Family, Law and Technology: An Interdisciplinary Workshop on Digital Futures in Family Relationships and Regulation

Date and Time: Thursday 7th July 2022: 12.30 – 4.00 & Friday 8th July 2022: 10.00 – 1.00 pm

Venue: St Luke's Campus, Exeter Medical School, Room EMS G25 and on zoom (link will follow)

Background and aims

Family life involves complex interactions which have undoubtedly been affected by new technology, including the way relationships are formed, conducted and concluded. Technology is playing an increasingly visible role in different aspects of the family lifecycle, with both positive and negative effects and clear implications for the regulation of private and family life. In relation to family breakdown, for example, policymakers see new technology as a vital means through which formal processes of dispute resolution can be streamlined and made more efficient, benefiting users, judges and the courts. Recent experience of online processes during the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online and digital formats and tools for dispute resolution. It is almost certainly only a matter of time before decision-making based on AI and Machine Learning becomes a reality in the field of family justice, as it already has in less discretionary and less 'human-centred' areas of law. This will raise technological, ethical and legal questions which are likely to form the basis of future research. Technology has also become a more prominent means of facilitating some of the contact between children and parents in separated families.

The two day workshop aims to bring together people interested in identifying and discussing research questions which lie at the interface of Family, Law and Technology, and reflecting on the different interdisciplinary research methods needed to address them. It is hoped that the event will underpin future funding and publication collaborations.

The first day of the workshop involves 3 key speakers who will engage with the challenges and opportunities the digital future presents to families and family regulation with the aim of provoking discussion and debate. The second day, will be a 'sandpit-style' workshop, where participants will collaborate to develop research themes, ideas and opportunities around the topic.

Please register for this event using EVENTBRITE, indicating how you will attend, following this link https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/family-law-and-technology-an-interdisciplinary-workshop-tickets-367079975087

Zoom joining information will follow nearer the time to those who have registered on Eventbrite.

Please see the Programme below and contact Anne Barlow on a.e.barlow@exeter.ac.uk if you have any queries.

Day 1 – **Online speakers and hybrid attendance from delegates**

(Suggested format for key speakers 20-30 minute presentation followed by discussion)

12.00 – 12.30 – **Buffet Lunch** Outside room EMS G25 for in person delegates.

12.30 – 12.45 – Introduction to the workshop and speakers – Anne Barlow and Leanne Smith, University of Exeter Law School

12.45 – 1.45 – *Automating (family) justice and the potential of AI: Lessons so far* – Professor Roger Smith OBE, Visiting Professor London South Bank University; Researcher, journalist and law and technology expert formerly responsible for www.law-tech-a2.org funded by the Legal Education Foundation; former Director of JUSTICE and of the Legal Action Group.

1.45 – 1.55 Comfort Break

1.55 – 2.50 – *Supporting (separating) families digitally:* - Penny Mansfield CBE and Dr Shannon Hirst – OnePlusOne, a relationship research charity specialising in digital resources aiming to support and empower people in their relationships.

2.50 – 3.00 Comfort break

3.00 – 3.45 – *The impact of technology on relationships and family life* - Dee Holmes, Senior Practice Consultant, Relate, UK's largest national charity providing relationship advice.

3.45 – 4.00 - Closing remarks – (Housekeeping for Friday; Choice of breakout groups; Reflection on any themes to take forward to breakout groups)

Day 2 - Sandpit workshop – In person (preferred if possible) or online

The aim is to identify ideas, research questions, approaches and potential fruitful interdisciplinary research relationships on these issues.

9.30 – 10.00 - Coffee and introductions (30 minutes)

10.00 – 10.45
- **Breakout 1**: Brainstorming research issues/ questions around these themes from day 1 – 3 parallel sessions:
    - Relationships, family life and technology – impact of technology on getting together and intact relationships and what we need to find out as researchers and what methods might we use? (*Ammanda Major, Relate Family Therapist to lead*)
    - Separating families in the digital age – breakdown of relationships and using the digital to repair them or learn new relationship or co-parenting skills
    - Optimising a digital family justice system – ethics, challenges, opportunities, technical issues of digital family justice

10.45-11.00 – Report back in plenary

11.00 – 11.10 – Comfort/Coffee break

11.10 – 12.05

- **Breakout 2**: Technology, family, justice and your field/ discipline (3 interdisciplinary breakout groups each considering these questions)
    - What are the issues or areas of interest in your discipline or field?
    - How might these be complemented through using an interdisciplinary research framework?
    - What existing relevant research can you think of?
    - What are the methodological challenges and opportunities?

- **12.05 – 12.20** – Report back in plenary

- **12.20 – 12.55**
- Next conversations (Padlet exercise – 10 minutes)
    - Have we already identified any research areas or questions of shared interest?
    - What activities (e.g. lunchtime seminar/ reading group/ networking event/ stakeholder engagement/ sandpit) might we consider next; what might you be interested in?)
    - Which stakeholders should we be working with?
- **12.55 – 1.00 - Close**
- **1.00 – 1.30 – Buffet lunch for in person delegates**.