

## Question in Project:

PaCo - Mechanisms of panel conditioning in longitudinal surveys: Questions on social desirability, gender roles, and environment (English Version)

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## Question Topic:

Society & social affairs/ Delinquency

## Construct:

Illegal/criminal behavior

## General Information:

**\*Note: This item was tested in German. This is an English translation of the original German wording.\***

## Question Text:

Have you ever stolen something from a store or something that does not belong to you worth less than 50 euros?

*[Haben Sie jemals etwas aus einem Laden oder etwas, das Ihnen nicht gehört, im Wert von weniger als 50 Euro gestohlen?]*

## Answer Categories:

Yes *[Ja]*

No *[Nein]*

Don't know *[Weiß nicht]*

I do not want to answer this *[Ich möchte dies nicht beantworten]*

## Cognitive Techniques:

Specific Probe, Confidence Rating

## Findings for Question:

Do the test persons have problems understanding and/or answering the question?

No test person had problems understanding or answering the question. Four test persons answered it "yes" and six test persons answered it "no."

Those who answered "yes" to the question stated that they had done so in their childhood or teenage years and that it had been things such as chewing gum, a lollipop, trading cards, shot glasses or similar:

- *"That used to be a piece of chewing gum. But I was six years old then."* (TP 02)
- *"As teenagers, we thought it was totally cool to steal those Diddl cards. We used to steal one every now and then."* (TP 03)
- *"Yes, at teen age, chewing gum, the classic. [...] Or in the disco, shot glasses, because they were so pretty."* (TP 05)
- *"A lollipop or something like that as a child. I don't really remember exactly. I only know that I did it when I was a little boy. [...] It was a test of courage. What people used to do in the old days."* (TP 08)

Of those who answered "no" to the question, three test persons stated without explanation that they had really never done it before. Two others cited their fear of the consequences as the reason:

- *"No, I was afraid of my grandma. [...] She said she'd beat the crap out of me when I was little."* (TP 04)
- *"No, I was always too scared. You could have been caught, and I found the consequences unreasonably high in relation to what you could have stolen."* (TP 07)

Test person 09 recounted that she once found a gold "stray" necklace in a playground as a child, but after it was discovered by her mother, she had to return it and track down the person who owned it.

### **How sure are the test persons that their answer is correct?**

All test persons were "very sure" (n = 9) or "rather sure" (n = 1) that they had remembered correctly.

### **How sensitive do the test persons perceive the question to be?**

The test persons were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale how unpleasant they found it to be asked the question (sample N5\_F13, see Appendix). The majority of test persons found it "not at all unpleasant" (scale item 1; n = 6) or "rather not unpleasant" (scale items 2 and 3; n = 2) to be asked the question.

Two test persons chose the middle category (scale point 4). One of them gave as her

reason that the question somewhat implied having stolen something before (TP 01), but that she had never stolen anything. The other test person, who had stated that she had already stolen something, commented on this as follows: *"You [...] are not allowed to do that, you know it, and then you did it anyway, as a decent person, as you see yourself [...]. But because [the stolen shot glasses] were not of such high quality [and no one] was harmed, it was something in between."* (TP 05)

The test person who had chosen scale point 3 was somewhat embarrassed: *"Yes, it is a bit unpleasant [...]. Because I'm embarrassed that I even came up with the idea. Maybe it's normal as a child. I do not know."* (TP 09)

Those who found answering the question "not at all/not at all uncomfortable" and had stolen something before justified their answer by saying that people do this kind of thing in their childhood/adolescence and can honestly admit to it:

- *"My theft was not that serious. It was just a youthful sin, you can admit that."* (TP 02)
- *"That was just being a teenager, you do a lot of nonsense. I was not uncomfortable admitting that."* (TP 03)

Three persons who found the answer to the question "not at all/not at all unpleasant" and who had never stolen anything gave the reason that they could talk openly about it due to the fact that they had never done it before. One of them also stated that she did not think it would be a bad thing to steal something when she was a child (TP 07).

Furthermore, the test persons were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale how honestly they thought respondents would answer this question in a real survey (see Table N7\_F13). Six test persons believed that this question would be answered "not at all honestly" (scale point 1;  $n = 1$ ) or "rather not honestly" (scale points 2 and 3;  $n = 5$ ) in a questionnaire, one test person chose the middle answer category (TP 08; scale point 4), and three believed that this question would be answered "rather honestly" (scale point 5).

Those who believed that the question would be answered "not at all/mostly honestly" indicated that it was a socially undesirable behavior in which people tended to lie:

- *"Because I believe that people think about what society would expect from them and would not answer honestly."* (TP 01)
- *"Because I think that's an uncomfortable topic, that you just don't do that, that people then aren't as honest about it."* (TP 05)
- *"Because theft, even if it's under 50 euros, is not socially accepted. Even if people would do it, they would not admit it, I think."* (TP 06)
- *"I think that people tend to cheat because they are embarrassed."* (TP 10)

Those who believed that the question was answered "rather honestly," whether they had done it themselves or not, indicated that these were only youthful sins of which there was nothing to be ashamed of:

■ *"That's like committing a youthful sin. There are no criminal prosecutions for that. It would be stupid to lie about it."* (TP 02)

■ *"I think many people, when they were little, stole a piece of chewing gum from the bakery or something, even small objects. And no one has to be ashamed of it if they did that as a child and messed up."* (TP 04)

## **Recommendations:**

Questions: No changes recommended.

Response format: No changes recommended.