



## Annex A – Studentship Application Form

<p><b>Title of proposed research – Social Work pathway</b></p>
<p><b>Women’s work? Social work practice in protecting children from male violence from 1889 to 2010.</b></p>
<p><b>Your research proposal.</b></p> <p><b>IMPORTANT: There is a <u>strict</u> 1300-word limit, fully inclusive of everything except references. This includes all the written text, quotes, in-line citations, section headers, captions, the contents of tables and any foot-/endnotes. Each figure/graphic should be counted as equivalent to 200 words. Tables should be counted as the number of words they contain. Proposals that are found to be overlength will be rejected. Remember that if you are applying to one of our interdisciplinary programmes, a clearly articulated interdisciplinary approach should be evident.</b></p>
<p>My proposal is for an engaged interdisciplinary PhD exploring change and continuity in ideas about gender in social work practice between 1889 and 2010, with a particular focus on maternal protection of children from domestic violence. This project aims to provide a new, longer-term perspective to contemporary research into gendered practice and add to the extensive historiography of social work (which largely explores discourses of childhood and the relationship between the family and the state), by focussing on gender and intersectionality. It will be of interest to academics, practitioners, and educators.</p> <p>There has been a decline in the teaching of social work history on qualifying courses and there is a tendency to locate the origins of the profession in the post-war creation of the welfare state which obscures earlier connections with social Darwinism, maternalism and the Poor Law (Scourfield, 2020). This loss of a historical perspective de-politicises a profession that operates on the boundary between state and family, within which responses to domestic violence serve as ‘a weathervane identifying the prevailing winds of anxiety about family life in general’ (Gordon, 1988 p.2). My research aims to challenge this trend, producing accessible training materials, drawing on the more troubling aspects of the profession’s past to provoke reflection on current attitudes. It will be rooted in practice, as ‘social work needs politicized, historical research’...’grounded in the lived experiences of people in poverty and in the lived experiences, dilemmas, and challenges of practitioners’ (Krumer-Nevo, 2009 p.318). This research is</p>



particularly relevant during a period of austerity, with high levels of domestic abuse within care cases and overwhelming evidence of the association between poverty and child removal, mediated by ethnicity (Bywater et al., 2020).

Scrutinising the performance of gender within the family has been central to the moral project of child and family social work since its origins in late nineteenth century philanthropy. The period chosen was marked by huge change in ideas about gender, childhood, sexuality, the family and the role of the state and the social worker. Nineteenth century discourses persisted, disappeared, and were transformed in response to wider political and cultural ideas, legislation, moral panics and changing 'scientific' theories of psychology and child development (Behlmer, 1982; Hendrick, 2003).

Nineteenth century philanthropists saw men as providers and women as responsible for creating a domestic ideal through good character, with children coming to be regarded as state assets (Davin, 1978; Davidoff and Hall, 2019). Over the next 120 years, mothers remained the primary focus of state scrutiny and intervention in family life, despite the influence of second wave feminism, changing discourses of masculinity and fatherhood, and increased recognition of male violence and sexual abuse. Contemporary social work continues to hold mothers primarily responsible for the care of children, with 'fathering' little explored. In addition, women are now asked to leave abusive relationships they were once expected to endure. This construction of maternal duty to protect is inadvertently both punitive and sometimes dangerous to women; it renders men largely invisible in child protection practice as both risk and resource (Scourfield, 2003).

Many women occupying proto-social work roles in late nineteenth century philanthropic organisations relied on maternalism to justify their authority over other women, particularly black and working-class mothers, and used the skills they gained as part of a wider campaign for suffrage and entry to education and the professions (Prochaska, 1980). Second wave feminist discourses constructing domestic violence as a manifestation of the patriarchy were instrumental in the establishment of family violence as a child protection issue during the second half of the twentieth century. However, the feminist rhetoric of sisterhood was



sometimes in sharp contrast to increasingly risk averse mother-blaming child protection practice (Hicks, 2015). Intervention in family life remains largely the province of female workers, although the social work profession can be described as ‘female-majority, male-dominated’ in terms of institutional power (McPhail, 2004b.). This research project focuses on the evolution of such gendered practice over time and its impact on women, particularly mothers expected to protect children from exposure to male violence.

My primary sources will be the Cheltenham Charity Organisation case files and related local authority records for 1893-1952 held in the Gloucestershire Records Office alongside more recent local authority social work case files, subject to ethical approval (which my registered social worker status will assist). I will also draw on the Birmingham University collection of social work training materials and the oral history collections held by the British Library collection and BASW. Data will be collected from case files at 30-year intervals with a focus on referrals, assessments and plans. Such sources make visible the assumptions of those who created them and unexpressed ideologies leak out from between the lines, creating an ideal location for a feminist examination of gender as an axis of power (Bressey, 2002; White, 2005; Gordon, 1988). I will take a mixed methods approach, using quantitative analysis to gain knowledge about levels of engagement with mothers and fathers respectively, alongside discourse analysis to examine constructions of gender in case files and training materials. This will allow comparison between rhetoric and practice. Completing the MRes will allow me to develop the necessary research skills for this ambitious project.

I will consider the following questions: what constructions of mothering, fathering and family violence do these sources express? How does the emergence of domestic violence as a child protection issue in the 1980s affect expectations of mothers? How do the ways in which women are attributed agency and responsibility for the protection of children change over time? How is female violence understood? How are these ideas mediated by class, race and sexuality? How do these discourses influence judgments of men and women as parents? Who do social workers



talk to, gather information about and make plans for? To what extent are maternalism and feminism used to endorse social work action? How does this change over time?

The study builds on my 36 years of work as a practitioner, trainer and researcher and my commitment to the creative dissemination of learning. My History Mst research examined discourses of femininity in case files produced by the Cheltenham Charity Organisation Society in 1893, finding an absence of maternalism, a lack of mother-blaming and the emergence of social work processes and procedures that persist today. My Advanced Social Work Msc used child protection files to explore work with violent men, finding selective use of feminist ideas within punitive practice that held women responsible for the protection of children.

I am particularly interested in how such gendered stories are expressed and hidden within the historically and socially contingent narratives of life story books created for children in care. I am an experienced practitioner, trainer and mentor in this area, author of the forthcoming RiP Life Story Work Practice Tool and national training programme. My article on this subject is on the reading list of many social work training programmes. My decision to study history was inspired by a visit to the Paramatta Female Convict Factory Memory Project as part of my Churchill Travel Fellowship to Australia (Djuric, 2016). This is a place where experts by experience work with and become historians, poets and playwrights to create collaborative, collective life stories. This is an approach I would like to develop in the UK post-doctorally, focussing on work with women who have experienced social work intervention as a result of domestic violence.

My ideas have been inter-disciplinary from their inception – a wish to pursue this way of working motivated my decision to study history. The proposed research is methodologically innovative, using historical analysis as a way of highlighting issues in contemporary practice and seeking to explore arts-based methods of disseminating knowledge within both social work education and through developing collaborative practice in the longer term. It has the potential to make a significant societal contribution.

**Word count (please complete): 1299**



**References (Bibliography)** (not included in your Word count)

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