“I’m calling in regard to my son”: Entitlement, obligation, and opportunity to seek help for others

Short title: *Seeking help for others*

Emma Tennent[1]

[1] School of Psychology, Victoria University of Wellington

Emma Tennent

School of Psychology

Victoria University of Wellington

PO BOX 600

Wellington 6140

New Zealand

emma.tennent@vuw.ac.nz

Abstract:

From mundane acts like lending a hand to high-stakes incidents like calling an ambulance, help is a ubiquitous part of the human experience. Social relations shape who we help and how. This paper presents a discursive psychology study of an understudied form of help – seeking help for others. Drawing on a corpus of recorded calls to a victim support helpline, I analysed how social relations were demonstrably relevant when callers sought help for others. I used membership categorisation analysis and sequential conversation analysis to document how participants used categories to build and interpret requests for help on behalf of others. Categorical relationships between help-seekers, help-recipients, and potential help-providers were consequential in determining whether callers’ requests were justified and if help could be provided. The findings show that different categorical relationships configured seeking help for others as a matter of entitlement, obligation, or opportunity. Analysing the categories participants use in naturally occurring social interaction provides an emic perspective on seeking help for others. This kind of help-seeking offers a fruitful area for discursive psychology to develop new conceptualisations of help and social relations.

Keywords:

Help-seeking, helplines, categories, social relations, victim support

Data availability statement:

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks to Ann Weatherall and Fiona Grattan for feedback on drafts of the manuscript. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Introduction

Help lies at the heart of social life. From mundane acts like lending a hand to high-stakes incidents like calling an ambulance, help is a ubiquitous part of the human experience. Shared common-sense expectations about who should help whom are part of the moral order that organises everyday life (Sacks, 1972a). In this discursive psychology study of help, I examine how moral notions of entitlement and obligation are organised when people seek help for others on a victim helpline.

Help at an individual level

Social relations shape whether and how help occurs, but psychological research has largely examined helping behaviour from the perspective of individuals. Two interrelated questions have motivated much social psychology research on help. The first was initially raised by Darley and Latané (1968) in their famous studies of the bystander effect – why don't others help? Experimental findings demonstrate that people are less likely to offer help when others are present, particularly when the victim is a member of a different group (Levine & Cassidy, 2009). The second question is the focus of research on help-seeking behaviour – why do some people avoid seeking help? Survey and interview findings demonstrate that individuals face a range of barriers to seeking help, particularly from formal services (MacKay et al., 2017; Sabina et al., 2014). One explanation offered is that seeking help can threaten individuals' ability to evaluate themselves positively (Farmer et al., 2012; O'Doherty et al., 2016). Thus, social psychology has largely approached help as motivated behaviour influenced by social relations at an individual level.

Seeking help on behalf of others is a phenomenon that lies at the intersection of these research questions. Rather than an individual seeking help directly, when someone seeks help on another's behalf, the relationships between help-seeker, help-recipient, and potential help-provider are particularly salient. Seeking information, advice, or arranging services for others

is a widespread practice (Cutrona et al., 2015) recognised as a key form of social support (Reifegerste et al., 2017). Although research indicates family relationships are important (Hing et al., 2013; McCann & Lubman, 2018), this work largely operates with pre-determined definitions of relationships between help-seekers and help-recipients.

The discursive psychology approach I adopt asks a different question – how do social relations matter for the accomplishment of help in everyday life? In this paper, I examine how seeking help for others occurs in naturally occurring social interactions. Following the ethnomethodological transformation of a one-person problem into a two-person problem (Sacks, 1995), I study help and social relations through the interactions *between* people, rather than decisions or behaviours at an individual level.

Entitlement and obligation to help

In social interactions, participants orient to entitlements and obligations to help one another. These rights and responsibilities are grounded in what Sacks (1967, 1972a) referred to as membership categories. Sacks' ground-breaking work showed how membership categories structure help-seeking in everyday social life. Sacks examined how callers to a suicide helpline could claim they had 'no one to turn to' – even while talking to a call-taker. Callers' claims indicated they had conducted a search for help, which Sacks argued is normatively and morally organised through membership categories. The search for help is organised by a collection of relationship categories made up of paired relational categories (e.g. husband-wife, friend-friend, stranger-stranger) which are standardised as "a locus of rights and obligations concerning the activity of giving help" (Sacks, 1967, p. 203). Some pair members have a proper obligation to provide help and the right to be turned to by a pair member in need. Members of other relational categories lack these rights and obligations and are thus improper to turn to. By claiming they had 'no one' – no present or available

members of proper relationship categories – callers accounted for seeking help from the call-taker, a stranger who would be normatively improper to turn to.

Entitlements and obligations regarding different kinds of help are organised with reference to different categories. Call-takers on the suicide helpline oriented to a collection of categories organised with special distributions of knowledge, categorising themselves as professionals with specialist knowledge about suicide and exclusive rights to help (Sacks, 1972). Although in relational terms, call-takers may be strangers who should not be turned to, in knowledge terms, they are professionals with specialist expertise. Similarly, care-giving is an activity that lies at the intersection of relational and professional categories. In some cases, participants orient to caring for patients as an obligation of professional category membership, while in others, participants treat caring as a right and obligation of family members (Hunt, 1991; Izumi, 2017). Thus, categories within different collections can be applied to the same people to configure rights or obligations to help in different ways.

Participants also orient to entitlement and obligation through the ways they build and interpret requests for help. Interactional research has documented how help can be accomplished in different ways (Drew & Couper-Kuhlen, 2014), from direct requests and narrative descriptions (Fox & Heinemann, 2016; Zimmerman, 1992), to reports of trouble or embodied displays (Drew & Kendrick, 2018; Jansson et al., 2019). These different methods of help-seeking configure self-other relations differently. For example, requests impose an obligation on recipients to grant or deny, while embodied displays of trouble provide an opportunity for recipients to provide help (Kendrick & Drew, 2016). Likewise, different ways of help-seeking may highlight participants' entitlement to receive assistance (Heinemann, 2006), the contingencies associated with providing help (Curl & Drew, 2008) or the distribution of costs and benefits (Clayman & Heritage, 2014). Analysing how help is

accomplished in social interaction can demonstrate how participants understand the social relations of help.

Institutional help-seeking

Entitlement and obligation to help are particularly salient in institutional contexts. In emergency calls, establishing a joint understanding of callers' entitlement to seek help for others is consequential for the provision of help. In one infamous emergency call, misalignment between caller and call-taker regarding the caller's knowledge about his stepmother's problem and his entitlement to request an ambulance led to the fatal delay of help (J. Whalen et al., 1988). To guard against possible suspicion, callers seeking emergency assistance display both their physical and social relation to the trouble. Callers establish their physical relationship to the problem by displaying the basis of their knowledge (e.g. being within eye- or ear-shot) and their social relationship to the problem by displaying whether the problem 'belongs' to them or someone else (M. R. Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990). Seeking help on behalf of others can pose interactional challenges, particularly when callers lack epistemic access to the problem at hand (Fele, 2014).

One taken-for-granted feature of institutional calls is a shared assumption that callers are seeking help for themselves. When callers are instead seeking help for others, they regularly account for doing so in their opening turns (Sharrock & Turner, 1978). One basic way to account for seeking help for others is through the use of categorical person reference terms. Kitzinger (2005) showed that callers seeking afterhours medical care for others regularly referred to patients using category terms in their requests for help. The categorical relationship between help-seeker and help-recipient was procedurally consequential for the trajectory of the calls. When callers referred to patients using category terms from the collection family (e.g. a spouse or child), doctors asked callers where they lived, displaying a common-sense expectation that members of such categories live together. When callers referred to patients

using different category terms (e.g. a boyfriend or an adult child), doctors asked where the patient was, displaying an assumption that such relationships are not characterised by co-residence. Seeking help on behalf of others is a social action that makes visible normative arrangements of categorical rights and obligations.

However, the link between category membership and entitlement to seek help for others is a negotiated accomplishment. The action of seeking help for others can be used to infer participants' category memberships in different ways. For example, a woman seeking help for her boyfriend's eating habits on an online forum characterised herself as a concerned partner seeking advice. But respondents to her post categorised her as a 'nagging girlfriend' and discredited her rights to seek help for her boyfriend (Gordon & İkizoğlu, 2017). Thus, whether seeking help is understood as warranted can depend on how social relations are configured.

Seeking help for others in calls to victim support

Social psychological research has demonstrated that social relations play an important role in people's decisions to seek or offer help (Levine & Cassidy, 2009) and that close personal relationships are associated with seeking help for others (Hing et al., 2013; McCann & Lubman, 2018). However, much less is known about how social relations shape help-seeking in naturally occurring interactions. This paper provides an empirical investigation of seeking help for others as it occurs *in situ.* I analyse how callers to a victim helpline oriented to social relations when seeking help for others. I focus on the categories participants themselves treat as relevant. Membership categories are stores of common-sense knowledge about the kinds of activities that are normative for different kinds of people (Sacks, 1972b). Examining the link between categories, entitlement, obligation, and opportunity provides an emic perspective on how social relations matter for seeking help for others.

Data and method

The data are recorded calls to a victim helpline in New Zealand. The helpline is managed by community organisation Victim Support, which offers free emotional support and practical advice to victims of crime and trauma. Support workers are stationed around the country, while a national Contact Service manages the helpline and allocates clients to support workers. In contrast to other services where call-takers provide emotional support, the Victim Support helpline is a first point of contact. Call-takers connect clients to their support workers, enter new clients in the database, or transfer calls to other services. The work of emotional support is largely deferred to support workers.

The data corpus consists of 396 recorded calls collected in 2015-2016. The Contact Service routinely record their calls for training purposes. A pre-recorded message notifies callers they can request recording be halted at any time. The organisation amended this pre-recorded message and their online privacy statement so recordings could also be used for university research. Call takers provided written consent to have their recorded calls included in the research sample and were given the opportunity to withhold calls they did not want included. The research was approved by the university ethics committee. To maintain confidentiality, identifying information such as names or addresses have been edited from the sound-files and replaced with pseudonyms on the transcripts.

Calls were listened to and catalogued according to details such as call length, outcome (i.e. transfer), gender of caller, and incident type. Calls have been progressively transcribed following conversation analytic conventions (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017; Jefferson, 2004). In the course of examining how help was sought and offered, I noticed that some callers sought help for themselves, and others sought help on behalf of others. Upon returning to the corpus, I identified a sub-set of 34 calls where callers sought help for others. An initial observation was that some callers identified in terms of institutional categories, such as police officers

referring a victim for support, while others identified in terms of relationship categories, such as family members or friends.

In this discursive psychology study of seeking help for others, I combined sequential conversation analysis and membership categorisation analysis to examine how the categories participants used were consequential for the sequential unfolding of the interaction (see Stokoe, 2012). For each case, I analysed how callers referred to themselves and others, which collections of categories these references invoked, and how participants oriented to categories as relevant for building and interpreting requests for help. In just under half the cases (n = 16), callers used categories to refer to both themselves and the person they were calling for. In other cases, callers referred only to the person they were calling for (n = 13) or categorised themselves directly (n = 5). Nevertheless, the link between categories and actions means callers' relationships to those they sought help for were inferentially available even when not named explicitly. This inductive approach demonstrates how categorical social relations mattered to participants seeking help for others in social interaction.

Analysis

In three sections below, I examine how seeking help for others was rendered accountable through participants' orientations to entitlements, obligations and opportunities associated with different categorical relationships between help-seekers and help-recipients. The first section briefly establishes how callers used categories to establish their entitlement to seek help for others. The subsequent two sections examine how different collections of categories can configure seeking help for others in terms of obligation or opportunity.

Entitlement to seek help for others

Callers' use of categories were a key resource for establishing their entitlement to seek help for others. Participants displayed an understanding that certain category memberships entitled seeking help for others. For example, in Extract 1, the caller (CL) uses

categories to refer to herself and the person she is calling for. These categories establish the basis of their relationship and provide a warrant for why she is calling. CT refers to the call-taker.

Extract 1: Tom 21

```
01   CT:     Kia o:ra victim support this is To(h)m,[1]
02           (0.6)
03   CL:     Kia ora!=It's Verina practice nurse calling
04           from: Kohamahama medical clini:c in Northington.
05           .hh I was just after some advice regarding one of
06           my patients?
07           (0.4)
08   CT:     Oh yeah? Go ah[ead.]
09   CL:                   [Um- ]
```

In her opening turn, which functions as a pre-request (Schegloff, 2007), the caller categorises herself as a "practice nurse" (line 3) and refers to the person she is calling for as "one of my patients" (lines 5-6). Nurse is a professional category with certain rights and responsibilities vis à vis patients (cf. Sacks, 1967). The caller orients to her entitlement to seek advice about a patient, using the possessive "my" (line 6) to describe the third party as under her care. The call-taker aligns with the caller's claimed entitlement, producing an explicit "go ahead" (line 7) that invites the request for advice on behalf. Thus, the participants jointly orient to seeking help for others as a category-bound activity associated with institutional membership.

Yet it was not just institutional representatives who oriented to their category-bound entitlements to seek help for others. Callers who used relationship categories likewise oriented to their entitlement to seek help for others. In Extract 2 below, the caller displays an entitlement to seek help for her daughter.

Extract 2: Samuel 64

```
01   CT:     Kia ora victim support Samuel speaking,
02           (1.0)
03   CL:     .hh Hi:! Um (.) we had quite a (.) bad bre:ak in and
```

[1] "Kia ora" is a Te Reo Māori greeting used in New Zealand English

```
04          I wanted to: um .hh recommend my daughter for um
05          support,=The police gave me your number?
06          (0.8)
07  CT:     Oka:y you want to recommend your ah your daughter for
08          ah support [from us,]
09  CL:                [ YE::s  ]
```

The category-resonant description "we had quite a (.) bad bre:ak in" (line 3) makes inferentially available that the caller is member of a collectivity who can be categorised as victims. This description also presents a relevant institutional problem for an organisation that offers emotional support to victims of crime and trauma. However, the caller's declarative request, "I wanted to: um .hh recommend my daughter for um support," (lines 4-5) displays that she is calling on behalf. Referring to someone as a daughter invokes the caller's own membership in the category mother, within the standardised relational pair child-parent (Sacks, 1967). Mothers have common-sense rights and responsibilities to their children, and the caller orients to her category-bound entitlement to seek help for her daughter.

Before the call-taker can respond to the request, the caller latches another turn constructional unit to her turn, "the police gave me your number?" (line 5). This description of how she came to call works to legitimise her request. That the police gave her the number for the victim helpline displays another institution's tacit support for her rights to seek support for members of her family.

In the extracts above, participants orient to callers' entitlements as members of professional or relationship categories to seek help for others. In the following section, participants orient to callers' obligations to provide help and treat seeking help for others as accountable.

An obligation to help

In Extract 3, the caller orients to her obligation to provide help and accounts for seeking help instead.

Extract 3: Samuel 43

```
01   CT:     Kia ora!=Victim support Samuel speaking,
02           (1.0)
03   CL:     Good morni:ng, Um my name is Deb Larry I'm calling
04           in regard to my son ~who is in~ Westmere Sherring,
05           =.hh He's threatening suici:de, .hh We recently
06           lost my son and his brother to sui~cide~, .hh
07           And his marriage is falling down a- (.) around him.
08           .hh Because I'm currently in Moorland there's
09           nothing I can do.=Can you please get someone to him.
10           (0.4)
11   CT:     .hh Okay yes:. He's in um (0.2) .h he's in Westmere
12           did you say?
```

The caller establishes the relationship between help-seeker and help-recipient in her first unit of talk. Referring to "my son" (line 4) makes her own categorical identity as a mother inferentially available. Thus, the help-seeking is located within the entitlements and obligations associated with the standardised relational pair parent-child (Sacks, 1967). The description of the problem using the present tense "threatening suicide," (line 5) displays the caller's epistemic access to an ongoing situation (cf. M. R. Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990).

In two subsequent turn constructional units, the caller elaborates on the troubles her son is facing. These troubles not only upgrade the severity of his threats but work to account for why the caller is seeking help on his behalf. The description "we recently lost my ~son and his brother to sui~cide~" (lines 3-4) identifies both caller and her son as institutionally relevant victims – people who have lost a family member to suicide. The caller later reveals that her son has been allocated a support worker and is a client of the organisation (not shown). The caller's description of her son's trouble also accounts for why members of other proper relationship categories (i.e. a brother or spouse) are unavailable for her son to turn to.

As a mother, the caller is a relationship category member with proper entitlement and obligation to help her son. She orients to her obligation to help him by accounting for her inability to do so. She formulates her location as the reason there is "nothing" (line 7) she can do. The pseudonyms Westmere Sherring and Moorland refer to cities more than five hours'

drive apart. Using place names relies on members' knowledge of common-sense geography (Schegloff, 1972) to provide a recognisable reason for her inability to help. Having established her inability to fulfil her obligation to help, the caller orients to her entitlement to seek help on her son's behalf. Her request (line 9) displays entitlement through the interrogative format and use of the modal verb "can" (Curl & Drew, 2008). Thus in this extract, the caller orients to her category-bound obligation to help. She explicitly claims an inability to fulfil this obligation to account for instead turning to an institution.

In the extract below, the caller likewise orients to her obligations to help as a member of a proper relationship category and accounts for her inability to do so. The caller displays her lack of familiarity with the service by describing how she found the phone number (lines 3-4) and requesting information about the services available (lines 8-10). Nonetheless, she describes the problem in a way that displays her understanding that emotional support is offered to victims.

Extract 4: Samuel 54a

```
01   CT:     .hh Kia ora victim suppo:rt Samuel speaking,
02           (0.6)
03   CL:     .h Oh hi Samuel, Um (0.6) >I just got this< (0.2)
04           number from >one of our< local um phone books?
05           (0.8)
06   CT:     Oh yes:,
07           (0.4)
08   CL:     And um I've- (0.4) I'll just take off, (0.2) .hh
09           Yeah no just wondering what um °°er-er-°°(0.6) tch
10           like what you guys >can do cos I've got a bit of a<
11           um: (1.0) it's been ongoing for about (.) a month
12           but I've got a bit of a (0.4) °er-° (0.2) er (0.2)
13           .h (0.4) court policey kind of situation that I've
14           got myself into, And my mum: (0.6) is really really
15           quite upset about it?
16           (0.4)
17   CT:     .htch Oh yes, okay?

             ((14 lines omitted – mother's location provided))

18   CL:     A:nd uhm I was just wondering like (0.8) I'm
19           okay for the day, (1.2) But I've just started
20           to >really really< think of her=And I gave her
21           a call to:day but couldn't really (0.2) .h (0.4)
```

```
22           talk to her properly,=Um (.) whether: you guys
23           have people that (0.4) if travelling (0.4) uhm
24           (0.6) are willing to like call in and (0.2) .hh
25           (0.6) and pop in and have a visit with(h)
26   CT:     .HH ((clears throat)) Now that c- can be arra:nged,
```

The caller initially designs her reason for calling as an information-seeking request about "what you guys >can do" (lines 9-10). After a word search (line 12), she describes the problem she is seeking help for as a "court policey kind of situation that I've got myself into," (lines 13-14). Despite describing the problem using the personal pronoun "I" (lines 12-13), the caller specifies that her "mum: (0.6) is really really quite upset about it?" (lines 14-15) which makes inferentially available she is seeking emotional support for her mother. Referring to someone as "my mum:" (line 14) also invokes the caller's category membership as a daughter within the standardised relational pair (adult) child/parent.

After describing where her mother is located (not shown), the caller begins a request that displays her orientation to her category-bound obligations. She halts what is projectable as a declarative request "I was just wondering" (line 18) to specify that she is seeking help on behalf. By describing herself as "okay for the da:y" (line 19), she displays she is seeking help for her mother rather than herself. After becoming concerned about her mother's wellbeing, she called her, "but couldn't really (0.2) .h (0.4) talk to her properly" (lines 21-22). As a member of a proper relationship category, the caller has recognised her obligations to help her mother and undertook to help her by calling. However, much like Extract 3, the caller is unable to provide the help needed. After accounting for her inability to provide the help needed, the caller resumes the request where she left off , using "whether:" (line 22) as a direct continuation of "I was just wondering" (line 18).

However, later in the same call, the call-taker orients to a different set of categories as relevant for understanding the caller's help-seeking. After the call-taker pursues details about the caller's experience to determine if her mother is eligible for support, she reveals that she

has breached her parole conditions (not shown). The extract below picks up just after this disclosure, where the call-taker ascribes a different category membership to the caller.

Extract 5: Samuel 54b

```
01   CT:     In-in which cas:e um that-that-that's where
02           you're um you're .h the offender aren't you?
03           Like not ah: not so much the victim? (.) .h
04           It's ah: (l-) it was your responsibility to
05           >y'know< to be where you were supposed to be
06           for the: um you know .h for the probation.
07           (.)
08   CT:     .hhh S[o    um       ]
09   CL:           [>Yeah yeah I-<] °(exactly)° I'm not
10           trying to ask for support I'm trying to ask
11           (0.2) to see if there's any support for my mum
12           being the victim >a-a- a- A victim of (.) of:
13           (0.2) you know m- what's (0.4) [   g]one on.=
14   CT:                                 [(.h)]
15   CL:     =Yeah [exact]ly I'm (0.2) OWNing that that's=
16   CT:           [(d-) ]
17           =why I'm ringing ya(h) hh
18           (0.2)
19   CT:     .h YE:ah yeah .h so victim support wouldn't
20           unfortunately be: um the appropriate place to
21           offer support to your mother .h in that
22           situation.
```

The call-taker explicitly categorises the caller as "the offender" (line 2), marking this as the upshot of her description. The call-taker displays his understanding of victim-offender categories as mutually exclusive, claiming that her identity as an offender means she is "not so much the victim?" (line 3). He articulates the moral upshot of the caller's category-bound "responsibility" (line 4) to meet her probation conditions. Articulating someone's failure to fulfil category obligations is a way to attribute blame (Watson, 1978) which here displays the call-taker's stance on the caller's actions.

Rather than deny her ascribed category membership, the caller addresses the accountability of her help-seeking. She disavows that she is seeking support for herself, instead describing that she is "trying to ask (0.2) to see if there's any support for my mum" (lines 31-32). By formulating her conduct in this way, she addresses the accountability of her action (Sidnell, 2017). She displays an understanding that, as an offender, seeking help from Victim

Support for herself is morally sanctionable, and denies doing so. Instead, her formulation of seeking help on behalf displays her understanding of categories that licence help-seeking. The caller orients to the help-recipient's identity as more relevant than her identity as a help-seeker. Categorising her mother as "A victim" (line 33), establishes her mother's entitlement to support – irrespective of her own categorical identity as an offender. For the call-taker however, the caller's categorical identity as an offender invalidates her rights to seek help for herself *or others,* reflecting institutional policy that states Victim Support cannot assist offenders or their families.

Callers who categorise themselves as members of proper relationship categories display an orientation to their proper entitlements and obligations to help members of standardised relational pairs (Sacks, 1967). Although Sacks noted that members of proper relationship categories "on being turned to for help may themselves seek out a professional" (p. 220), callers accounted for doing so by describing their inability to provide help. However, intersecting category memberships could invalidate callers' rights to seek help for others. In the final section below, I explore other instances where callers' intersecting categorical memberships are relevant for seeking help for others.

Opportunities to seek help for others

Not all help-seeking calls for others were configured in terms of entitlement or obligation. In this final section, I examine cases where participants oriented to callers' help-seeking actions as opportunities as a result of intersecting category memberships.

In Extract 6, the caller categories himself as "a shift commander" (line 2), a member of the collection of categories with knowledge and expertise about problems such as victimisation. Yet he is not calling to make a straightforward police referral and instead presents his help-seeking as a matter of opportunity.

Extract 6: Claire 16

```
01   CT:     Kia ora victi:m support this is Claire,
02           (1.0) ((voices in background))
03   CL:     Hello:. It's uh: Jake Chamberly speaking, I'm a:
04           um (.) tch .hh a shift commander in south comms,
05           .hh [ In  Dur]wood, .hh [U:m] >but I'm actually<=
06   CT:         [  yeah? ]          [mm ]
07   CL:     =ringing: u:m: (.) about a: um .hh an Asian
08           lady here in Durwo:od: u:m who approached me,
09           .hhh She works in a >rest ho:me and my mother's
10           the:re and um (0.4) >she knows I'm in the police<
11           And .hhh she was after some advi:ce.=And I was
12           just thinking it mi:ght be a victim suppo:rt
13           thing >and you might be able to help with?<
14           (0.2)
15   CL:     .hhh U:m (0.2) tch am I talking to the right
16           person [for that?]
17   CT:             [   .hh   ] #I-# [I:'m] I-I'm not su:re=
18   CL:                             [or::]
19   CT:     =ah it-it depends abou- on the: um circumstances
20           so .hh ah wha-what what has happened,
21           (0.4)
22   CL:     Yeah well there's no: there's no family violence
23           >or anything at this stage (they ascerta:in<)
24           but she's- >basically she's broken up from her
25           hubby,
26           (0.6)
27   CL:     Ah and I think he's New Zea- >I don't know if he's
28           Asian I think he might be New Zealander< [um ]
29   CT:                                              [O:w]
30           (0.4)
31   CL:     And ah she's just looking thro:ugh about getting
32           .hhh sorting out with the property: and >like
33           he's< still living there by r-agreement but he's
34           meant to be moving ou:t and just (0.2) .hh sorting
35           ou:t um: (.) tch whether she should apply for a
36           protection order,
```

The caller's self-categorisation as "a shift commander in south comms," (line 2), suggests his rights for calling are located with his professional category membership, but with "actually" (line 3), he marks that the reason for the call is contrary to what might be expected (Clift, 2001). He refers to the person he is calling for as "an Asian lady" (lines 5-6). These categories for help-seeker and help-recipient are not paired; nor are they relational. Thus, the caller displays that he is seeking help outside of the normative framework of categorical entitlements and obligations.

Because the woman has “approached” (line 6) the caller in a personal capacity, rather than making a formal report to police, he lacks the entitlement of his professional membership to make a straightforward referral. With only a tenuous personal relationship, he is not obligated to seek help on her behalf. Instead, he has taken the opportunity to do so. That opportunity arises in part from his professional category membership. His identity as a police officer is the reason the woman sought him out (line 8) and provides him with the knowledge to infer she may need a protection order (lines 33-34).

The opportunity to seek help also arises from the unavailability of others who might be normatively proper to do so. Although the caller disavows the category “family violence” (line 20) – notably, “at this stage” (line 21) – the category provides inferences to understand the relationship break-up. The colloquial term “hubby” (line 23) references a member of a relationship category. Husbands and wives are members of standardised relational pairs, and the woman’s husband is a first position member of a proper relationship category (Sacks, 1972a). However, when the husband is also a (potential) perpetrator of violence, the rights and obligations associated with relationship categories intersect with those associated with victim and perpetrator categories. First position category members likes spouses have the right to be turned to first which means victims of family violence cannot properly turn to friends or other family members within the normative rules of the search for help (Sacks, 1972a). This problem has long been documented in feminist research where women report feeling unable to turn to others, even those whom they are close to (Sabina et al., 2014; Towns & Adams, 2009). Thus in this case, a caller who does not have a proper relationship (but instead institutional knowledge related to his role as a police officer) may be uniquely placed to seek help on behalf

In Extract 7, the caller likewise orients to knowledge associated with her professional role, even as she configures her help-seeking within relational categories.

Extract 7: Siobhan 21

```
01   CT:     .h Kia ora victim support you're speaking with
02           Siobhan,
03           (0.4)
04   CL:     .h Yeah hi Vaughn my name's Rey. .hh Um I'm ringing up
05           on behalf of a (0.6) um of a frie:nd that's in a (0.4)
06           .hh really difficult- <I've actually just rang acc.=
07           But anyway, .hh U:m (0.4) Hhh (1.0) .hh (1.0) I've got
08           a fri:end that's (0.6) got (m-) hh hh went through
09           trauma as a chi:ld um like (1.0) was locked in
10           cupbo:ards and things like that?
11           (0.4)
12   CT:     Okay,
.
.            ((21 lines omitted – description of the problem))
.
13   CL:     And she .HH she's tried counselling and it's not
14           h:elping and .hhh I mean I'm not a c- counsello:r but
15           I've I: work two twelve step programmes.
16           (0.6)
17   CL:     And she- Oh that's how I met her in al anon because
18           of the trauma in her life,
19           (0.6)
20   CT:     Mhm?
21   CL:     And u:m (0.8) tch .hh HH you know (0.2) s-they're on
22           one wa:ge she's not able to work at a:ll, .hh (0.2)
23           Um she just needs: (1.0) tch .hh well it's more than
24           counselling she needs ps-ps-psychology,
25           (0.4)
26   CL:     I- (0.2) you know (.) I mean I'm not a doctor I know
27           that but
28   CT:     Mhm,
29           (0.4)
30   CL:     How (0.8) you know (0.6) how (0.2) they can't afford
31           to go to a psychologist. She's spent quite a lot of
32           money on .hh cou:rses:? .hh U:m that she's gone to but
33           they're sti:ll not (0.8) you know she needs one on
34           one help?
35   CT:     [Okay]
36   CL:     [A:nd]
```

In her first turn of talk, the caller identifies that she is calling on behalf. However, she displays trouble referring to the person she is calling for. The word search "on behalf of a (0.8) um of a friend" (line 5) includes an intra-turn silence and "um" which flags the trouble and a repetition of "of a" before the caller supplies the category "friend" (line 5). Referring to someone as a friend invokes the caller's own category membership as a friend within the standardised relational pair friend/friend (see Sacks, 1967).

The caller cuts off her description of the problem (lines 5-6) to describe previous help-seeking efforts that have occasioned the call.[2] With the parenthetical marker "anyway" (line 7), the caller returns to a description of her friend's troubles that displays her understanding help may be available for a victim of trauma.

After elaborating on the problem (not shown), the caller claims her friend has "tried counselling and it's not h:elping" (lines 13-14). She begins to continue her troubles-telling with "and" (line 14), but halts the turn in progress to launch what Maynard (2013) described as an I-mean prefaced utterance (lines 14-15) to defend her rights to articulate the complaint on her friend's behalf. The caller disavows that she is a member of the professional category "counsello:r" (line 14) with proper rights to evaluate whether counselling is helpful or not. However, she categorises herself as a member of another professional category with the category-resonant description "I: work two twelve step programmes." (line 15). This description locates the caller within the collection of categories with specialist knowledge and expertise about problems such as trauma (Sacks, 1972a).

The caller orients to both relationship and professional categories as relevant in this instance of help-seeking. Although she is calling as a friend, she initially met her friend in a professional capacity (lines 17-18). Her professional category membership grants her rights to knowledge about the help her friend needs. However, she orients to the limits of her professional category entitlements. After asserting that her friend "needs ps-ps-psychology," (line 24), she again disavows category membership with another I-mean prefaced utterance (see Maynard, 2013). The caller orients to assessing psychological need as an activity properly bound to "a doctor" (line 26). Although she lacks this proper professional category

[2] ACC (the Accident Compensation Corporation) is New Zealand's no-fault injury compensation scheme which includes support for work-related trauma and sexual violence

membership, the caller nonetheless asserts that her friend "needs one on one help?" (lines 33-34) and is seeking financial support to allow her to access this.

Although the caller, as a friend, is a member of a proper relationship category, members of different relationship categories have hierarchically organised rights and obligations (Sacks, 1972a). Thus the caller has different obligations to help than first position category members such as spouses or family members (cf. Extracts 3 and 4). As a friend, she is not obligated to seek professional help for her friend. As a twelve step programme facilitator, she is not entitled to refer clients to Victim Support. However, her relationship with her friend and her professional knowledge grant her the *opportunity* to seek help on behalf.

In Extract 8, the caller similarly orients to her opportunity to seek help and the limits of her professional role. Both participants orient to her call as beyond the normal kind of help she is obligated to provide.

Extract 8: Samuel 97

```
01   CT:     Kia ora, victim support Samuel speaking?
02           (0.6)
03   CL:     Oh hi Samuel, Good morni:ng, Um my name is Lucy and
04           I'm a victim advisor at Omakau district court. How
05           are you?
06           (0.4)
07   CT:     Oh good thank you Lucy,
08   CL:     .hh That's good .h um look the reason for my call is
09           I was just talking to: one of the victims and she's
10           very distressed, .hh Um and she would really: be
11           helpful if someone can give her a call from victim
12           support? .hh Um if I give you her details and other
13           things er- y- is- can someone contact her today if
14           possible?
15           (0.4)
16   CT:     .HH Okay, Erm .h yes ah so d-does she know that you're
17           calling us to make a referral on her behalf?
18           (0.2)
19   CL:     Ah yes she did say that because I did (0.2) I did got
20           her permission and she agreed.
21           (1.0)
22   CT:     And she agreed, Okay then? .hh Yep okay we'll see about
23           that, Um .h so so you're in Omakau,
```

The caller categorises herself as “a victim advisor” at a district court (line 4). Members of this occupational category have special knowledge about how to deal with victims as professionals (Sacks, 1972a). The caller categorises the person she is calling for as “one of the victims” (line 9). These two categories are not a relational pair, but an institutional pairing with associated professional rights and obligations.

Despite this, the caller treats emotional support as a form of help she cannot provide. She accounts for calling by describing a prior conversation and assessing her client’s emotional state as “very distressed” (line 8). The caller is not a member of a proper relationship category or a proper professional category. Nonetheless, her relationship with her client allows her to infer a need for emotional support and her professional knowledge allows her to identify Victim Support as a potential help-provider. Thus, the caller’s help-seeking is an opportunity rather than an entitlement or obligation.

However, the call-taker targets her rights to seek support on her client’s behalf. His question (lines 16-17) treats the caller’s activity of arranging support as non-normative and potentially problematic if her client is unaware of it (see Sacks, 1967). By confirming that she explicitly sought permission (lines 19-20), the caller likewise displays an orientation that arranging support for her client is not a straightforward entitlement or obligation of her category membership, but a marked activity beyond the normal remit of her role. This displays the call-taker’s understanding that, as a court victim advisor, the caller lacks common-sense rights to seek support on her client’s behalf. It is only once the caller confirms the client granted “permission” (line 18) that the call-taker moves to provisionally progress the request. Thus, the participants jointly police the boundaries of the caller’s category entitlements and obligations, instead configuring her help-seeking as a matter of opportunity.

Discussion

On the victim support helpline, participants configured entitlement, obligation, and opportunity to seek help for others through category memberships. Participants oriented to the ways that seeking help for others invoked social relations between help-seekers, help-recipients, and help-providers.

In some cases, callers' categorical references to themselves or others were sufficient to establish their entitlement to seek help on behalf. These callers oriented to seeking help for others as a taken-for-granted entitlement of their category membership. Callers who categorised themselves within professional categories oriented to seeking help on behalf of others as a normative part of their professional membership. Callers who categorised themselves within relational categories oriented to seeking help on behalf of others as a normative part of their membership role when the problem was presented as an institutional matter.

In other cases, callers who categorised themselves as members of proper relationship categories oriented to their obligation to help others in need. These callers accounted for their inability to help to justify seeking institutional support on another's behalf. Callers' accounts invoked and reproduced normative expectations of relational care and support (see Kitzinger, 2005). However, participants negotiated which collection of categories were relevant. The call-taker who categorised the caller as an offender oriented to the way this institutionally relevant category membership trumped her common-sense rights and responsibilities as a daughter. Thus, whether seeking help for others is warranted can depend on the categorical relationship between help-seeker and help-recipient (cf. Gordon & İkizoğlu, 2017). Helpline call-takers, as potential help-providers, oriented to social relations as relevant in determining whether a request-on-behalf was warranted.

Some callers sought help for others without category-bound entitlements or obligations. In these cases, participants oriented to seeking help for others as an opportunity. Callers displayed that they had identified a need for help (sometimes as a result of their category-bound knowledge or personal relationship) and taken the initiative to seek help for another. In the absence of a straightforward entitlement to seek help for others, these callers treated their actions as accountable, producing justifications for why they were calling. Call-takers also oriented to help-seeking on behalf as outside of the remit of some professional roles. Thus participants jointly constituted which members of categories are entitled to seek help for others, and treated help-seeking in the absence of such relationships as accountable.

Just as different methods of recruiting help can present recipients with an obligation or opportunity to help (Kendrick & Drew, 2016), different social relations can grant help-seekers entitlement, obligation, or opportunity to seek help for another. The analytic findings align with research on emergency calls that documents how different social relations render callers' actions accountable in different ways. For example, a security guard reporting trouble fulfils a professional obligation, a wife seeking help for her injured husband claims a relational entitlement, and a passer-by takes an opportunity to report a crime just witnessed (cf. Fele, 2014; M. R. Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990). Just as callers seeking emergency assistance design their requests to display their social relationship to the problem, callers seeking support for others display their relationship to the person they are seeking help for.

Although Sacks (1972) noted the accountability involved in turning to strangers on another's behalf, this paper extends his observations about the way knowledge and relationship category collections can intersect when people seek help for others. I have shown how categories within relationship and knowledge collections confer different entitlements, obligations, or opportunities to seek help for others. Helping people who are suicidal, ill, or traumatised can be the proper remit of either professional or relational category members (cf.

Hunt, 1991; Izumi, 2017; Sacks, 1967). However, in the social context of the victim support helpline, a different collection of categories related to victimhood was also relevant in determining the legitimacy of a request for help on behalf. A key feature of institutional help-seeking is that institutional representatives claim the rights to determine which identities and self-other relations are relevant to understand and respond to callers' requests (Heritage, 2004). In calls to Victim Support, call-takers claimed the rights to determine who callers were relative to others, which was consequential in the provision or withholding of support.

Although seeking help for others is recognised as something 'concerned significant others' or 'affected family members' do (Hing et al., 2013; McCann & Lubman, 2018), there has been little analytic investigation of how category membership plays a role in this kind of help-seeking. Rather than applying predetermined analytic categories, I analysed the categories participants used for themselves. In doing so, I found that seeking help for others is not the sole prerogative of friends or family members. People without close personal relationships can and do seek help for others. In some circumstances, such as family violence, family members may be uniquely *un*suited to seek help for others. The findings demonstrate the value of avoiding presumptions about what kinds of help are normative for certain kinds of people. Instead, by documenting participants' own orientations to the normativity (or otherwise) of help-seeking, I have provided an emic perspective on the accountability of seeking help for others.

The unique configuration of social relations in seeking help for others makes it a fruitful area for discursive psychology to conceptualise help in new ways. Cognitivist social psychological investigations of help have shown that decisions to help are influenced by the presence of others (Darley & Latané, 1968) and that intergroup dynamics shape helping behaviour (Levine & Cassidy, 2009). However, my findings paint a different picture regarding the connections between help and relationships. When seeking help for others,

people visibly orient to the moral accountability of help, rather than interpreting helping behaviour as based on internal motivations. This initial investigation of seeking help for others demonstrates the possibilities for a discursive psychology of help to examine social relations as they are constituted in morally consequential ways by participants in interaction.

References

Clayman, S. E., & Heritage, J. (2014). Benefactors and beneficiaries: Benefactive status and stance in the management of offers and requests. In P. Drew & E. Couper-Kuhlen (Eds.), *Requesting in Social Interaction* (pp. 55–86). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Clift, R. (2001). Meaning in Interaction: The Case of Actually. *Language*, *77*(2), 245–291.

Curl, T. S., & Drew, P. (2008). Contingency and Action: A Comparison of Two Forms of Requesting. *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, *41*(2), 129–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/08351810802028613

Cutrona, S. L., Mazor, K. M., Vieux, S. N., Luger, T. M., Volkman, J. E., & Finney Rutten, L. J. (2015). Health Information-Seeking on Behalf of Others: Characteristics of "Surrogate Seekers." *Journal of Cancer Education*, *30*(1), 12–19. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13187-014-0701-3

Darley, J. M., & Latané, B. (1968). Bystander intervention in emergencies: Diffusion of responsibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *8*(4), 377–383. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0025589

Drew, P., & Couper-Kuhlen, E. (2014). Requesting – from speech act to recruitment. In P. Drew & E. Couper-Kuhlen (Eds.), *Studies in Language and Social Interaction* (Vol. 26, pp. 1–34). John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/slsi.26.01dre

Drew, P., & Kendrick, K. H. (2018). Searching for trouble: Recruiting assistance through embodied action. *Social Interaction. Video-Based Studies of Human Sociality*, *1*(1). https://doi.org/10.7146/si.v1i1.105496

Farmer, C., Farrand, P., & O'Mahen, H. (2012). 'I am not a depressed person': How identity conflict affects help-seeking rates for major depressive disorder. *BMC Psychiatry*, *12*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-12-164

Fele, G. (2014). Requesting help with null or limited knowledge: Entitlements and responsibility in emergency calls. In A. Zuczkowski, R. Bongelli, I. Riccioni, & C. Canestrari (Eds.), *Communicating Certainty and Uncertainty in Medical, Supportive and Scientific Contexts* (Vol. 25, pp. 139–156). John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/ds.25.07fel

Fox, B., & Heinemann, T. (2016). Rethinking format: An examination of requests. *Language in Society*, *45*(04), 499–531. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404516000385

Gordon, C., & İkizoğlu, D. (2017). 'Asking for another' online: Membership categorization and identity construction on a food and nutrition discussion board. *Discourse Studies*, *19*(3), 253–271. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445617701810

Heinemann, T. (2006). 'Will you or can't you?': Displaying entitlement in interrogative requests. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *38*(7), 1081–1104. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2005.09.013

Hepburn, A., & Bolden, G. B. (2017). *Transcribing for Social Research*. SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473920460

Heritage, J. (2004). Conversation Analysis and Institutional Talk. In R. Sanders & K. Fitch (Eds.), *Handbook of Language and Social Interaction* (pp. 103–146). Erlbaum.

Hing, N., Tiyce, M., Holdsworth, L., & Nuske, E. (2013). All in the Family: Help-Seeking by Significant Others of Problem Gamblers. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *11*(3), 396–408. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-012-9423-0

Hunt, M. (1991). The identification and provision of care for the terminally ill at home by 'family' members. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, *13*(3), 22.

Izumi, H. (2017). Help-Search Practices in Rehabilitation Team Meetings: A Sacksian Analysis. *Human Studies*, *40*(3), 439–468. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10746-017-9430-z

Jansson, G., Plejert, C., & Lindholm, C. (2019). The social organization of assistance in multilingual interaction in Swedish residential care. *Discourse Studies*, *21*(1), 67–94. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445618814040

Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In G. Lerner H. (Ed.), *Conversation Analysis. Studies from the first generation* (pp. 13–31). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Kendrick, K. H., & Drew, P. (2016). Recruitment: Offers, Requests, and the Organization of Assistance in Interaction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, *49*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/08351813.2016.1126436

Kitzinger, C. (2005). Heteronormativity in Action: Reproducing the Heterosexual Nuclear Family in After-hours Medical Calls. *Social Problems*, *52*(4), 477–498. https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2005.52.4.477

Levine, M., & Cassidy, C. (2009). Groups, Identities, and Bystander Behavior: How Group Processes Can Be Used to Promote Helping. In S. Stürmer & M. Snyder (Eds.), *The Psychology of Prosocial Behavior* (pp. 209–222). Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444307948.ch11

MacKay, J., Robinson, M., Pinder, S., & Ross, L. E. (2017). A grounded theory of bisexual individuals' experiences of help seeking. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *87*(1), 52–61. https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000184

Maynard, D. W. (2013). Defensive mechanisms: I-mean-prefaced utterances in complaint and other conversational sequences. In M. Hayashi, G. Raymond, & J. Sidnell (Eds.), *Conversational Repair and Human Understanding* (pp. 198–233). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511757464.007

McCann, T. V., & Lubman, D. I. (2018). Help-seeking barriers and facilitators for affected family members of a relative with alcohol and other drug misuse: A qualitative study. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, *93*, 7–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsat.2018.07.005

O'Doherty, L. J., Taft, A., McNair, R., & Hegarty, K. (2016). Fractured Identity in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence: Barriers to and Opportunities for Seeking Help in Health Settings. *Violence Against Women*, *22*(2), 225–248. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215601248

Read, S. A., Morton, T. A., & Ryan, M. K. (2015). Negotiating identity: A qualitative analysis of stigma and support seeking for individuals with cerebral palsy. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, *37*(13), 1162–1169. https://doi.org/10.3109/09638288.2014.956814

Reifegerste, D., Bachl, M., & Baumann, E. (2017). Surrogate health information seeking in Europe: Influence of source type and social network variables. *International Journal of Medical Informatics*, *103*, 7–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijmedinf.2017.04.006

Sabina, C., Cuevas, C. A., & Rodriguez, R. M. (2014). Who to turn to? Help-seeking in response to teen dating violence among Latinos. *Psychology of Violence*, *4*(3), 348–362. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035037

Sacks, H. (1967). The search for help: No one to turn to. In E. S. Shneidman (Ed.), *Essays in self destruction* (pp. 203–223). Science House.

Sacks, H. (1972a). An initial investigation of the usability of conversational data for doing Sociology. In D. N. Sudnow (Ed.), *Studies in Social Interaction* (pp. 31–74). Free Press.

Sacks, H. (1972b). On the Analyzability of Stories by Children. In J. J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (Eds.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication* (pp. 325–345). Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

Sacks, H. (1995). *Lectures on conversation* (G. Jefferson, Ed.). Blackwell.

Schegloff, E. A. (1972). Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place. In D. N. Sudnow (Ed.), *Studies in Social Interaction* (pp. 75–119). The Free Press.

Schegloff, E. A. (2007). *Sequence Organisation in Interaction*. Cambridge University Press.

Sharrock, W., & Turner, R. (1978). On a Conversational Environment for Equivocality. In J. Schenkein (Ed.), *Studies in the Organization of Conversational Interaction* (pp. 173–198). Academic Press.

Sidnell, J. (2017). Action in interaction is conduct under a description. *Language in Society*, *46*(03), 313–337. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404517000173

Stokoe, E. (2012). Moving forward with membership categorization analysis: Methods for systematic analysis. *Discourse Studies*, *14*(3), 277–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445612441534

Towns, A. J., & Adams, P. J. (2009). Staying quiet or getting out: Some ideological dilemmas faced by women who experience violence from male partners. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *48*(4), 735–754. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466608X398762

Watson, D. R. (1978). Categorization, Authorization, and Blame-Negotiation in Conversation. *Sociology*, *12*(1), 105–113.

Whalen, J., Zimmerman, D., & Whalen, M. R. (1988). When Words Fail: A Single Case Analysis. *Social Problems*, *35*(4), 335–362. https://doi.org/10.2307/800591

Whalen, M. R., & Zimmerman, D. (1990). Describing Trouble: Practical Epistemology in Citizen Calls to the Police. *Language in Society*, *19*(4), 465–492.

Zimmerman, D. (1992). The interactional organization of calls for emergency assistance. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Talk at Work* (pp. 418–469). Cambridge University Press.