

## History, Law and Reproduction: New Challenges for Legal History

In legal studies, the engagement with history can often be restricted to using history as background or context for a given study. Historical precedents tend to be referred to in a decontextualised manner. And legal historians are commonly perceived as those working on ancient legal sources (Sandberg 2022).

Yet there is a growing interest in history among feminist and socio-legal scholars of reproduction. Though it is not always self-described and represented as legal history, it questions and challenges the boundaries and methods of the discipline (e.g. Mulcahy and Sugarman 2015; Auchmuty, and Rackley 2020; Sheldon et al. 2022).

In this workshop we seek to address the following questions:

- Why does history matter for the legal study of reproduction?
- Does the legal historical study of reproduction pose specific methodological and theoretical challenges?
- Are socio-legal and feminist legal scholars shaping legal history?

The workshop will bring together a selected group of researchers to present work-in-progress papers at the intersection of law, history and reproduction. Legal history is not tightly defined, and diverse forms of engagement with historical sources/questions/context within the legal study of reproduction is strongly encouraged. While the papers need not explicitly address the questions above, they provide a framework within which discussions will proceed.

Bristol has an excellent network of researchers who are experts on abortion law, medical law, family law, socio-legal studies and legal history, who will serve as discussants for the workshop. The session will therefore provide an excellent opportunity for feedback, mentorship and networking, aiming to building a forum of scholars working at the generative intersection of law, history and reproduction.

We invite contributions, especially from early career researchers, located at this interface. We particularly encourage submissions that:

- Address methodological and/or theoretical questions
- Engage with little-known legal contexts, in terms of both time and place
- Adopt feminist and/or decolonial approaches.

The workshop will take place at the University of Bristol Law School on 1 May 2026, from 1-4 pm.

Please send an abstract (max 500 words) and a bio (max 200 words) to Dr Elena Caruso ([elena.caruso@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:elena.caruso@bristol.ac.uk)) and Dr Gauri Pillai ([gauri.pillai@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:gauri.pillai@bristol.ac.uk)) by 15 December 2025. Selected participants will be informed by 7 January 2026.

The deadline for the full paper (5,000- 8,000 words) will be 1 April 2026.

Financial assistance for travel will be provided to UK-based participants.