 2026 Frontline Worker Safety Report

Why rising customer abuse is a workforce crisis employers can no longer ignore



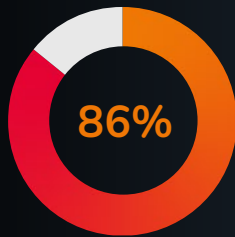
Warning signals from the frontline

Abuse is becoming routine



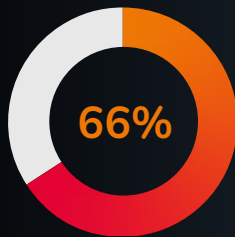
experienced abuse or know a colleague who has within a typical four-week period

Wellbeing is under pressure



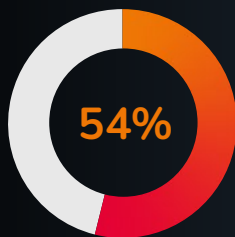
report increased stress or anxiety due to customer aggression

Retention is at risk



have considered quitting due to customer aggression

Body cameras can help



say visible safety measures discourage abusive behaviour

Reporting is falling short



receive updates after reporting serious incidents





“Shouted at.” “Choked.” “Spat at.” “Threatened.”

For growing numbers of frontline workers, this is no longer an occasional bad day at work. Across retail, hospitality, transport, logistics and private security, customer abuse is becoming a routine feature of frontline jobs. Yet for many organisations, the full impact remains poorly understood.

To better understand the scale of the issue, HALOS commissioned independent research involving 2,500 frontline workers in public-facing roles across the UK and US. What they reported should concern anyone responsible for managing, recruiting or retaining staff.

Workers are struggling with high levels of stress and anxiety, becoming more guarded with customers, avoiding certain shifts, taking time off after incidents, and in some cases leaving frontline roles altogether. Many also describe feeling unsupported after reporting abuse, with just **14%** saying they receive follow-up updates after flagging a serious incident.

One account captures the reality many now face:

“I had a customer who was verbally abusive and threatened physical violence against me. I refused to serve them and asked them to leave as I felt unsafe. Reporting this to my manager, I was advised that I should have just apologised and moved on.”

It is a stark example of how abuse has become normalised within frontline environments. And worse still, how some employers are failing to tackle it.

The findings are difficult to read if you manage a frontline workforce. They are harder to ignore. This report makes the case that customer abuse is a workforce crisis – one that employers can, and must, do something about.

Abuse increasingly “part of the job”

The research suggests customer aggression is not only widespread, but increasing.

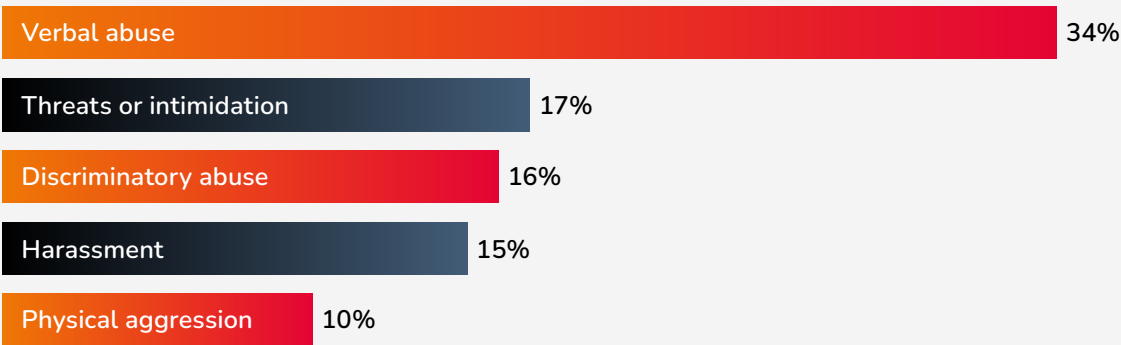
More than half (**57%**) of frontline workers say they have either personally experienced abuse, or know a colleague who has, in the last four weeks. One in five (**21%**) say they experience abuse “fairly often.” Nearly two in five workers (**39%**) say customer abuse is treated as “just part of the job” where they work.

Workers report experiencing everything from verbal aggression to threats and physical violence. More than a third (**34%**) say they have experienced verbal abuse in the past year.

Worryingly, **41%** say they have personally experienced or witnessed an increase in antisocial behaviour over the past 12 months. The issue is particularly pronounced in the retail sector where rising customer abuse has led to nearly nine in ten (**88%**) reporting higher levels of stress and anxiety as a result.

Behind every percentage point is a worker who has learned to expect the worst before their shift has even started. And for many, that expectation has simply become part of the job.

Types of abuse experienced by frontline workers in the past 12 months



Retail workers report some of the starkest signs of abuse becoming normalised. Nearly two in five (39%) say customer aggression is treated as “just part of the job.” Nearly nine in ten (88%) report increased stress or anxiety linked to customer abuse.



The personal cost for frontline staff

Customer abuse is taking a psychological toll on frontline workers, leaving many stressed, anxious and less confident in their ability to do their jobs. Across the workforce, **86%** report increased stress or anxiety linked to customer aggression, while **79%** say they feel anxious before starting a shift. More than a quarter (**27%**) say customer aggression has negatively affected their sleep. Two thirds (**67%**) say customer aggression has reduced their confidence at work.

The impact of abuse lingers long after the incident itself. Nearly two in five (**39%**) say they find it difficult to “reset” and continue working normally following abuse or aggression, increasing to half (**50%**) of workers aged 25–34.

Over time, workers are adapting their behaviour around the risk of abuse. More than a quarter (**27%**) say they have avoided certain shifts, such as late or closing shifts, to reduce the risk of customer aggression. Nearly one in five (**19%**) have asked to change roles, locations or responsibilities because of safety concerns linked to customer behaviour.

Much of this strain goes unseen. Workers absorb it, adapt around it, and carry on. But the cumulative effect on confidence, performance and retention compounds over time, pushing people away from frontline roles altogether.

With roles that are often lone-working and high-contact, delivery and logistics workers report some of the strongest behavioural changes at work linked to customer abuse. 85% say they have become more cautious or avoidant with customers.

“Someone threatened to hurt me over a very minor on-road situation. I told people at work, but nothing was done and barely anyone seemed to care. Now I just try to take situations like this on the chin. It does affect me, but I don’t expect much support when these things happen.”

How customer abuse affects employee retention

What happens when frontline workers no longer feel safe to do their jobs?

Increasingly, the response to customer abuse is not to report it, challenge it, or wait for it to improve. It is to leave. Two thirds **(66%)** say they have considered quitting their job due to customer aggression.

For those that do stay, it can be a struggle to come to work. Nearly a quarter **(23%)** say they have taken time off following incidents of abuse or aggression, while **25%** have considered taking sick days because of safety concerns.

Customer abuse is also eroding job satisfaction overall. More than four in five **(81%)** say it has reduced how satisfied they feel in their role.

The pressure is particularly acute among younger workers. Employees aged 18–34 consistently report higher levels of avoidance behaviour and intention to leave than older age groups, raising longer-term concerns about the sustainability of frontline roles for younger employees.

Avoided shifts, rising absences, lower job satisfaction, and growing consideration of quitting all point to a retention problem already playing out across frontline workforces. For employers, that means more rota gaps, higher turnover, greater pressure on managers and additional costs to recruit, train and retain staff.

If current trends continue, customer abuse will become a workforce stability issue that affects not only employees’ wellbeing, but the resilience and performance of the business as a whole.

Transport workers report some of the strongest frustrations with incident reporting. More than two in five (42%) say reporting abuse takes too long during a shift, while almost three quarters (73%) say they feel less supported by employers following incidents of customer aggression.



The regional picture

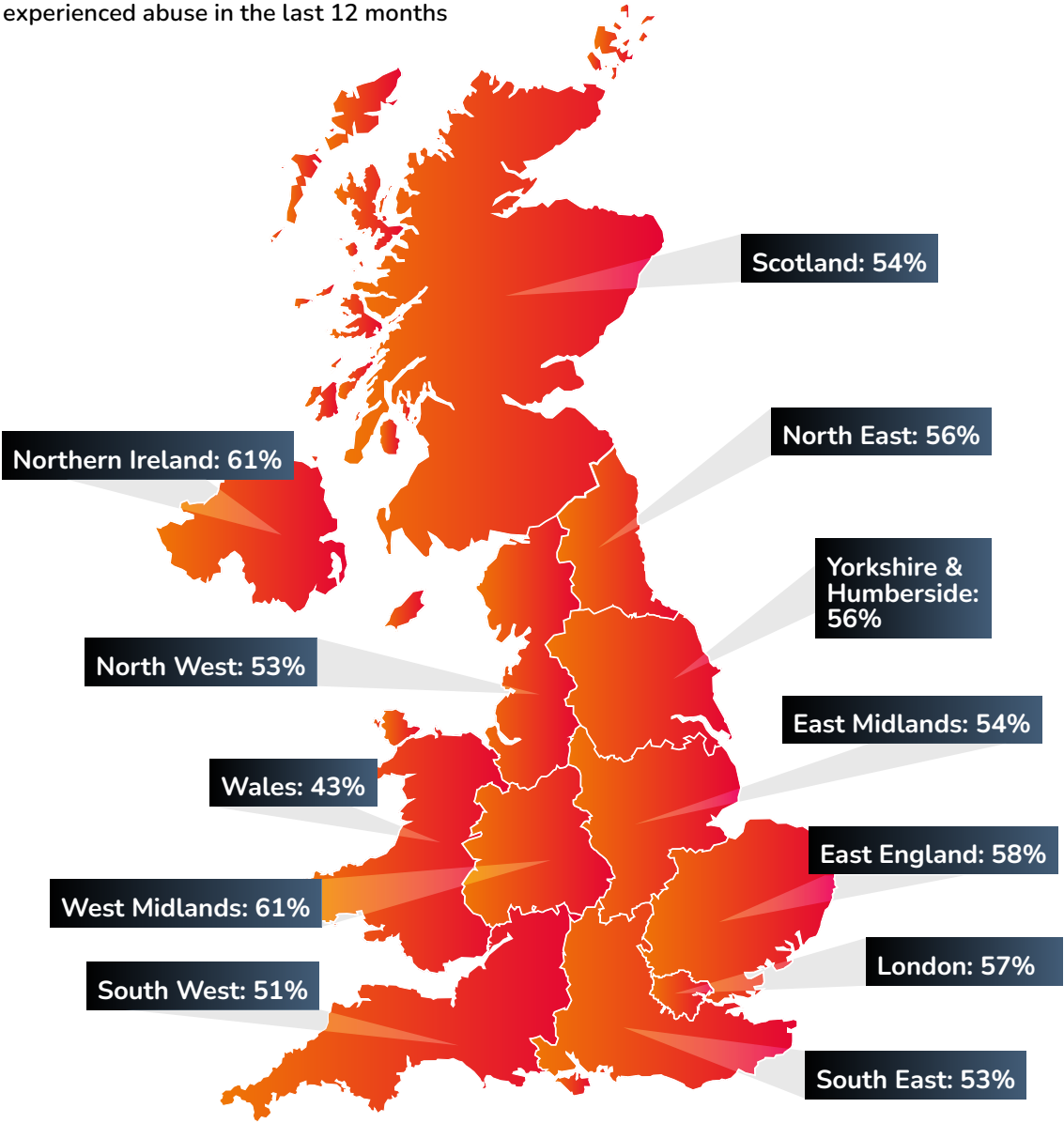
Customer aggression is not confined to a handful of difficult locations. It is showing up across regions, sectors and frontline environments on both sides of the Atlantic.

Taken together, the UK and US findings show how customer abuse affects frontline workforces in multiple ways: increasing stress and anxiety, disrupting confidence and sleep, changing how workers interact with the public, and contributing to lower job satisfaction, absence and retention risk.

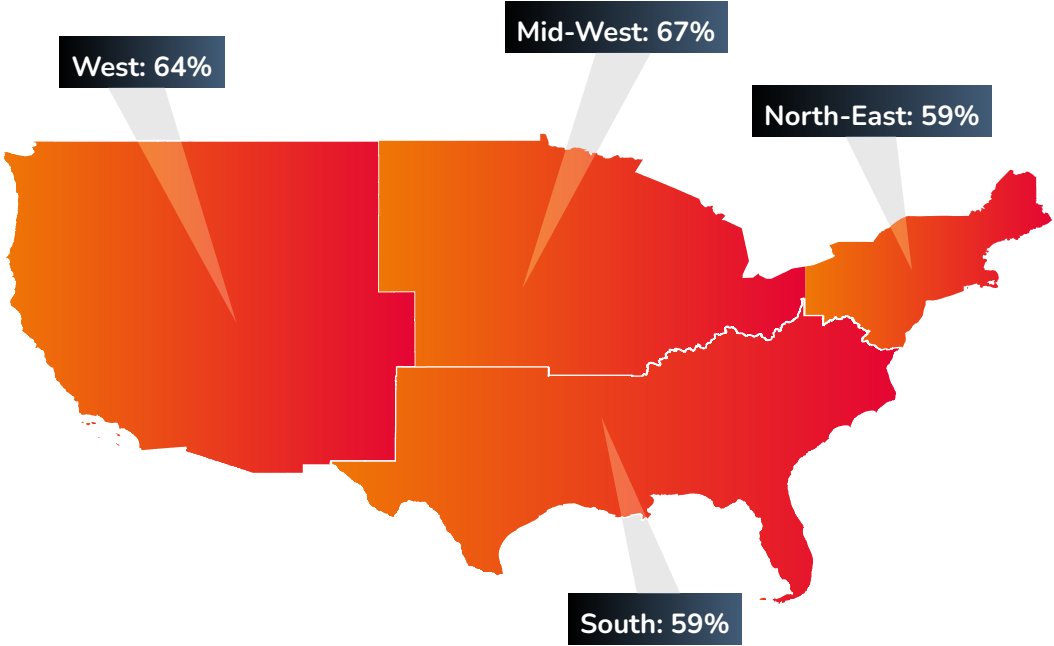
Regional differences are likely shaped by a mix of local pressures, from workforce density and footfall to staffing levels and antisocial behaviour. But those differences do not change the bigger message: customer abuse is not a localised problem.



UK: experienced abuse in the last 12 months



US: experienced abuse in the last 12 months



UK: the psychological toll



More than four in five (86%) say customer abuse has caused stress or anxiety



Four in five (79%) feel anxious before starting a shift due to the possibility of aggressive customers



A third (34%) say abuse has negatively affected their mental health



Three-quarters (75%) say abuse has knocked their confidence

US: a warning for workforce stability



Nearly 40% say customer aggression has increased over the past 12 months



More than four in five (84%) have become more cautious or avoidant with customers



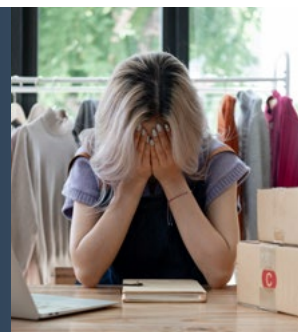
Four in five (80%) report lower job satisfaction



More than a third (37%) have taken time off, or know a colleague who has, because of customer aggression



of US workers strongly or somewhat agreed that reporting abuse or aggression at work leads to meaningful action



The reporting gap

Many employers have processes in place for reporting customer abuse. Far fewer workers believe those processes lead to meaningful action.

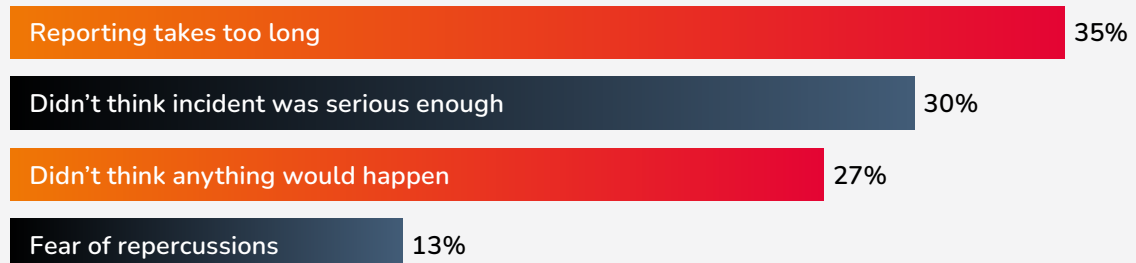
While **65%** of frontline workers say their safety is treated as a priority, and **67%** say clear reporting protocols exist, confidence in what happens afterwards is significantly lower. Just over half (**52%**) believe reporting leads to meaningful action. Just **14%** receive any follow-up after flagging a serious incident.

The barriers to reporting go beyond scepticism about outcomes. More than a third (35%) say reporting takes too long during a shift, while more than two in five (**42%**) feel incidents become a case of “my word versus theirs,” making it harder to feel supported after difficult interactions.

The result is a system that exists on paper but struggles to function in practice – where trust breaks down, incidents go unreported, repeat behaviour goes unchallenged, and workers are left to manage the consequences alone.

Hospitality workers report some of the highest levels of intention to leave of any frontline sector. Almost three-quarters (71%) have considered quitting due to customer aggression – the highest quit consideration rate across all sectors surveyed.

Barriers to reporting abuse



Practical steps to tackle abuse

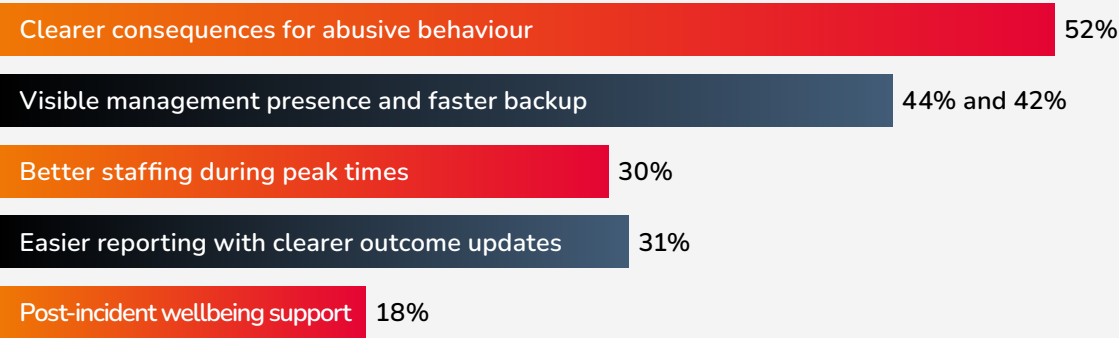
Frontline workers are clear about what would make them feel safer at work. Much of it centres on visibility, accountability and faster support when incidents escalate.

More than half **(52%)** say clearer consequences for abusive behaviours – such as removal or bans – would make the biggest difference. Nearly as many want a more visible management presence **(44%)** and faster access to backup **(42%)**.

Technology has an important role to play. Over half **(54%)** believe visible safety measures such as CCTV or body-worn cameras deter abusive behaviour, and **52%** say access to better tools for managing and documenting incidents would make them feel safer.

The message from workers is practical and consistent: they want employers to respond to abuse more visibly, more quickly and with greater follow-through.

What workers say would help



Cameras create a proven visible deterrent

A 2025 YouGov study commissioned by HALOS found that 79% of UK respondents were comfortable or indifferent to staff wearing body-worn cameras. More than two in five (44%) also said they would “think twice” about their behaviour if staff were wearing body-worn cameras.

The findings reinforce how frontline workers want visible signs that their safety is being taken seriously. In high-pressure environments, measures such as body-worn cameras can help improve confidence, accountability and deterrence when incidents occur.



[Read report](#)

Employer self-assessment framework

Frontline workers want to know that when abuse happens, employers will act.

The framework below outlines four practical areas employers should assess to strengthen frontline safety, improve trust in reporting, and better support workers when incidents occur.



Standards

- Establish a clear, communicated zero-tolerance policy for customer abuse
- Communicate the policy clearly to customers through visible signage, staff guidance
- Set clear expectations around unacceptable behaviour and the consequences
- Equip frontline teams with training and support to manage abusive incidents safely



Reporting

- Enable staff to report incidents quickly and easily
- Provide digital or app-based tools to log incidents consistently
- Create a reporting culture where staff feel safe speaking up
- Ensure staff know how to flag relevant body-cam footage as evidence



Follow-through

- Take consistent action after incidents are reported
- Keep staff informed about the outcomes of incidents reported, where appropriate
- Review available evidence, including recorded footage, in the investigation process
- Use incident data to identify repeat issues, locations or behaviours that need action



Recovery

- Check in with staff after serious or distressing incidents
- Provide structured post-incident support
- Track the wellbeing impact of abuse over time
- Review whether existing support measures are helping staff feel safer at work



Abuse is not inevitable. Employer response is a choice.

Frontline sectors are already navigating pressures no employer can fully control: automation, economic uncertainty, and a generation of younger workers actively weighing up whether the job is worth it. Customer abuse is one challenge they can do something about.

And yet, across the UK and US, workers describe environments where aggression has become routine, its impact is often unseen, and reporting systems too often exist on paper rather than in practice. Workers keep showing up, but trust in employers is weakening.

This report does not suggest every difficult interaction can be prevented. But repeated abuse and intimidation must not become the norm. A reporting protocol is only as strong as what happens after it is used. Body-worn cameras, digital incident logging and better evidence management are not substitutes for culture or leadership, but they can provide practical, visible signals that safety is being taken seriously.

Frontline sectors cannot afford to lose experienced workers to a preventable cause. The technology and tools to address customer abuse already exist, but their value depends on how employers use them: to respond faster, follow through more consistently, and show workers that their safety is being taken seriously.

For employers, the right response is becoming fundamental to the future of their business. It can help rebuild trust, strengthen retention, ensuring that abuse is never just part of the job.

Methodology

HALOS commissioned independent research among 2,500 frontline workers across the UK and US working in customer-facing roles, including retail, hospitality, transport, logistics and private security. Fieldwork was conducted in April 2026.