



ICPSR 20622

Assessing Identity Theft Offenders' Strategies and Perceptions of Risk in the United States, 2006-2007

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Qualitative Data Collection Instrument



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Note: We want to begin the interview by learning more about you, including your past and present life circumstances.

What was your family situation like growing up?

Who raised you?

What did they do for a living?

What is the highest level of school that you completed?

Are you married?

If no, were you married at the time you were engaging in ID theft?

Did you go through a divorce or separation during this time?

If so, did your involvement in ID theft have something to do with the separation?

Were you employed at the time you were engaging in ID theft?

If so, what type of job? How long did you do this job?

How much were you making?

Did the job help you commit ID theft?

If unemployed, how did you support your lifestyle?

We are interested in understanding what your life was like during this time. Please describe an average day during the time you were engaging in ID theft. When would you wake up? What would you do? Etc.

EXPERIENCE WITH CRIME AND DRUGS

Note: We are interested in understanding your level of participation in other crimes, including violent crimes, property crimes, and drug crimes prior to your incarceration.

Did you do any other types of crimes other than ID theft?

What types?

How old were you when you committed your first crime?

What was it?

Were you engaging in these crimes at the same time that you were engaging in ID theft?

Had you ever used illegal drugs prior to being incarcerated?

If so, specify the types.

How long were you using the drugs (years/months)?

Had you ever used crystal meth prior to being incarcerated?

About how old were you when you first used illegal drugs?

Were you using illegal drugs during the period you were engaging in ID theft?

If so, specify type(s)?

Did you see yourself as an addict?

Did this drug use/dealing have anything to do with these thefts?

Have you ever been arrested for another crime?

If so, for what crimes?

How many times?

Have you ever been convicted of another crime?

If so, for what crimes?

How many times?

Have you ever served time for another crime?

If so, specify

EXPERIENCE WITH ID THEFT

NOTE: Next, instruct the offender that you want to ask him/her some questions about his/her general approach to ID theft. Allow them to freely respond and then probe.

About how old were you when you committed your first identity theft?

Approximately how many individual identities have you taken and used in your life?

Was this based on need for money?

Was it based on risk and safety?

Was it based on opportunity?

Was it based on something else?

Did you ever commit ID theft with other people?

If so, how often did you do that?

Why did you work with others?

If worked in a group:

What was the size of the group?

How was the group organized? (Specialized roles, division of labor)

How were the goods divided? (What was the split?)

EVENT DECISIONS

Note: Inform the offender that the following questions relate to the ID theft(s) for which he or she is currently doing time for. Ask them to think back to that ID theft and try to remember everything that went on that day.

How did you come to the decision to do it?

- Instrumental needs (e.g., money for subsistence; hide identity; avoid arrest; commit another crime) - specify and probe
- Expressive needs (e.g., "To make something happen") specify and probe
- Influence of others - specify and probe
- Presented opportunities - specify and probe (e.g., how did the opportunity come about?)
- Influence of Alcohol/Drugs - specify and probe
- Other - specify and probe

Did the thought of not doing it come to your mind?

- If so, what made you not want to do it?
- Why did you decide to do it?
- What made you go ahead and do it?

Why did you choose the target that you did? Allow response then probe with:

- Low risk - specify and probe
- High reward - specify and probe
- Ease (e.g., close-by) - specify and probe

Did you know your target?

- If yes, what was your relationship?
- How long did you know the person?

- If no, did you study/observe them before committing the ID theft?
- What information were you looking for?

What information did you obtain? For example, credit card, social security numbers, date of birth, database, convenience checks, etc.

For how many people did you obtain this information? (probe for specific number)

What specifically did you do with the identity information once you obtained it?

- Did you personally use it?
- Did you sell it?
 - If you sold it, what specifically did you sell?
 - How much money did you sell it for?
 - What was your relationship with the person you sold it to?

How did you actually go about getting the person's information? - probe to determine exact method

- Why this method was adopted (e.g., was it part of employment or burglary?).

- What were the specific steps you took to get the info?
- How long did it take to get the info?

- Low risk - specify and probe

High reward - specify and probe

Ease - specify and probe

Were there other ways you would have preferred to get the information you needed?

Why did you not use these methods?

What did you gain from the ID theft?

If money, what did you do with the money?

How long would the money last?

Did you give things away to others?

Did you think about the chances of getting caught?

If not, why?

If yes, did you think you would receive a sentence?

What kind of a sentence did you expect if you were caught?

Incarceration - specify length and type

Probation

Other – specify

Who arrested you? (federal, state, local)

How did you get caught? Have respondent expand.

"Snitched-on" – probe

Through evidence – probe

Other – e.g., "self-incrimination" – probe

What was it like when you were caught?

Do you think you were treated fairly by police, courts, prison etc.?

What do you think you could have done to not get caught?

Did you depart from your typical approach on this occasion?

If so, what was the difference?

What did you see as the greatest risk of committing ID theft?

Police or law enforcement

Regulators (credit card or bank officials)

Victim

Family and friends

How did you overcome these risks?

Did you feel guilty beforehand? During? Afterwards?

If so, what did you feel guilty about?

How did you overcome this guilt?

Were there some people you wouldn't victimize?

If so, who were they?

Why not victimize these people?

What was the worst part of doing ID theft?

What is the best part of doing ID theft?

PERCEIVED RISKS OF ID THEFT

NOTE: Next, instruct the offender that you want to ask him/her some questions about his/her general approach to ID theft. Allow them to freely respond and then probe.

What kind of information were you looking for when committing ID theft?

Low risk - probe

High reward – probe

Ease – probe

What kind of a target do (did) you avoid when committing ID theft?

High risk – probe

Low reward – probe

High difficulty – probe

Did you think about the chance of being caught for an ID theft before (or while) you committed it?

If not, why?

How did you overcome the fear of being caught?

If yes, what did you think your chances of being caught were?

How did you overcome these “fears”?

Did you think about the chance of being caught "sooner or later?"

If not, why?

How did you overcome the fear of being caught?

If yes, what did you think your chances of being caught were?

(If appropriate) How did you know your chance of being caught?

Own experience – probe

Experience of others – probe

Media reports - probe

Other - probe

What did you think the penalties would be if you got caught?

Was this consistent with what you got?

HABITUATION AND IDENTITY THEFT

Note: Have the participant think back over the course of their career. Ask how things have changed since the first time they committed an ID theft until now.

What skills are required to be good at ID theft?

Technical skills (making ids, making checks)

Social skills (interacting with bank tellers or clerks)

Intuitive skills (who to approach, who to avoid)

Knowledge of banks and credit agencies

Did you consider yourself an ID thief?

Did others label you as an ID thief?

What constitutes a good ID thief?

What constitutes a bad ID thief?

Did your contacts with other ID thieves increase? How?

If you worked in a group did your role within the group change? How?

Did you lose contact with friends and family?

Did you lose employment during this period?

Did you become financially dependent on ID theft?

Did you choose work to facilitate ID theft?

Did work provide the initial opportunity to commit ID theft?

Did you change your lifestyle (e.g., partying habits) during this time?

What specialized knowledge do you need to be successful in ID theft?

How did you learn these skills?

Did your skills improve?

If yes, how did they improve?

Did you plan more?

Did you take more precautions?

Did you get more selective in victims?

Did you develop contacts to get information?

Did you provide information to others?

How did you “deal with” police and others?

What steps did you take to avoid being detected?

What steps did you take to avoid being arrested?

Did these strategies change as you progressed in ID theft?

CONCLUSION

Thank participants for giving us their time and their straightforwardness and honesty. Let them know that everything they have told us will be kept confidential. Ask participants if they have any questions?