

Call for Abstracts for Special Issue of the Journal of Family History

Title: What Makes a Family?: Searching for Legal, Cultural, and Biological Answers in the Welfare State

Guest Editors: Cecilie Bjerre (University of Southern Denmark), Gareth Millward (University of Southern Denmark), Laura Kings (University of Leeds)

For over thirty years, the Journal of Family History has provided an essential forum for scholarship on the history of family, kinship, and population across global contexts. We are pleased to invite submissions for a special issue, *What Makes a Family?: Searching for Legal, Cultural, and Biological Answers in the Welfare State*, which seeks to expand our understanding of how families have been conceptualized and contested within welfare states.

Special Issue Theme

The family is widely regarded as the core social unit in welfare states, often mirroring the rise of the nuclear family in industrial capitalism. However, defining “family” remains fraught with historical, cultural, and contextual complexities. Definitions vary not only across time and place but also between the state and individual families, with significant implications for social security, healthcare, citizenship, and rights to family life. These tensions are pivotal, affecting how individuals and groups access critical resources and claim their place within the social fabric.

This special issue builds on themes from a recent UK-Nordic workshop, which gathered scholars to investigate family definitions in the welfare state and explore their impact. We aim to broaden this discussion to include comparative and interdisciplinary perspectives on the following questions: What defines a family within welfare states, and how do these definitions evolve over time? How do legal, moral, and cultural definitions of family affect access to welfare benefits and rights? And how do conflicting interpretations of “family” between citizens and the state shape experiences?

We invite contributions that address themes such as:

Legal and Biological Parenthood: How have welfare states addressed questions of biological versus legal parenthood, particularly in cases involving adoption, assisted reproductive technologies, and contested paternity?

Marriage and Kinship: In what ways have marriage, divorce, and extended kinship structures (including grandparental rights) been recognized or excluded by welfare policies?

The Child's Place in the Welfare State: How have children's roles and rights within families been conceived and protected within welfare systems?

State and Family Definitions: What tensions arise when definitions of family held by individuals and communities diverge from those used by the state, and what are the material consequences?

Intersectional Perspectives: How do race, gender, sexuality, class, and citizenship status intersect with welfare state definitions of family?

Submission Information

Deadline for submission of abstracts (max 400 words): **February 15, 2025**

Decisions communicated: **End of March, 2025**

Full papers submission deadline: **October 1, 2025**

All abstracts are to be submitted to cbjerre@sdu.dk

For further information, please contact the special issue editors, Cecilie Bjerre, Gareth Millward, and Laura King, at cbjerre@sdu.dk

Or check *Journal of Family History's* website: <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jfh>