

THE SINCERITY OF QUESTIONED PEOPLE

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Abstract

Applying questionnaires is one of the basic methodologies in sociology. Usually sociologists consider that choosing a representative sample and properly formulated questions, the results will show real characteristics of the society. But the following main question should always be analyzed: are people sincere? Psychology proved that we try to meet the society's expectation. In this way the answers do not represent the questioned person's thought, but what they considered expect from society. The present study analyzes the sincerity of police officers, asked to complete a questionnaire for a scientific purpose, respecting the principle of anonymity. The results show that around 2/3 of the questioned persons did not give sincere answers, offering importance for an inexistent person (Schnade). By analyzing the answers to another question (the importance of the television and the bicycle for the questioned persons), it was found that insincere people could be not easily excluded: the sincerity is changing from question to question; some persons are sincere regarding a specific domain and not sincere in another domain.

.Keywords: questionnaire, sincerity, conformity

1. Introduction

Applying questionnaires is one of the basic methodologies in sociology, introduced by Francis Galton in about 1870. The credibility of the results highly depends on the sincerity of the subjects for who the questionnaires are applied.

By Herbert Fingarette sincerity „is conformity between what a person tells us and what he tells himself” (Fingarette, 1969).

Usually the problem of sincerity of the questioned persons is not largely discussed in statistics. Even in reference works the problem is presented shortly: words and acts often differ (Freedman, Pisani, Purves, 2007)

The conformity is generally studied by psychology. Solomon Eliot Ash proved that the individual's own opinions are highly influenced by the majority group. (Ash, 1951). Donelson R. Forsyth offers a detailed analysis of the phenomenon (Forsyth, 2013).

The present study analyses the sincerity of police officers in completing questionnaires.

2. Hypotheses

1. A relevant part of the questioned people respond not they opinion, but what they are considering that they have to respond.

2. The urge to be in conformity to the expected answers could depend on gender, age and level of education.

3. The sincerity is changing from question to question; some persons are sincere regarding a specific domain and not sincere in another domain

3. Analysis

3.1. Data

The present analysis focused on the data obtained by applying questionnaires among police officers.

The dependent variables are the answers offered to a question regarding the importance of Mozart, Kant, Picasso and Schnade to the questioned person.

The independent variables are the rank of police officers (non-commissioned [N.C.O.] or commissioned officers [C.O.]), their gender and age.

		Total	Male	Female
Rank	N.C.O.	43.2	43.0	40.7
	C.O.	36.5	39.5	29.6
	Not declared	20.3	17.5	29.6
Gender	Male	77.0	-	-
	Female	18.2	-	-
	Not declared	4.7	-	-
Age	30 years old and under	41.9	39.5	63.0
	31-45 years old	31.8	33.3	33.3
	46 years old and over	17.6	21.9	3.7
	Not declared	8.8	5.3	0.0

Table 1. Independent variables (in % of questioned police officers)

Table 1. shows that the gender analysis has to take into consideration that the questioned female police officers (18.2% from total) were relevantly younger than the male police officers (41.9% of the total police officers were younger than 30 years, among the questioned female officers 63.0%)*; also in the case of female police officers the percentage of C.O. is lower (29.6%, compared to 39.5% for male police officers).

3.2. Methodology

148 questionnaires were applied for the police officers, who were participants in the year of 2013 in trainings in the field of discrimination. After the training, the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire for a scientific purpose, respecting the principle of anonymity. The questionnaire has 12 questions, one of them (the 8th) regarding the importance for the questioned persons of different items (from homeland to bicycle, in five different lines, the fourth line containing Mozart, Kant, Picasso and Schnade) asking to give a grade for every item, from 0 (not at all) to 5 (very important). It was explained to the participants that it need sincere answers and they have the possibility to not answer to some questions, if they are not clear what to choose.[†]

By inserting an inexistent person (Schnade) after three relevant personalities, the presumption was created that Schnade is possible also a personality, creating a dilemma for

* Until recent years the access of women to police was very difficult.

† The questionnaire contains questions regarding opinions on legal norms, moral attitudes, and law obeying behaviors. The 8th question differs from the others, asking the followings: 'How important is for you [give grades from 0 to 5, 0 not at all, 5 very important]: homeland, faith, flag, rule of law {first line}, separation of powers in the state, separation between the state and religions {second line}, respect of human rights, education of Roma children {third line}, Mozart, Kant, Picasso, Schnade {fourth line}, mobile phone, television, computer, bicycle {fifth line}'.

the questioned person to recognize or not that they did not know who is Schnade.

To analyze the sincerity of the questioned persons the following was considered to be relevant:

- the percentage of different grades given for different items (to find quantitative differences regarding the self-recognized importance of existent and non-existent persons);
- the percentage of wittingly choosing people, those who accorded a grade from 1 to 5 for Mozart, Kant and Picasso, but 0 for Schnade or did not offered any answer for Schnade (to find how many people realized that the personalities has an importance for them, recognizing also that they did not know who is Schnade);
- the percentage of people with hit-or-miss answers, those who accorded higher grade for Schnade than for Mozart, Kant or Picasso (to find how many people offer answers in a very clear way only randomly, without any connection to the question);
- the percentage of even answers, those who accorded similar (non-0) grade for all of the four names (to find how many persons chooses a value, considering that the same value could be representative for all persons).

In the case of people who made a wittingly choose it was verified if they answer significantly differ to the total questioned people in another part of the same question, regarding the importance of television and bicycle.

3.3. Results and discussions

Tables 2-7 present the results obtained by the questionnaires.

By Table 2., the mean grade obtained by Schnade (2.0) is significant lower than the mean grade obtained by Mozart (3.1), Kant (2.8) or Picasso (2.9), but is still high for an inexistent person. 68.3% of the total questioned police officers[‡] considered that a non-existent person has some importance for them.

	Mozart	Kant	Picasso	Schnade
Non answer	4.7	6.8	5.4	12.8
0	6.8	10.1	8.8	18.9
1	11.5	13.5	12.8	18.9
2	18.9	21.6	21.6	20.3
3	25.7	18.9	19.6	17.6
4	14.2	14.9	14.9	6.1
5	18.2	14.2	16.9	5.4
Mean grade	3.1	2.8	2.9	2.0

Table 2. The percentage of different grades and the mean grade for different items (total police officers)

Comparing N.C.O. and C.O. (Table 3.) it could be observed that the mean grade for Schnade is higher in the case of C.O. (1.9 compared to 1.7), but the mean grade is also higher for real persons (for sample 3.2 respectively 2.5 for Mozart); the non-answers are lower (10.9% compared to 16.7%) in the case of N.C.O.

[‡] A similar questionnaire was applied also to lawyers, prosecutors and judges. In they situation 62.7% considered that a non-existent person has some importance for them.

	Mozart		Kant		Picasso		Schnade	
	N.C.O.	C.O.	N.C.O.	C.O.	N.C.O.	C.O.	N.C.O.	C.O.
Non answer	4.7	5.6	7.8	7.4	6.3	5.6	10.9	16.7
0	12.5	0.0	12.5	7.4	14.1	3.7	20.3	18.5
1	14.1	11.1	14.1	14.8	15.6	13.0	20.3	14.8
2	18.8	16.7	28.1	20.4	28.1	13.0	25.0	18.5
3	26.6	25.9	14.1	16.7	12.5	31.5	17.2	24.1
4	6.3	22.2	9.4	22.2	9.4	18.5	3.1	3.7
5	17.2	18.7	14.1	11.1	14.1	14.8	3.1	3.7
Mean grade	2.5	3.2	2.4	2.7	2.3	3.0	1.7	1.9

Table 3. The percentage of different grades and the mean grade for different items, comparison of N.C.O. and C.O.

The gender of the questioned people was less significant, taking into consideration also the age and rank differences between male and female police officers (Table 4.). Generally, females have given a higher grade for every item. Also it could be observed that the female police officers avoid using the possibility of non-answer (12.3% of male police officers did not offer any answer in the case of Schnade, compared to 3.7% of female police officers).

	Mozart		Kant		Picasso		Schnade	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Non answer	5.3	0.0	7.9	0.0	6.1	0.0	12.3	3.7
0	7.0	3.7	10.5	7.4	8.8	7.4	17.5	25.9
1	14.0	3.7	14.0	14.8	14.0	11.1	21.9	11.1
2	20.2	14.8	21.9	22.2	21.1	25.9	19.3	25.9
3	25.4	33.3	19.3	14.8	20.2	18.5	19.3	14.8
4	12.3	22.2	13.2	25.9	14.0	18.5	6.1	7.4
5	15.8	22.2	13.2	14.8	15.8	18.5	3.5	11.1
Mean grade	2.7	3.3	2.5	2.8	2.7	2.9	1.8	2.0

Table 4. The percentage of different grades and the mean grade for different items, comparison of male (M) and female (F) police officers

The numbers of non-answers for Schnade are significantly lower (3.2%) in the case of 30 years old or younger police officers than in the case of 46 years or older police officers (26.9%), but the situation is similar in the case of real persons.

	Mozart			Kant			Picasso			Schnade		
	Y	M	O	Y	M	O	Y	M	O	Y	M	O
Non answer	1.6	2.1	15.4	1.6	8.5	15.4	1.6	4.3	15.4	3.2	12.8	26.9
0	11.3	4.3	0.0	12.9	10.6	0.0	11.3	10.6	0.0	21.0	19.1	15.4
1	14.5	12.8	3.8	16.1	14.9	7.7	16.1	12.8	7.7	25.8	19.1	7.7
2	21.0	14.9	26.9	19.4	21.3	30.8	27.4	21.3	11.5	19.4	23.4	19.2
3	21.0	36.2	23.1	22.6	14.9	19.2	14.5	17.0	34.6	14.5	21.3	23.1
4	11.3	12.8	23.1	16.1	10.6	23.1	11.3	17.0	23.1	9.7	2.1	7.7
5	19.4	17.0	7.7	11.3	19.1	3.8	17.7	17.0	7.7	6.5	2.1	0.0
Mean grade	2.7	2.9	3.0	2.5	2.6	2.8	2.5	2.7	3.1	1.9	1.7	2.0

Table 5. The percentage of different grades and the mean grade for different items, comparison of 30 years old or younger (Y), 31-45 year old (M) and 46 years or older (O) police officers

Only 15.5% of the questioned police officers made his choose wittingly (Table 6.). The percentage is higher in the case of C.O., female police officers and older persons. From

the questioned police officers 10.9% offered a hit-or-miss answer, 25.5% choose the same grade for all of the four persons. Younger police officers use the hit-or-miss method in a higher rate than older, males the even choose than females.

	wittingly	hit-or-miss	even
Total	15.5	10.9	25.0
N.C.O.	10.9	9.4	29.7
C.O.	22.2	5.6	22.2
Male	12.3	9.6	28.1
Female	22.2	14.8	11.1
30 years old and under	9.7	16.1	25.8
31-45 years	14.9	4.2	29.7
46 years old and over	26.9	6.4	11.5

Table 6. The percentage of wittingly chooses, hit-or-miss answers, and even answers

Comparing the all questioned people and those who made a wittingly choice regarding the importance of television and bicycle to them (Table 7.), the obtained mean grade is higher for bicycle in the case of the all questioned people, showing again that a relevant part of the questioned people do not respond with their opinion but what they are considering the correct response to be[§]. It could be expected that in the situation of persons who made a wittingly choose and the answers were sincere in the case of the four personalities, will offer a similar sincere answer regarding the importance of the television versus the importance of the bicycle. The result shows the opposite: in that case the importance of bicycle is even higher reported to television.

	Total		Wittingly	
	TV	BC	TV	BC
Non answer	4.1	3.4	4.3	0.0
0	10.1	8.1	8.7	4.3
1	10.8	14.9	4.3	13.0
2	22.3	16.2	17.4	21.7
3	24.3	20.9	39.1	17.4
4	15.5	12.8	13.0	30.4
5	12.8	23.6	13.0	13.0
Mean grade	2.7	2.9	2.9	3.0

Table 7. The percentage of different grades and the mean grade for television (TV) and bicycle (BC) from total questioned police officers and from police officers who made a wittingly choose

4. Conclusions

Applying questionnaires is one of the basic methodologies in sociology. Usually sociologists consider that choosing a representative sample and properly formulated questions, the results will show real characteristics of the society. If we ask a definable number of people regarding they political orientation or if they have racist attitudes, the answers will show, with reasonable precision, the chances of different political parties to enter the Parliament and the level of racism in a society.

[§] In this case the sincere answers could not be clearly dissociated from insincere answers, because for some persons bicycle is really more important than the television. But is unlikely that bicycle is more important in generally for the questioned persons than television, knowing that in the Romanian society almost everybody is watching the television and only a very narrow segment of the society uses bicycle.

But the following main question always has to be analyzed: were the people sincere? Psychology proved that we try to meet the society's expectation. In this way the offered answers are not what questioned persons think, but what they considered that expect the society from them. An important number of people will hide that they support unpopular parties or they are racist.

For the present study a specific category of people was chosen: police officers. By specific education and specific formation from working in the system, they were formed to respect rules, to offer fair answers to the questions. They were asked to complete a questionnaire for a scientific purpose, respecting the principle of anonymity. One of the questions was regarding the importance of some personalities (Mozart, Kant, Picasso and Schnade) and some objects (among others, television and bicycle) for them. Schnade being an inexistent person, all answers giving it any importance are insincere answers.

Admitting that you do not have any clue who is Schnade, in an anonymous questionnaire, is only a problem of personal vanity, it did not intervene other type of pressure from the society or by the interviewer.

The result shows that a relevant part of the questioned persons does not respond not their own opinion but what they are considering that they have to respond: 68.3% of the total questioned police officers considered that a non-existent person has some importance for them. In the case of lower rank and younger police officers the percentage was higher.

It was also verified if insincere persons could be simply excluded, with a Schnade-type question. The answer is: no. In the situation of people who made a wittingly choose and the answers were sincere in the case of Schnade, did not offered a similar sincere answer regarding the importance of the television versus the importance of the bicycle. This induces the idea that detecting insincere people is more difficult: the sincerity is changing from question to question. Some persons are sincere regarding a specific domain and not sincere in another domain.

In this condition sociology has to answer to a very unpleasant question: how to obtain reliable empirical data? How the precision of a study be confirmed if there exists the possibility that around 2/3 of the questioned people are not sincere?

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