How We Conduct Interviews

- The goal of this project is to highlight the experiences of those most directly affected by the UK's push to digitise and automate its benefits system. Everything we hear from claimants and advisers is useful and important, even if there is no apparent connection between technology and their experiences.
- **Interviews** are semi-structured and last between one and two hours. They begin with an exploratory conversation about the project, the purposes of our research, and why we are seeking their input. Interviewees are free not to answer a question, or end the interview at any time
- We will obtain explicit and informed **consent** from interviewees before the interview. Ahead of this, we will explain that the interview is voluntary and how information will be used.
- Interviewees who are happy with this will be quoted by name in our report. If they want to be anonymised, we can report their comments under a pseudonym. If they forgot to ask for **anonymisation** during the interview, they can ask the researcher for it afterwards. We can anonymise comments as long as our report has not yet been published.
- We seek to conduct interviews in **locations** that protect the privacy and security of the interviewee and are convenient to them. We will make reasonable adjustments to accommodate disability. If interviewees need to travel, we will cover the cost to and from the location.
- **We are keen to speak with claimants regardless of whether they ultimately consent to be cited in our report. This is because what they tell us will be valuable in shaping the direction of our research, and our understanding of the challenges they and other interviewees face.**

Case Examples

Example #1[1]

Katie and Luke have two children aged 12 and one. Luke works full-time in a warehouse, taking home between £285 and £300 per week (paid weekly). Katie works 16 hours per week in a shop (despite not being required to work given the age of her youngest child) and is paid £512 every four weeks. Due to the interaction of pay cycles and assessment periods, they

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[1] This is based on a case *study* in *Child Poverty Action Group*'s report, *"Rough Justice,"* https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/rough-justice-problems-monthly-assessment-pay-and-circumstances

have received vastly varying UC payments: December = £624; January = £466; February = £1,185; April = £392; May = £0; June = £598.

Why cases like this relevant to our research:

At the heart of UC is the Real Time Information (RTI) system, which collects earnings data submitted by employers to Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC) for tax purposes, and shares them with DWP to automatically calculate UC benefit amounts on a monthly basis. Cases like Katie and Luke's help us show how this automated, one-sized-fits-all approach to benefits calculation does not match the realities of claimants' employment and financial circumstances (such as zero hour contracts or irregular income), leading to fluctuations, delays and reductions in payments that cause financial hardship and food insecurity.

Example #2[2]

On the online message board, netmums, member Sarah M(4796) posts that she attended an Interview Under Caution in 2016. Investigators informed her that credit reference checks showed that her ex-partner was living at her address while she was claiming Income Support. She responded that their relationship ended and he moved out before she started her claim for Income Support. She asked her landlord to take him off the tenancy but the landlord would not do so without his permission. Without her knowledge, her ex-partner also registered two credit cards to her address. She said that she broke down during the interview, and feared that the investigation will cause her to lose her place as a student nurse.

Why cases like this relevant to our research:

The DWP's Living Together Data & Analytics program compares DWP data from Income Support claims with credit reference data to detect Living Together fraud. The project vendor forwards claimants flagged by the program to DWP investigators, who may conduct further investigation and summon claimants to an Interview Under Caution. Experiences like Sarah M(4796)'s help us understand the reasons why these forms of data analysis may not reliably predict the risk of Living Together fraud, the experiences of claimants during Interviews Under Caution, and the challenges they face when under investigation. The DWP has also deployed data analysis programs to predict whether claimants are being overpaid because they did not declare their student status, or have undeclared capital, property interests or income.

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[2] This example was lifted from netmums: https://www.netmums.com/coffeehouse/legal-social-services-1109/court-cases-43/1555528-interview-under-caution.html. We cannot verify or corroborate its claims – this is merely used for illustrative purposes only.