

How 80% think it's OK to steal from work as study reveals our wavering moral compass

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Last updated at 8:59 AM on 07th September 2009

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Four out of five people think it's okay to pilfer things from work

Four out of five people see nothing wrong with stealing from their workplace - while more than half think it acceptable for a carer to persuade an elderly person to rewrite their will, according to a new study.

The fascinating insight into Britain's 'moral compass' also found that one in three people have downloaded music illegally and 13 per cent have shoplifted.

The findings, from an online study of more than 15,000 people, suggest that the typical Briton is less honest and more confused than most people realise.

It also shows that the concept of honesty varies hugely from person to person.

Eight of 10 people who took part in the survey said it was dishonest for a woman to wear a dress for a party before returning it to the shop for a refund.

But only 43 per cent believed it was dishonest for a carer to try to persuade an elderly person to leave them something after their death.

The authors of the study commissioned for the British Science Festival in Guildford say the findings raise disturbing questions.

Dr Stefan Fafinski of Brunel University said: 'The law is based upon an assumption that the majority of people in society hold the same views about what conduct is dishonest.'

'Our research challenges that assumption as we found that there is a great deal of disagreement among people even upon very basic situations such as finding money in the street or taking stationery home from work.'

The researchers invited people to visit a website and watch a video clip outlining one of 50 scenarios in which an actor describes a potentially

dishonest activity.

They included theft from shops, telling lies in relationship, faking burglaries and stealing stationery from the workplace.

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The volunteers were asked to say whether the activity was dishonest and whether they would convict that person if they went to court.

People were far more prepared to turn a blind eye when crimes were committed against big companies or faceless organisations.

Around 37 per cent said it was dishonest not to tell a shop assistant they had undercharged them while 42 per cent said it was dishonest to break off broccoli stalks in a supermarket before weighing them.

Just under a thirds of people thought it dishonest to keep money found on a street, while two thirds per cent thought it dishonest to pick up a winning lottery ticket on the street and claim the prize.

The survey also suggests that the Government's attempts to crack down on music and movie piracy may be doomed.

Just 49 per cent of people think it dishonest to knowingly watch a pirate DVD and 58 per cent think it dishonest to download music for free on the internet. In contrast, 97 per cent think it dishonest to take a DVD from a shop without paying.

Women appear to have tougher morals than men. They are more likely to think that stealing stationery from the office, lying about their age on a dating website or buying clothes for a one-off event and then returning them is dishonest.

Older people are also more prepared to described activities as dishonest than younger generations.

'This could be because society is getting less honest - or it could be that as we get older we acquire more possessions and we get more protective of them,' said Dr Fafinksi.

The survey also asked people whether they had committed petty crimes.

Nearly two thirds of people admitted the have taken stationery home from work, more than 44 per cent of people admitted to 'opportunistic theft', a third said they had stolen music or films, while a third said they had stolen from their employer.

Nearly 13 per cent admitted that they had stolen from a shop - and yet only eight per cent claimed to have told lies in a relationship.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-1211629/How-80-think-OK-steal-work-study-reveals-wavering-moral-compass.html#>