

## **Bad service maintains the rage**

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Professor McColl-Kennedy says customer rage is on the rise. Australians have had enough of poor service and some of us will swear, throw tantrums, get physical and make bomb threats to make our point.

The world's first international customer rage study, led by The University of Queensland, surveyed 240 customers and frontline staff from banks, pharmacies and electricity utilities about their customer rage experiences.

It revealed more women than men indulged in customer rage and it was an increasing phenomenon in Australia with anger often escalating to threats, revenge, sabotage, slander and violence.

Employee rudeness, incompetence and indifference were the most lethal triggers for customer rage.

Lead researcher, UQ's Professor of Marketing Janet McColl-Kennedy said most organisations were ill-equipped to deal with customer rage as they had not trained their staff to defuse dangerous situations.

Professor McColl-Kennedy said staff and customers dealing with rage went through an emotional rollercoaster, starting with shock then frustration, anger, exhaustion and hurt after the ordeal.

She said she was surprised and concerned at some of the disturbing stories from the study, such as one customer who threatened to shoot the person who disconnected their electricity.

Customers threatened to blow-up companies when their appliances burnt out and other customers had to be forcibly removed by security.

Another customer warned a company if they came to his property he'd be waiting with a knife and some friends while others threatened to sue and take their complaints to a TV station.

"They're saying I would shoot, I would kill someone, I would blow up your building — that's pretty aggressive stuff," Professor McColl-Kennedy said.

"One customer flew into a rage shouting and banging the counter of a bank when he was advised he'd have to pay a fee for a bank cheque.

“We're trying to understand what triggers this behaviour and why some people express their feelings verbally while others take out destructive actions against organisations, frontline employee and even other customers.”

Professor McColl-Kennedy is leading the team with researchers from The University of New South Wales and George Washington University, in the United States.

The next stage of the study will explore what customers felt and did and what front line staff did to defuse or inflame the rage incident.

This work will be carried out in the United States, Thailand, China as well as in Australia and she expected some important cultural differences.

“This ground-breaking research will help business and government service organisations better understand and respond to this growing phenomenon in order to avoid economic, social and emotional losses and minimise damage to property and persons.”