

## Article

# **“I don’t have an address ”: Housing instability and domestic violence in help-seeking calls to a support service**

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## **Abstract**

Increasing recognition of the long-term negative impacts of gendered violence has led to the establishment of a variety of social support services. Feminist research has examined the barriers that prevent women from accessing these services and the problems women report getting the help they need. However, little is known about what happens *in situ* when women interact with support services. This paper is a novel empirical investigation of naturalistic social interactions where women seek help with problems resulting from violence at home. We used conversation analysis to examine how problems of housing instability and help-seeking unfolded in recorded telephone calls to a victim support service. We found that the routine institutional practice of asking for an address posed interactional trouble for women who were seeking to leave violence, had left a violent home, or were homeless as a result of violence. When answers could not be provided, callers’ responses included disclosures of violence or challenges to the meanings of address. Our findings point to an interactional burden that women confront in institutional interactions. We suggest institutions should carefully consider how routine practices such as asking for an address might pose unintended problems for service users in vulnerable circumstances.

## **Keywords**

Gender and language, helplines, Intimate Partner Violence, Housing instability, Support services New Zealand, Institutional talk

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In this paper, we examine what happens when women seek help from a telephone-mediated support service after experiencing gendered violence. With detailed attention to the actions accomplished in the turns and sequences of talk, we demonstrate how a routine institutional practice of asking for an address can result in misalignment. Call takers' orientation to progressing practical tasks can be incongruent with the problems women present. We show how questions for an address can cause trouble in the interaction, and ultimately place an interactional burden on vulnerable women at the very moment they are seeking help.

### **Institutional support for victims of gendered violence**

Gendered violence is recognised as a global health crisis with the responsibility for preventing violence and the importance of supporting victims increasingly recognised by policy makers worldwide (Grant & Marshall, 2020). A range of different organisations offer support for victims of domestic violence<sup>1</sup> in New Zealand (the site of our study) and internationally. Despite the increasing availability of social support services, women's rates of uptake and their experiences as service-users are pressing concerns. Numerous barriers prevent women from seeking formal support, including lack of knowledge about services, lack of trust in institutions, prior negative experiences with services, and geographical isolation (Lelaurain et al., 2017). Personal and societal beliefs about the normality of violence, and shame or fear of further violence also shape decisions to seek support (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010).

When women do turn to institutions for support, they do not always receive the help they need. In surveys, women report that tangible support such as food, housing, and financial assistance are more helpful than the emotional, psychological, or legal aid often prioritised by service-providers (Postmus et al., 2009). Other studies suggest the majority of women who access formal services find them helpful (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). Nevertheless, there are numerous challenges women face, including being believed and supported in policing,

healthcare, and other support services (Jordan, 1998, 2015). In interviews, women recount difficulties accessing help from services that may be inadvertently stigmatising (Jeffrey & Barata, 2017) or lack empathy (Reisenhofer & Seibold, 2013). Responses from service-providers have impacts on women's long-term recovery. Negative responses can be traumatising and re-victimising, while positive responses can support healing and recovery (Campbell, 2008; Campbell et al., 2001).

Despite recognition of the challenges women face accessing helpful support for gendered violence, scant research has examined help-seeking interactions in their own right. In this paper, we analyse recordings of real-life calls where women seek help from a support agency. Our focus is how the issue of housing instability becomes visible through the routine practice of a question about address. Housing instability is a documented problem for women experiencing violence at home, seeking to leave a violent relationship, or attempting to forge a new life free from violence (O'Campo et al., 2015; Woodhall-Melnik et al., 2017).

Although stable housing is critical for increasing safety, service providers are often under-resourced or ill-equipped to respond to women's housing needs (Jeffrey & Barata, 2017). Our analysis provides a new approach to the issue of housing and domestic violence by examining how such issues become live concerns for women calling an institutional support service for help.

### **Analysing service interactions**

A substantive body of work on helpline interactions uses conversation analysis to examine how they operate and what might be done to optimise their services (Bloch & Leydon, 2019; Hepburn et al., 2014). For example, Sikveland, Stokoe, and Symonds (2016) studied calls to medical receptionists for a doctor's appointment. They found when callers' appointment requests were rejected, receptionists moved to close the call, leaving patients to initiate alternative requests. Sikveland and colleagues interpreted the findings as placing a burden on

the service-users. Furthermore, they suggested greater patient satisfaction was associated with medical practices where receptionists rather than patients initiated offers of alternative appointments.

Conversation analytic research has also documented how seemingly innocuous questions can halt the smooth progression of institutional interactions. A recurrent place such trouble occurs is in the collection of personal details. For example, in a study of calls to a dispute resolution service Weatherall (2016) found that call takers' requests for name and address could be treated as interruptive by callers. Although call takers were taking necessary steps towards addressing the complaint, callers were still progressing their problem presentation, resulting in misalignment between parties. In a health helpline where questions about callers' ethnicity were asked for monitoring purposes, Wilkinson (2011a) documented problems with answering. Callers displayed uncertainty about how to answer the open-ended question, regularly responding in terms of nationality rather than ethnicity. In a different health helpline, ethnicity questions were posed with a list of possible answers which could also cause problems as callers resisting the categories being offered (Leydon et al., 2013).

One practical and routine use of questions in institutional interactions is to solicit personal information. However, questions also house presuppositions (Heritage & Clayman, 2010) that communicate values, assumptions, and beliefs about the world (Ostermann, 2017). For example, Kitzinger (2005) suggested heteronormativity in action could be seen in the ways doctors asked questions about where patients lived. Callers who referred to the patient as a wife were asked where they lived, while callers who referred to the patient as a friend were asked where the patient lived. Kitzinger argued that these question-answer sequences are interactional building blocks that construct heterosexual family relations as normative and taken-for-granted. Likewise, Stokoe, Sikveland and Huma (2017) showed that routine questions in commercial sales calls were implicated in common-sense knowledge about

couples and relationships. Call takers' questions about the 'parties to the sale' revealed stereotypical expectations of callers' relationships. Questions about callers' titles (e.g. 'is that miss or missus') activated categories and common-sense knowledge about relationships which the authors conceptualised as intruding onto customers' domestic domain.

Encountering – and having to potentially challenge – such presumptions can pose an additional barrier for service-seekers to navigate (see Land & Kitinger, 2005).

Analysing the close detail of service encounters provides a unique perspective on the experiences of service-users. In this paper, we apply those principles to analyse how a victim support service operates when women seek help after experiencing domestic violence. We analyse questions for address that were recurrent across calls. Although these questions are relevant for call takers to accomplish their institutional tasks, we show how the design of address questions convey presuppositions about callers' living arrangements. Our feminist interest is to highlight how these presuppositions are particularly problematic for callers whose problems are intimately connected with matters of home, housing, family, and safety.

## **Method**

### *Setting*

The setting of our research is a New Zealand non-governmental organisation that provides free emotional support and practical advice for victims of crime and trauma. The community organisation consists of a Contact Service that operates a free-phone helpline and a regionalised network of support workers who interact with clients over the phone and in face-to-face support encounters.

Police can refer people to the service for support directly, or people can self-refer via the helpline. Referrals are recorded as case files and allocated to support workers. Contact service workers primarily enter self-referrals as case files, transfer established clients to their allocated support workers, or transfer callers to other organisations. Typically, the work of emotional support is deferred to support workers or emergency counselling helplines.

### *Data corpus and sample*

The data corpus comprises 396 recorded calls to the victim helpline collected in 2015-2016. Calls range in length from 15 seconds to 20 minutes, with half of all calls completed in under two minutes. Around three quarters of the callers in the corpus were women although determining callers' gender from their voices alone is not infallible (Wilkinson, 2011b). We logged calls for type (i.e. referral or transfer), reason for calling, and brief notes on features of potential analytic interest, for example crying. Calls have been progressively transcribed for different lines of inquiry, using Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 2004).

As part of the consultation leading up to permissions for collecting telephone recordings we observed the Contact Service centre in action and were given access to their operations manual. This background information alongside the knowledge we gained by transcribing the calls and intensely working with the data inform our understanding of what happens in the calls.

There are 57 calls related to gendered violence. While working on how violence was disclosed (Tennent & Weatherall, 2019) we noticed that questions for the caller's address were recurrently associated with trouble in answering, which then became the target of further analysis. Of the 57 calls, 33 included one or more questions about the caller's address and in about half of those (n=18) an address was given. We present just one of those cases below, however, our main focus is on the other half of the cases where answers are not given

so have structural features associated with dispreference and misalignment (Jefferson & Lee, 1992; Schegloff, 2007).

### *Ethics*

The Contact Service routinely record calls for training purposes. A pre-recorded message informs callers that they can request the recording be halted at any point. This message and the online privacy statement were updated to specify that recordings could be used for research and that callers could opt out. Call takers provided written consent and could opt out of having interactions included. Sound files were digitally edited to scramble identifying information such as names and addresses. The transcripts below use pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality. The Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee approved this study.

### **Analysis**

We provide a novel interactional perspective on the problem of housing instability and domestic violence by using conversation analysis to examine how questions about address are designed and responded to in calls for help about violence. In the three sections below, we document callers' different responses to address questions. We begin with cases where callers provide their address. Then, we turn to cases where there are problems answering the question. In the third section, we present multiple calls from a woman homeless due to violence who challenges the relevance of the question.

#### *Address questions answered*

The first extract is from a caller who wants someone to be with her when partner returns home after a temporary detention order. She is determined to stay in the house and is rightfully upset. Our extract begins about two minutes into a call that is nearly eight minutes long (indicated in the title of the extract). The wh-question for address in this case is the start

of an interrogative series that we found could constitute the process of making a case file.

The question and answer are in bold in the transcript.

Extract 1 Monica 16 (2:00/7:52)

01   CONTCT:        u:[m:     ]  
02   CALLER:        [but I-] °you know (but-)° .hhh yeah .sniHH (0.8) I  
03                   just- I: I'm a- I'm just lost.=I just don't know what  
04                   to do,  
05                   (0.8)  
06   **CONTCT:        okay what was [your address.]**  
07   CALLER:        [I- the only- ]  
08                   (1.0)  
09   **CALLER:        um five b, hh**  
10                   (0.4)  
11   CONTCT:        [yeap ]  
12   **CALLER:        [.shih] rak- (.) rakanoa r- a - k - a (0.2) n - o - a**  
13                   **ave (.) in nortonburt?**  
14                   (0.4)  
15   CONTCT:        °o:kay.°

The caller's smooth articulation of her desperate need for help "I'm just lost.=I just don't know what to do" (lines 3-4) is prefaced by turn initial restarts and breathiness that develop into crying (line 2) with a halting re-entry into talk via a cascade of I- framed repairs "I just- I: I'm a- I'm just lost." The call taker begins their turn of talk with a shift implicative and affectively neutral "okay" (Beach, 1992). Rather than attending to the emotional state of the caller, the call taker initiates the activity of establishing a case file which is a necessary preliminary to allocating a support worker who might be able to help the caller.

The caller misprojects the end of the call taker's turn as completed after "okay" and bids for the conversational floor, likely with talk about the problem.<sup>2</sup> However, at the same time the



call taker launches a question about the caller's address. The caller concedes her turn to the call taker (line 7) and starts a completely new turn at line 9 which aligns with the action of the question by providing a number, which in this sequential position is a house number. The call taker's receipt of the house number is delivered in overlap with a crying sniff before the caller goes on to name the street, then spell it out, completing the answer by providing the name of the suburb.

In this first case then, the caller is seeking support for when her abusive partner returns. She answers the address question straightforwardly with a turn formatted as house number, street, and suburb. The caller in the following cases likewise provides an address but does not treat this as straightforward information.

The following two extracts are from a call where a woman is seeking support to leave an address shared with an abusive partner. Extract 2 shows the caller formulating her problem as part of the reason for calling. Extract 2a joins the call about three minutes later as the call taker creates a case file for the self-referral.

Extract 2: Molly 52 (1.00/6:35)

01 CALLER: you know like um (1.4) you know like I'm being threatened  
02 that (0.2) you know like (0.6) I'm not allowed to: (0.8)  
03 leave with my so:n from the address?  
04 CONTACT: mhm?

Extract 2a: Molly 52 (4.35/6:35)

05 CONTACT: a:nd now †that number that you're calling me on  
06 is that the number we should be contacting you on?  
07 (0.8)  
08 CALLER: yep,  
09 (0.2) ((typing))

10 CALLER: it is  
 11 CONTCT: coo:l  
 12 (0.8) ((typing))  
 13 CONTCT: .hh um:  
 14 (6.0) ((typing))  
 15 CONTCT: °cool° >sorry just bear with me for a second,<  
 16 (2.6)  
 17 CONTCT: c(h)ool.=and what was your home address?  
 18 (1.8)  
 19 CALLER: um I'm currently staying at nine Ferguston crescent,  
 20 (0.8)  
 21 CONTCT: at what was the crescent sorry?

The process of establishing a case file for a self-referral routinely involves recording details about the caller's name, address, and telephone number. In Extract 1 the address question initiated making a case file. In Extract 2a, the address question follows the request for confirmation about the phone number (lines 5-6). The address question is tied to the ongoing activity with "and" prefacing (line 17), a practice used to link multiple turns together in a single activity (Heritage & Sorjonen, 1994).

An initial indication that the address question is a problem for the caller is the 1.8 second silence (line 18). When she begins to speak, she starts with "um" (line 19) which further delays the response and marks the turn to come as non-straightforward (Schegloff & Lerner, 2009). Although the caller does answer the question, she designs her response to challenge a common-sense meaning of the question. Phrasal answers to wh-questions typically do simple answering (as in Extract 1), while grammatically more complex clausal and sentential answers indicate trouble (Fox & Thompson, 2010). The sentential answer here, "I'm currently staying at nine Ferguston crescent" (line 19) treats an aspect of the question as inapposite. Thus, the caller orients to the address she provides as a place of temporary

residence rather than a “home” (line 17). The caller’s answer displays the relevance of address to her problem and reason for seeking help to leave. The call taker however, orients to the activity of recording details for the case file, initiating repair to confirm the spelling of the street name (line 21).

Although the caller in Extract 1 was rightfully upset about her situation, she answered the address question straightforwardly. In Extract 2, the caller answered the question but in a way that challenged the presupposition an address is a place one lives. In the following section we analyse responses that do not answer the address question.

#### *Other responses to “what’s your address”*

In the next case, the caller has been referred by the police and advised a support worker would contact her. A police referral means the caller should have a case file in the system. The caller is ringing because the expected contact has not yet occurred.

The extract begins about one minute into a call which is just under four minutes long. The call taker explains that the caller’s name is not coming up in the system (line 1) and requests confirmation of her phone number (lines 3-7). The call taker’s “o:h” (line 9) is a change of cognitive state token (Heritage, 1984) which displays a realisation, likely that the caller’s name has been incorrectly spelled on file (which she explains at lines 23-24). The address question is the call taker’s attempt to find the case file, but the caller does not answer straightforwardly.

Extract 3: Claire 1 1:00/3:50

01 CONTCT:       ah your name is not coming up in my (0.2) system,  
02                       (2.0)  
03 CONTCT:       this is the [(phone)] ah phone number and I’ve got=  
04 CALLER:                       [ UM ]  
05 CONTCT:       =oh three three five oh seven (0.4) six seven two three?

06 (1.2)

07 CALLER: yep.

08 (3.0)

09 CONTACT: o:h

10 (1.4)

11 CONTACT: **and what's your address please,**

12 (1.8)

13 CALLER: **um at the moment I'm staying with a friend?**

14 (1.2)

15 CONTACT: °okay, °

16 (0.4)

17 CALLER: **cos I used to live with my ex-partner?**

18 (0.8)

19 CONTACT: ohkay

20 (0.4)

21 CALLER: **but I'm not at that address anymore.**

22 (0.8)

23 CONTACT: okay so: (0.6) um:: (0.6) we- what we ma:y have is

24 (1.6) not the correct spelling of your name.

As in Extract 2, the request for address is designed as part of an ongoing activity with and-prefacing (Heritage & Sorjonen, 1994). The form of the question, as in the previous two cases, uses the possessive adjective “your address” (line 11) – a formulation that conveys a “common-sense geography” about location (Schegloff, 1972, p. 85). That is, there is a shared understanding about what “your address” means. However, much as in Extract 2, the caller’s response highlights her housing instability. Where she lives now is temporary because a “moment” (line 13) is a fleeting length of time which differentiates from the implied stability of “your address”. The description “staying with a friend” (line 13) shows that the meaning of an address includes the kinds of people there.

The implicit understanding that *your address* is a stable location where family resides is made explicit in the caller's turn at lines 17 and 21. The call taker's quiet "okay" (line 15) receipts the information provided and is a way of indicating sequence closure (Schegloff, 2007). Yet the caller continues from her previously completed turn with the conjunction "cos" (line 17). The explanation is that she used to "live" with her "ex-partner" (line 17). To *live* contrasts with to *stay* which produces its situated meaning as a past period where she had an address. That information is also receipted with an "ohkay" (line 19) which is another signal that the sequence asking about address is being treated by the call taker as closed. Nevertheless, the caller completes her explanation with "but I'm not at that address anymore" (line 21).

The caller's response is an orientation to an inferential order that links categories of people to different living arrangements. The economy rule of categorisation devices (Sacks, 1972) links "ex-partner" (line 17) and "friend" (line 13) by inference as members belonging to the same category – those with whom an address is not normatively shared. The term ex-partner in the setting of a victim support service also makes available a possible inference that the crime is domestic violence (Tennent & Weatherall, 2019).

The caller's continuation of her response in the face of the call taker's signals of sequence closure points to a misalignment about the progression of action. The call taker is troubleshooting why the case file cannot be found from the caller's name and treats each of the caller's answers as sufficient. The reduced volume of the first okay and the breathy delivery of the second indicate that the call-taker is also attending to the computer system, a matter that she explicitly articulates in lines 23-24 with an "okay so" prefaced turn that lacks the same paralinguistic markers. However, the caller is seeking support previously promised. While her replies are fitted to the question of address, they also function to legitimate her whereabouts as part of the problem. Recall that her reason for calling was to take the

initiative to contact the service. Her response to the address question makes available the inference that she is a victim of intimate partner violence and has just recently left the family home. At the end of the call (not shown), the call taker detects some possible urgency in the need for help and asks if it is an emergency. Although the caller denies this, she claims her ex-partner is tormenting her.

In Extract 4, the caller is seeking help with paperwork to apply for a protection order to make her ex-partner's contact with her illegal. She was told by police that a support worker would be in contact, but that has not yet happened. In this interaction the call taker checks the caller's details against those recorded in the case file. The address question is formatted differently from the previous extracts, packaged in one turn that also asks for a name.

Extract 4: Devon 8 (1:00/2:10)

01   CONTCT:       okay let me check (0.2) **what is your first=last**  
02                   **name and your address please.**  
03                   (1.2)  
04   CALLER:       uh my: name is Tanya, t-a-n-y-a,  
05                   (0.6)  
06   CONTCT:       mh[m]  
07   CALLER:       [L]ederson,  
08                   (1.0)  
09   CALLER:       l-e-d-e-r:-s-o-n,  
10                   (0.2)  
11   CONTCT:       .h (0.2) cool. **a:nd just your address please,**  
12                   (0.8)  
13   CALLER:       U:M (0.8) d'you want the address where I A:M or  
14                   **the address on the complaint?**  
15                   (0.8)  
16   CONTCT:       #e::rm# (0.8) e:ither either let's see(h).  
17                   (0.8)

18 CALLER: [ UM: ]  
 19 CONTCT: [i-it's] just a security (0.4) thing for us(h)  
 20 (0.8)  
 21 CALLER: okay. a hundred and one,  
 22 (1.0)  
 23 CALLER: Marapata road, m-a-r-a-p-a-t-a?  
 24 (0.2)  
 25 CALLER: Monvay.  
 26 CONTCT: perfect (h)

The call taker proposes to check the caller's file for an update on her case by initiating an action that requests her name and address in a single turn (lines 1-2). The caller's response only provides her name which is a first sign that answering the question about address might be a problem. The call taker asks for address a second time, using and-prefacing and including "just" (line 11) which presents the request as a minor imposition.

The caller's response to the follow-up address question begins with "U:M" and an intra-turn silence (line 13). The caller displays trouble understanding what the question is asking for, initiating repair (Schegloff et al., 1977) seeking clarification whether "your address" (line 11) refers to "the address where I A:M" (line 13) or "the address on the complaint" (line 14). The listing of the two alternatives shows two relevant residency locations. The first location is where a support worker might find her, while the second is where the violence occurred and would be the one give on the formal complaint to the police. Although the call taker's question was designed as a matter of identification, the caller's initiation of repair challenges an assumption of a no-problem response. In this case the recorded address is not where she currently is, but where she was assaulted .

When two possible answers are presented as alternatives the order is important. The principle of contiguity means that the second option is presented as the one most likely to be agreed with (Sacks, 1995). However, the call taker does not pick either option, but explains the basis for the question is a security check (lines 16-19). The collective “us(h)” (line 19) refers to the Contact Service, distinguishing it from other possible institutional interests such as police (for whom incident location is relevant) or a support worker (who may visit the caller in person).

In Extract 5, the same caller from Extract 4 contacts the helpline the following day. The caller asks to speak to her support worker (lines 1-3). Transferring calls from clients to their support workers is part of the call taker’s job and here that task is jointly accomplished in less than a minute.

Extract 5: Adrian 40 (0:30/0:52)

01 CALLER: hi, I was wondering if I could speak to: Lex in (.)  
 02 Manahiro?  
 03 (0.4)  
 04 CONTACT: Lex in Manahiro? uh y- awesome so uh jus- jus- (.)  
 05 >in order to find the right person< just if I can ask  
 06 for your first and surname please. .hh  
 07 (1.2)  
 08 CALLER: my first an- my name’s Tanya Lederson.  
 09 CONTACT: Tanya Lederson. Awesome. **>And just if I can also< get**  
 10 **you t- uh to confirm your address please.**  
 11 (2.0)  
 12 CALLER: **uh::m (0.8) er I: think it’s port- thirteen, porter**  
 13 **avon (0.6) drive Akatane?=I don’t know I’m going**  
 14 **through a protection order thing at the moment,**  
 15 CONTACT: .hh gotcha so I think we might have your pre::v↑ious  
 16 address.  
 17 (0.8)



18 CALLER:           okay a hundred and one marapata road?  
19 CONTACT:       that['s it]  
20 CALLER:           [ Mon]vay?  
21 CONTACT:       yep awesome.

The call taker launches the activity of identification confirmation by repeating the caller's name and asking for her address with an and-prefaced second unit of the same turn (lines 9-10). The use of "just" produces the provision of the address as a minor imposition. By asking the caller to "confirm" her address (line 10), the call taker displays that he already knows this information but requires the caller to provide an address that matches what is recorded on file before he can grant her request.

Although the caller answers the question, she displays that the provision of the address is not a straightforward matter. The answer is prefaced with a long silence (line 11), non-lexical sound objects "uhm" and "er" (line 12) and hedged with "I think" (line 12). The address is followed by "I don't know" (line 13) which indicates uncertainty for the information given (Weatherall, 2011). The caller orients to the fact that people are normatively expected provide their address (see Monteiro, 2016) by adding an account that she is "going through a protection order thing at the moment," (lines 13-14). This description makes inferentially available that she is a victim of domestic violence. It is because she experienced violence that her living situation is precarious and she cannot answer with certainty what address is relevant for Victim Support. Accounts are a routine feature of dispreferred responses (Heritage, 1988), but here, the caller's account includes a disclosure of violence.

The call taker receipts the caller's disclosure with "gotcha" (line 15) and provides a possible reason why the address provided does not match what is listed on file (lines 15-16). After the caller provides a different address (line 18), he confirms this is correct (line 19) and moves to transfer the call. The call taker's markedly positive assessments of responses ("awesome",

line 9 and 21) seem incongruent with the caller's situation that necessitates a protection order.

In a study of interviews, Antaki, Houtkoop-Steenstra and Rapley (2000) found high grade assessments showed an interviewer's orientation to the progression of task-related activities rather than to the content. It seems that the positive assessments here are functioning in a similar way. The call taker is marking the progression of the task-related activity of identifying the case file rather than displaying a stance on the caller's disclosure of violence.

In the analysis so far, we have shown that address questions can be answered with a no-problem response (Extract 1) and that such questions can be a source of trouble, particularly for women who have left where they were being assaulted. Trouble can be managed by challenging the assumption address is where one is currently located (Extracts 2a and 3), initiating a repair sequence to establish which of two possible addresses is relevant (Extract 4), or by hedging an answer (Extract 5). In the next section we analyse how address questions are designed and responded to across multiple calls from a woman made homeless by violence.

### *Questions about address to a homeless caller*

Our dataset includes 11 calls made by the same woman over the course of three days. Extract 6 below is from the first call she makes. At the start of the call she presented a complex set of problems including being assaulted by her flatmate, having slept on the street that night, and having her possessions stolen. She mentions reporting to the police and having previous contact with the organisation for a past problem. The call taker has searched for a case file but been unsuccessful so begins to create a new file. The extract begins with the call taker confirming the caller's telephone number.

Extract 6: Sharika 1 (4:10/8:08)

01   CONTCT:       uh-okay (0.8) so (1.0) um ah °oh one two oh one  
02               f:ive two nine seven five two° okay,

03 (0.6)

04 **CONTCT:** >alright< and what was your um an- w- y:our most  
05 **recent\_** (.) address?

06 (1.4)

07 **CALLER:** um it's: it- w-where I was assaulted last night is  
08 **seven h glowmare road,**

09 (0.8)

10 **CALLER:** South Benfall?=which is the address I told to the  
11 **police where the: um assault happened?** I didn't  
12 realise he was a: um schizophrenic!

13 (1.4)

14 **CONTCT:** o[ka: y ]

15 **CALLER:** [yeah when] I'd taken him in as a flatmate?

16 **CONTCT:** oh okay.

17 (0.8)

18 **CONTCT:** alright.

After confirming the caller's phone number (lines 1-2), the call taker asks for her address using and-prefacing. The call taker cuts off her turn that was on its way to *what was your address* (line 04) which the analysis so far has shown is a recurrent format. However, the call taker displays trouble with this formulation, halting the progress of her talk ("your um an- w-") and modifying her turn in progress to specify "y:our most recent (.) address" (lines 4-5). Modifying her question in this way shows an orientation to recipient design because the insertion of "most recent" marks that the current address may be different to the one the caller had in the past.

The caller responds to the question in a way that answers it but also retrospectively transforms what was being asked for. She begins to answer in a format that is projectable as a clausal response ("it's: it-") before cutting off to restart her turn as a declarative statement that makes the problem the subject of the turn and the address the object, "w-where I was

assaulted last night is seven h glowmare road,” (lines 7-8). The design of the answer shows that she is doing more than simply answering the question (Fox & Thompson, 2010) The caller highlights relevant thing about the address for her is first and foremost a place *where she was assaulted*.

The call taker is progressing an institutional task of making a case file by asking for an address. Although the caller aligns with that activity, she also makes explicit the relevance of her answer to why she is calling. There is a silence after the caller gives the house number and street where the call taker is likely entering in the information into the case file (line 9). In the absence of a next question, the caller goes on to provide the suburb which is another possible completion point of the answer (line 10). Here she rushes through the place where speaker transition is relevant (Sacks et al., 1974) to further elaborate on her reason for calling.

The caller explains that she reported the address to the police (lines 10-11) and discloses the perpetrator had a mental health problem that she did not know of when she made him her flatmate (lines 11-15). The “okay” receipts (lines 14; 16) indicate the call taker is ready to shift to a next action (Beach 1994), with the “alright” being a clear indication of sequence closure (Schegloff, 2007). These receipts show the call taker attending to the progression and completion of the task of making a case file. As with the use of high grade assessments, the use of *okay* in response to disclosures about the problem point to a misalignment between the parties. The call taker orients to the task of establishing the casefile while the caller orients to telling about her problem.

Extract 7 comes from later that same day when the caller follows up on support arrangements. In the reason for the call (not shown) she identified as having called earlier that day, needing help with accommodation, and being a victim of physical and sexual assault the day before. In her first turn, the call taker moved to identify the case file and confirm the

identity of the caller by asking for her name. The extract begins as the call taker progresses the activity by asking for the address.

Extract 7: Katie 1 (0:56/3:53)

01 CONTCT: .hh (0.4) an:d °w-° (0.2) could you confirm your  
02 address for me ple:ase,  
03 (1.0)  
04 CALLER: uh: it's number seven: glowmare,  
05 (0.4)  
06 CALLER: .h seven h glowmare uh: road south benfall,=but I  
07 can't go back there for three days .hhh be[cause the ]  
08 CONTCT: [ ↑ri::ght ]  
09 CALLER: police hav:e (.) cordoned it off (0.2) becaus:e of my  
10 blood and the evidence, they need to come back  
11 [ and ] hh .hh photograph everything after the assa:ult?  
12 CONTCT: [oka(h)y]  
13 (0.6)  
14 CONTCT: °okay:°

The address question is designed as request for confirmation (lines 1-2) which displays the call taker has found the case file based on the caller's name and is moving to check she has the right file. Even though the caller provides an address, the one second silence (line 3) before turn-initial "uh:" (line 4) signals some trouble in responding. The clausal framing, "it's" (line 4) before the address likewise signals the response will be non-straightforward (Fox & Thompson, 2010). After re-completing the address (line 6), she keeps speaking to challenge the presupposition that her address is where she is living, claiming "but I can't go back there for three days" (lines 6-7). Informing about her absence at that location explains that she could not be reached there, showing an orientation to that being relevant for the organisation.

The call taker receipts that information with “right”, a token that can function like ‘alright’ and ‘okay’ to signal a change-of-activity (Gardner, 2007). However, the caller continues with her explanation, describing her address as a police crime scene. The call taker’s “okay” responses indicate a readiness to change the activity (lines 8, 12), showing no affiliation with the content of the telling which includes horrific details of the assault. Thus, there are misalignments between the parties. The call taker is progressing the institutional task of confirming the address in the system and the caller is indicating potentially relevant information that is not where she can be found. Furthermore, the caller’s disclosure is ill-fitted with what the call-taker is doing. The kind of aggravation that such misalignment creates becomes evident in the final extract below.

In Extract 8, the caller has asked to leave a message with the support worker who has now been assigned to her. The call taker progresses the task of finding the case file and confirming the identity of the caller. Extract 8 begins as the call taker receipts the answer to his question for her name.

Extract 8: Adrian 18 (0:30/2:37)

01   CONTACT:        awesome so Reri >just if I can also get you to<  
02                    confirm y- (.) your: (0.2) address please,  
03                    (1.2)  
04   CALLER:        I DON'T have an a(hh)dre(h)ss bud,=I had to m~ove  
05                    ~out of (.) where I was assaulted.  
06   CONTACT:        [↑>okay< um just-just if I can ask for that-]  
07                    [        U:m:        .hhh   two days ago.        ]  
08   CALLER:        so that's why I'm needing to get an urgent message  
09                    please [through to] Nezka. .h[h u:m        ]  
10   CONTACT:        [ gotcha,        ]                    [just if I] can ask for  
11                    that ad[dress.]  
12   CALLER:        [ yeah.]

13 (1.0)

14 CALLER: oh my previous addr[ess was ] um: (0.6) seven h=

15 CONTACT: [yes please]

16 CALLER: =glowmare road, um South Alb- ah South Benfall. .hh

17 CONTACT: awesome so Reri what I'm gonna do is I'mma give a

18 quick call to Nezka and if [she answers-]

19 CALLER: [oh no don't ] wake her up yet.

The high-grade assessment receipt of “awesome” (line 1) indicates the call taker has accomplished the activity of identifying the case file. The call taker then moves to confirm the match between the caller and the case file by asking for the address (line 1-2). The question is recipient-designed by using the caller’s name and is explicitly formulated as a request for confirmation.

After a delay of 1.2 seconds which is an initial indicator of dispreference (Schegloff, 2007), the caller baldly rejects the question and accounts for why she cannot answer with a disclosure of her assault. The rejection takes the form “I DON’T have an a(hh)dres(h)ss bud,” (line 4). The raised volume (indicated by capital letters) and particles of aspiration in the word “address” display an emotional stance hearable as frustration. The use of the address term “bud” further marks a stance towards the question being asked (Clayman, 2012). The caller accounts for her lack of address with a disclosure of violence, “I had to m~ove ~out of (.) where I was assaulted.” (lines 4-5). The tildes represent the caller’s ‘wobbly voice’ as she describes her situation in a display of emotion (Hepburn, 2004).

The call taker pursues the task of address confirmation, orienting to the immediately relevant task – from his perspective – of confirming the caller’s case file. This turn overlaps with the caller’s explanation that her lack of address is why she needs to contact her support worker (line 6-9). Her response a misunderstanding of the question and that her concern is seeking help with somewhere to live. The caller addresses her problem in understanding by

reformulating the address question using “that address” (see lines 6 and 11) rather than “your address” (line 02). This change resolves the misunderstanding as shown by the caller’s oh-prefaced turn that reformulates the question as referring to her “previous address” (line 14) before providing an answer (lines 14-16) that the call taker treats as sufficient to progress the action (lines 17-18).

As in the previous extracts, caller and call taker are misaligned regarding the relevance of address and the activity in progress. In this case, there are two relevancies of address for the caller. First and foremost is that she lacks a place to stay and so she has no address. Then there is the address where she was assaulted and the one that is listed on her file. For the call taker, the recorded address is relevant to progress the institutional task of confirming the case file which is a necessary preliminary to giving the help needed.

## **Discussion**

Seeking help for problems arising from gendered violence can be difficult and retraumatising (Campbell, 2008). This study contributes to understanding the challenges associated with seeking institutional support by examining how those problems unfold at the level of social interaction. We analysed how questions about address were asked and responded to in naturally occurring calls to a victim support service.

Our analysis showed that questions about address were a recurrent practice for progressing key institutional tasks including finding case files, making case files, and verifying callers’ identities which are preliminary steps towards providing support. Address questions had relatively fixed formats with variants of “what was your address.” Additional components included and-prefacing to link the request to a larger course of activity and “just” to construct the inquiry as minimal. The form of the question could also be recipient-designed by using callers’ names or by making the action of the question explicit (e.g. doing confirmation).



Although questions about address could be answered straightforwardly (e.g. Extract 1), they were equally likely to produce troubles in answering. These troubles occurred because problems with housing were central to the reason women were calling for help. The “common-sense geography” (Schegloff, 1972, p. 85) or culturally shared meanings associated with address were revealed in answers that challenged them. Address is normatively understood as a place where one lives rather than stays, and as a place shared with family and intimate partners rather than friends (Extracts 2a, 3). However, for women seeking help after violence, address can involve multiple relevant locations (Extract 4 and 5). Regularly an address is the location of violence, which can be a reason for not having an address at all (Extracts 6-8).

The conversation analytic concept of alignment is useful to provide a more general explanation of the interactional trouble we documented. The structural relationship between initiating actions and their responses provides one conceptualisation of alignment. In sequence organisation, structurally preferred responses are aligned. Aligned responses to questions accept the terms of the question, progress the action, and typically occur without delay in simple grammatical formats (Fox & Thompson, 2010; Schegloff, 2007). When callers cannot straightforwardly provide an address, responses were misaligned and structurally more complex. Explanations are a routine feature of such dispreferred responses (Heritage, 1988), with women regularly accounting for their inability to answer with disclosures of violence.

Call takers’ responses to disclosures of violence are evidence of another form of misalignment. Broader misalignment can occur when participants have different involvements with the activities being advanced (Jefferson & Lee, 1992) or different affective stances towards the matters at hand (Stivers, 2008; Weatherall & Stubbe, 2015). Call takers oriented to address questions as progressing routine institutional tasks involving

case files. The recorded details of address were treated as more relevant than the particulars of callers' experiences at those addresses. Thus, call takers did not treat callers' disclosures as relevant or responded with positive assessments (e.g. "awesome") that oriented to the progression of the activity rather than the details of the problem. By contrast, callers oriented to a broader range of relevancies associated with address. Callers drew distinctions between where they were staying and where they had lived, who they were staying with, the experiences that occurred at different addresses, and the practical difficulties involved in staying, leaving, or finding housing.

We conceptualise the misalignment between caller and call taker as an interactional burden. The interactional practices of service-providers can place burdens on service-users to secure help (Sikveland et al., 2016). We propose that a broader notion of interactional burden is useful to explain the kind of misalignments that occur when questions accomplishing institutional tasks have different meanings for service users. In our analysis, callers faced a burden by having to account for why they could not provide an address or challenge the presuppositions of address displayed in the question. The notion of interactional burden also explains the kinds of troubles documented in other settings caused by routine questions about marital status (Stokoe et al., 2017) or ethnicity (Wilkinson, 2011a).

Our findings have implications for institutional service provision. In this institutional context, the practical tasks of recording, retrieving, and checking case files are accomplished through address questions. While address is relevant information for a service that arranges home support visits, the tasks of verifying callers' identities might feasibly be accomplished through other information, such as contact details. Another solution that has been successfully implemented in other institutional contexts (e.g. Leydon et al., 2013) involves call takers explaining the reason for the question. Such accounts can pre-empt some of the difficulties we have documented by resolving the ambiguity for callers regarding what kind

of information is being sought and why. More broadly, our analysis suggests institutions should carefully consider how questions about callers' personal details have different relevancies for service-providers and service-users.

Our findings cast new light on the problem of housing instability and gendered violence by showing how the problem unfolds for women in interactions with an institutional support service. We demonstrated how an institutional practice of asking for address placed what we call an interactional burden on women where they were compelled to challenge the meaning of having an address, account for not having one, or seek clarification about which of several addresses were relevant. In the process, many women disclosed experiences of violence that were largely ignored by call takers. The misalignment we found might be related more broadly to women's reported dissatisfaction with service providers (e.g. Jeffrey & Barata, 2017; Reisenhofer & Seibold, 2013) and establishing that relationship is a possible direction for future research. By empirically documenting what happens when women turn to institutions for support, we can better understand and hopefully improve women's experiences with services. This work is essential to provide sensitive support that can aid women's recovery after violence.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> We use the term domestic violence rather than intimate partner violence to refer to violence at home because not all cases in our dataset are perpetrated by intimate partners.

<sup>2</sup> Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) described the conversation analytic model of turn taking which explains how turns of talk are taken and how overlaps can occur.

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