

Call for Papers

Family & Disability. Comparing British and German Histories of Care for the Disabled

18-20.02.2021, German Historical Institute London, 17 Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2NJ, United Kingdom

Submission deadline: 15.01.2020

The care of people incapacitated by old age or disability has always been a central challenge for every kind of society. A significant proportion of this care work traditionally takes place within families, shaping their everyday lives and social practices. But this daily work on the part of family members is embedded in private negotiating processes, changing patterns of social recognition and frameworks determined by the welfare state. Up to now, however, historiographical research has not adequately addressed the question of exactly how each of these three factors influences who carries out this work, at what times and in what way, nor how they influence the likelihood that someone will accept or reject the care that is offered to them. We still know very little about how care within the family comes about or how the allocation of caring tasks among family members changes when someone becomes disabled. This conference, supported by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, aims to compare the factors that influence care arrangements at home, weighting them proportionally through a synthesis of disability history, care history and family history. The conference ranges across various historical periods, in order to show how care within families has changed over time. In this connection, we also want to discuss whether the inclusion of 'disability' as a component of historical research implies that we need to rethink the way in which we currently sequence family history. We will compare the situations in Germany and Great Britain in order to identify specific national traits. For example, we wish to explore whether differences between family care work in Germany and Great Britain in the modern era reiterate diverging pre-modern welfare structures or religious practices, or whether they have only emerged in the context of the modern welfare state.

We are therefore interested in proposals with a medieval or early modern theme, as well as those on developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, focusing on German and/or British family care in everyday life, and/or on political/expert debates and medialised depictions relating to these.

At the conference, we will especially ask how the national shaping of domestic caring arrangements has influenced the interplay between family constellations and disability. This is not just about identifying development paths in relation to specific care practices. Rather, we are interested in the effects of a (sudden) disability on how multigenerational communities and families view themselves – not only the way in which family members perceive and define their families, their way of life and their sense of belonging, but also from the point of view of outsiders. For example, do family units beyond the nuclear family gain legitimacy through care work? In alignment with the premises of disability history, disability is here understood not as an individual, medically defined characteristic, but as the product of contingent sociocultural designations and practices. Scholars of this field have emphasised that the lived realities of different groups of disabled people are, to a great extent, dependent on society's acceptance of their respective disabilities and the associated legitimisation – or not – of their need for care. At the same time, following one of the key principles of this new subdiscipline, we question whether people receiving care should be seen as passive. We therefore welcome submissions that analyse the attention given at different times to different groups of disabled people and how much agency disabled people have had in terms of accepting and shaping various forms of care.

The conference will also aim to shed more light on the gendered and generation-specific allocation of domestic care tasks, focusing especially on the inclusionary and exclusionary effects of at-home care for disabled people. It particularly seeks to find out more about why care work has so often been taken on by – or allocated to – mothers, daughters and other female relatives and what form(s) this care took in earlier times. Is it mainly due to the modern welfare state, whose benefits are structured around paid work, that any unpaid, time-intensive care work is more likely to be ascribed to female family members who (supposedly) are less likely to be the breadwinners? Or is it because gender norms view domestic work in general and care practices in particular as 'women's work', so that the existence of a disability within the family simply exacerbates the assumption that women will always be unquestioningly

available to provide such care? Here, too, we aim to transcend the level of concrete practices to look at political framings and media and academic negotiations of care work. It is also important to establish whether at-home care for disabled people is negotiated differently in public spheres and within the affected families. We welcome proposals that identify and contextualize gendered and other intra-familial fault lines in the allocation of care activities.

Please send abstracts (c. 500 words) and a short CV to lingelbach@histosem.uni-kiel.de and c.hodenberg@ghil.ac.uk by 15 January 2020.

The conference is also intended to give early career historians an opportunity to present their research findings and discuss these with colleagues. The conference language will be English and it is hoped that it will result in an English-language publication of selected papers. Travel, accommodation and sustenance costs will be met for all those invited to give papers.

For more information, please contact the two organisers of the conference:

Prof. Dr. Gabriele Lingelbach

Historisches Seminar der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel

lingelbach@histosem.uni-kiel.de

Prof. Dr. Christina von Hodenberg

Deutsches Historisches Institut London

c.hodenberg@ghil.ac.uk