

Executive Summary

Truth Recovery Independent Panel Report

Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries,
Workhouses and related pathways and practices,
Northern Ireland 1922–1995

July 2026



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

“ I was certain that as soon as they saw my beautiful boy they couldn't help but change their minds and take me home with them. Of course, I was deluding myself and although my mother cooed over him, there was no way they were exposing my shame to the world.

“ I think I was always curious. I remember, I've always been an emotional child, and I've always struggled with me knowing that I was adopted. I've always struggled with why wasn't I good enough to be kept? Why did she give me away? What did I do?

“ I often try and picture it. That she was going to head for the Workhouse for that was the only place that girls like her could stay or visit. There was nowhere else for you. And she had another sister who left home and didn't want to know anything about Mother.

“ Nobody knew. I had to carry this. This was my secret, and I wasn't allowed to say anything to anybody.

“ I still grieve and miss the mum and dad I didn't have.

“ ‘Take her away, take her away. This one's for adoption, this one's for adoption. Take her away, take her away.’ And someone said to me ‘Close your eyes, close your eyes.’ So, I closed my eyes, I didn't see her. I felt her, but I didn't see her [sniffs] and she was taken away.

“ And I felt frightened, felt abandoned, I felt alone, I felt scared, I felt, I just felt, I just felt abandoned, completely abandoned. [Sniffs.] And didn't expect anything more of my mother, but I expected more of my father. And I was disappointed in him that he didn't stand up to her.

“ My personality, my character, my life choices all shaped and influenced by another family who raised me...not my mother.

“ It was very much about, you know, repenting about, you know, about sinning. It was about sinning, not even being stupid, it was about sinning, it was about going against God.

“ [My suitcase] had been packed, and it wasn't in my room, and when I asked, I was told I was going into the laundry. My case had already gone into the laundry, and I was to go down a particular corridor that we had never used before. Well, I did, and I was met at the other end by a nun who brought me to the dormitory, and on we went.

“ So I am relying on total strangers to tell me, my life and what they decide they want me to know, and what they decide well we'll not bother telling her that today that's not really relevant what they think, not what I think, what they think.

“ And the man was never mentioned. It was the girls were the bad girls.

Contents

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the recommendations and findings of the Independent Panel (IP) from its archival research and from a total of 284 testimonies. An outline of the background to the IP's work and its place in the overall truth recovery process can be found in the Introduction chapter of our final report.

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Readers' advisory

Readers of this Executive Summary are reminded that when quoting from historical records, newspaper reports and other contemporary sources, it is necessary to use the terminology and language that was used at the time of the texts' production. The IP is aware that such terms can be upsetting and unacceptable and that they would not be used today. Such terms are used as little as possible throughout this report but may appear in quoted sections. It is important to make the point that institutional records and reports are reflective of the creator's viewpoint and should not be considered conclusive nor definitive of the practices and processes of the institution that produced them. Nor should they be considered to be evidential or impartial in relation to the institutions themselves or the girls and women who were admitted to them. This report also discusses issues that readers will find upsetting. These include subjects such as incest, rape, child sexual abuse, domestic violence and abuse, family separation and poor mental health.

In terms of testimonies, when speaking about their personal history, some individuals quote the terms that were derogatorily used about them or their children in the past. We will quote these terms as they appear in the testimonies cited.

Volume 1

Introduction, Approach
and Recommendations



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

Content:

This section discusses:

- 1.0 Truth Recovery Independent Panel's vision
- 2.0 Acknowledgements
- 3.0 Working groups
- 4.0 Recommendations

1.0 The Truth Recovery Independent Panel's vision:

To work together as an Independent Panel, creating a safe, inclusive human rights-based process. Listening empathetically and recording and reporting truthfully the experiences of those whose lives have been impacted.

2.0 Acknowledgements

The IP's full list of acknowledgements is to be found in the Introduction. Here the IP reiterate their immense appreciation of so many victims-survivors and their relatives, and advocacy groups who offered their advice, assistance and lived experiences in very many different ways.

In particular, the IP offer grateful thanks to the 238 individuals who shared their testimony for this report. We appreciate that it was often a difficult thing to do. When added to the testimonies available to share from the 2021 Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and Ulster University (UU) report, a total of 284 testimonies has enriched our understanding and this report.

3.0 Working groups

The IP established four working groups that were tasked with carrying out programmes of work related to the Terms of Reference set out by the Truth Recovery Design Panel in 2021.¹ Details of how the working groups operated are summarised in the Introduction chapter. There are full discussions of their work in four dedicated chapters in the report.

4.0 Recommendations

The IP have made recommendations throughout the past three years. All of those are outlined and explained in the chapter on Recommendations. Here we list only the latest and final recommendations that are included in this report.

4.1 Recommendations to the public inquiry

4.1.1 Operation of the public inquiry

Recommendation 1

The IP recommend that the public inquiry create a mechanism to afford victims-survivors core participant status.

Recommendation 2

The IP recommend that the public inquiry create a mechanism to receive and consider testimony given to the IP.

Recommendation 3

The IP recommend that the public inquiry consider the experience of victims-survivors from previous public inquiries in designing trauma-informed procedures for the reception of evidence so that mistakes of the past are not repeated.

Recommendation 4

The IP note the positive practices of the Muckamore Abbey Hospital inquiry with regard to the treatment of vulnerable witnesses and recommend that the public inquiry examine this model and follow best practice.

Recommendation 5

The IP recommend that the public inquiry consider fully the institutional records accessed, compiled and analysed by the IP.

4.1.2 Serious human rights issues

On the basis of its analysis of the testimony and archival records gathered, the IP recommend that the public inquiry investigate further the following serious human rights issues in particular.

4.1.2.1 *In relation to oversight of the institutions*

Recommendation 6

The IP's investigation points to a systemic failure on the part of the state to exercise effective oversight of the operation of the Good Shepherd Sisters (GSS) St Mary's institutions, Thorndale Industrial Home, and the mother and baby institutions, as well as baby institutions, and over foster placements, boarding-out placements and adoptive placements. The IP consider this failure a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

4.1.2.2 In relation to the right to equality and non-discrimination

Recommendation 7

The IP's investigation suggests the very fact that the mother and baby institutions, St Mary's institutions and the Thorndale Industrial Home were permitted by the state to exist at all points to a systemic failure on its part to guarantee equal treatment and to prevent discrimination. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 8

The IP recommend that the public inquiry investigate where children with disabilities born to women admitted into mother and baby institutions were sent in those cases where family separation took place. The IP found very few records relating to the pathways taken by these children.

4.1.2.3 In relation to the right to life and the prohibition on inhuman and degrading treatment

Recommendation 9

The IP suggest that no woman or girl should have been sent to the St Mary's institutions, whether by the state, or by her family, or because there was nowhere else for her to go. This is especially so given that these institutions were not properly regulated, and that there was, accordingly, no effective protection for individuals admitted against abuse and neglect. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 10

Many participants who engaged with the IP spoke of abuse, neglect and inadequate care in mother and baby institutions. In many cases, their experiences amounted to degrading treatment, especially given the level of vulnerability of the girls and women at the time. In some cases – as in the allegations made of sexual assault by Sister Z, which are discussed in detail in the chapter on the GSS Marianville Mother and Baby Institution, Belfast – the experiences described are likely to reach the threshold of inhuman treatment. The IP consider the treatment of girls and women who were admitted to the mother and baby institutions, including their time in maternity hospitals giving birth, to be a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry. In particular, the conduct of Sister Z in Marianville merits special attention, given the allegations of abuse made against her by women who spoke to the IP.

Recommendation 11

In terms of protection against abuse and neglect, the situation for children in both baby institutions and mother and baby institutions appears to have improved in line with better regulation and inspection from 1950. However, from 1972, the inspection regime became less effective. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 12

The IP's investigation suggests that there were systemic deficiencies in the regime for the selection and inspection of foster homes, boarding-out placements and adoptive homes, leading to failures to protect some children in these homes against abuse and neglect. The IP recommend that this be investigated by the public inquiry on the basis that foster homes, boarding-out placements and adoptive homes are part of the pathways of the mother and baby institutions.

Recommendation 13

The IP also recommend that the public inquiry investigate the drug trial that took place in 1962, involving young children, and led by scientists at QUB on behalf of Glaxo Laboratories Limited, on the basis that the trial raises serious human rights issues.

4.1.2.4 In relation to the prohibition of forced labour

Recommendation 14

The IP's investigation indicates that labour laws were not enforced in the St Mary's institutions. In particular, women were required to carry out work for which they were not paid. Given that few women entered these institutions voluntarily, it is likely that many women experienced forced labour in them. The IP's investigation also suggests that women who worked in Thorndale Industrial Home were not paid. The IP consider the work done by women in these institutions a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 15

The IP's investigation suggests that some pregnant women and new mothers were required to work in mother and baby institutions, and that some were sent to carry out domestic labour in local private homes. In some cases, the experience described may have amounted to forced labour in as much as it was involuntary and unpaid. Some of the work described – such as washing windows while standing on ladders or scrubbing floors – was manifestly unsuitable for pregnant women or women who had recently given birth. The IP consider the practice of making pregnant women and new mothers carry out these forms of labour a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

4.1.2.5 In relation to the right to liberty

Recommendation 16

The IP's investigation suggests that the state should not have committed girls and women to the St Mary's institutions or to the Thorndale Industrial Home. This practice was discriminatory in as much as it only affected girls and women, and it appears also that the institutions were not regulated or inspected effectively. Although girls and women were sometimes sent to these institutions for their own protection, alternative solutions should have been made available. The IP consider the practice of committing girls and

women to these institutions a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 17

The IP heard evidence of girls and women admitted to mother and baby institutions against their will. Some said they were prevented from leaving, and there is evidence that some who left were brought back by the police. Others said that they could not leave because they had nowhere else to go. In this context, the state's failure to put in place an effective system of support for one-parent families is particularly significant. Even though girls and women were not detained in the mother and baby institutions in a legal sense, the evidence seen by the IP suggests that their presence there can rarely be described as voluntary in any meaningful sense. In some cases, their experience may have amounted to unlawful deprivation of liberty. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

4.1.2.6 In relation to the right to respect for family life

Recommendation 18

The IP find that the practices surrounding the giving of consent to adoption resulting in family separation after a mother was admitted to a mother and baby institution raise serious human rights issues. The IP recommend that these practices be further investigated by the public inquiry. In particular, the practices of the social worker anonymised in this report (as Social Worker A) merit special attention, given the concerns expressed by mothers with whom she had contact and by her social work counterparts who spoke to the IP.

Recommendation 19

The IP's scrutiny of the Marianville records indicate that between 1950 and 1970 it acted as a third-party adoption agency. This conclusion places the institution more centrally in the adoption process than the GSS have acknowledged in the past. The IP recommend that the public inquiry investigate this institution's dual role as a de facto adoption agency and as a mother and baby institution.

Recommendation 20

In the context of cross-border movement of children for adoption, the IP are concerned at the lack of evidence of compliance with requirements in the records of those institutions where this occurred. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that the public inquiry investigate compliance with the rules relating to cross-border movement of children organised by the institutions, the state and voluntary adoption agencies associated with their operation.

Recommendation 21

In the view of the IP, the question of consent needs always to be considered and understood in the broader societal context. This was in the context of prejudice and discrimination against girls and women generally, against 'unmarried mothers' in particular, and against their children. Reproductive justice evaded girls and women, with access to sex education, contraception and abortion all circumscribed. This was in a context in which social welfare provision for one-parent families was inadequate, and pursuit of a father for child maintenance entailed a risk of public humiliation for the mother. Taking these factors into account, the IP believe that even where, in a particular case, family separation was not forced in a technically legal sense, it does not necessarily follow that the adoption was voluntary in the true sense, or that the mother and the child were not victims of a harsh and unjust system. The IP recommend that in its investigation of adoption practices in mother and baby institutions and their pathways and practices, the public inquiry consider this wider context.

Recommendation 22

The IP did not receive co-operation from Barnardo's or the Sisters of Mercy in relation to the baby institutions they operated. On the basis that these institutions were part of the pathways of the mother and baby institutions and it would be artificial to exclude them, the IP recommend that the Sisters of Mercy baby institutions and Dr Barnardo's, Manor House, Ballycastle be investigated by the public inquiry. The IP note that they were not investigated by the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (HIAI). If legislative measures are necessary to permit this, the IP recommend that these be taken.

Recommendation 23

The IP suggest that a fuller analysis of the role of a small number of private nursing homes in facilitating family separations and an assessment of their role as de facto mother and baby institutions could be carried out by the public inquiry by checking the names of children born at the addresses of these nursing homes in birth registrations against the names of adopted children in the adopted children register.

Recommendation 24

Work on Recommendation 23 could be carried out in tandem with an examination of death certificates of any infant that died at Strand Nursing Home, Portstewart, during the period discussed in the chapter on Private Nursing Homes.

Recommendation 25

The IP suggest that births and subsequent adoptions linked to a small number of private addresses be examined by the public inquiry. This will confirm whether or not those private family homes were used as de facto mother and baby institutions for the concealment of pregnancies and family separation. The IP will provide details of these addresses for the public inquiry.

4.1.2.7 *In relation to the right to respect for private life*

Recommendation 26

The IP's investigation suggests that while, in general, Northern Ireland (NI) had a robust system of civil registration during the period 1922–95, there were some systemic weaknesses around the registration of births, making it possible for the births of some adopted children to be falsely registered. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 27

The IP have been able to locate death certificates for almost everyone whose death is recorded in the institutional records. The fact that some death certificates were not located may be explained by spelling variations or errors in the recording of names. The public inquiry may consider collaborating with the General Register Office Northern Ireland (GRONI) to identify the final missing registrations that relate to deaths that took place in NI. The IP did not find evidence of irregular or unlawful burials at the sites of any of the institutions. The IP's investigation suggests that, if the bodies were not claimed by their families, women, girls and their babies who died in the institutions were lawfully buried in ordinary burial grounds nearby or cremated by those operating the institutions or by the hospitals in which they died.

Recommendation 28

The IP were unable to inspect the Register of Stillbirths because it is not publicly accessible. The IP recommend that the public inquiry consider inspecting these registers, something the IP could not do, to identify any missing registrations for the sake of completeness.

4.2 Recommendations to the NI Executive

4.2.1 *Relating to the public inquiry*

Recommendation 29

The IP recommend the **immediate** appointment of the Chairperson of the public inquiry by The Executive Office (TEO). This will enable the Chairperson to engage in necessary foundational planning for the public inquiry, gathering of evidence and establishment of necessary support services for witnesses. The IP regret that the appointment of the Chairperson did not occur during our tenure. It was always the vision and recommendation of the Truth Recovery Design Panel that the synergy created by the overlap in these operations, approaches and workflow would benefit the overall truth recovery process.

Recommendation 30

The IP recommend that responsibility for release of testimonies for public viewing on the IP website be assigned by TEO to the Chairperson of the public inquiry when the inquiry begins. This relates only to the testimonies of participants who have consented to this. The IP hoped that this matter could have been dealt with earlier via discussion with the public inquiry's Chairperson. The IP are conscious that the Chairperson is likely to want these testimonies to be made available at a time when their publication does not interfere with the public inquiry's work.

4.2.1.1 Relating to inclusion of institutions and relevant persons

Recommendation 31

The IP recommend that Clogrennan Mother and Baby Institution in Larne, Co Antrim, be added to the list of institutions to be investigated by the public inquiry and to the list of institutions for the purposes of eligibility for redress.

Recommendation 32

The IP recommend that Thorndale Industrial Home in Belfast be added to the list of institutions to be investigated by the public inquiry and to the list of institutions for the purposes of eligibility for redress.

Recommendation 33

The IP recommend that the public inquiry review the list of private nursing homes it has identified for investigation as having acted as de facto mother and baby institutions. If it confirms that they did operate in this way, the IP recommend that they should be added to the list of institutions for the purposes of eligibility for redress.

Recommendation 34

The IP recommend that girls and women who gave birth in Workhouses and were separated from their children should be included, as should those children separated from their mothers, in the scope of the standardised payment scheme. There was no less pain and trauma as a result of family separation for a mother and her baby in a Workhouse infirmary than there was in a mother and baby institution.

Recommendation 35

The IP recommend that the category of baby institutions as pathways from mother and baby institutions be added to any list to be explored by the public inquiry.

Recommendation 36

The IP's investigation found that Barnardo's Deanery Flats was a facility that was established to support single mothers and ensure families remained together by offering vital support including an onsite nursery allowing mothers to go out to work. Unlike other

mother and baby institutions investigated by the IP, Deanery Flats was not established to conceal pregnancy or promote and enable family separation. The IP recommend that Deanery Flats be removed from the list of institutions to be investigated by the public inquiry and from the list of institutions for the purposes of eligibility for redress.

4.2.2 Relating to civil registrations

Recommendation 37

The IP recommend that consideration be given by TEO to amending the law so that, in future, giving false information in the context of the registration of a birth is treated as a more serious criminal offence than has been the case historically.

Recommendation 38

The IP consider that access to civil registration information should be improved by removing distinctions between adopted people in access to birth information by reference to their adoption being before or after a certain date. The IP note that this differential treatment will be abolished when the Adoption and Children Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 is commenced, and accordingly the IP recommend to the Executive that this occur as soon as possible.

Recommendation 39

The IP recommend that the practice of issuing short-form birth certificates to adopted people be reviewed.

4.2.3 Relating to registration of all burials

Recommendation 40

It has not been possible to identify precisely where every person who died while ‘resident’ in the institutions was buried because in many private burial grounds, comprehensive burial records were not maintained. In private burial grounds, there is no requirement that all burials be registered. The IP recommend that the registration rules for public burial grounds be extended to private burial grounds, so that all burials in NI will be officially registered. The IP further recommend that measures be considered by the Executive to preserve the records of private burial grounds as public records so that future access may be guaranteed. Consideration should also be given to using information submitted to GRONI in ‘Disposal of Body’ forms to compile a burial and cremation database.

4.2.4 Relating to redress and reparations

Recommendation 41

The IP recommend that consideration be given to the introduction of a statutory right to support services for victims-survivors. The current short-term, temporary funding

by TEO of existing support services is short-sighted in terms of strategic planning for the organisations involved. This also suggests a lack of validation of experiences and severity of impacts on victims-survivors.

Recommendation 42

The IP recommend that TEO progress discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions and their equivalent government counterparts outside the UK to ensure that applicants to the redress scheme will not be financially penalised and their state benefits will not be affected by receipt of a financial redress payment.

Recommendation 43

The IP recommend that TEO address the issue of non-payment of wages to women for daily manual work undertaken in the institutions. There is scant evidence that those girls and women were paid for the work or that superannuation payments were made by the institutions on their behalf. This has an impact on pension entitlement and economic status.

Recommendation 44

The IP recommend that TEO establish an effective mechanism and begin negotiations with those responsible for the management of the institutions to ensure there is financial contribution to the redress scheme.

Recommendation 45

The IP recommend that trauma-informed letters of acknowledgement and apology, from the First Minister and deputy First Minister, be written to families of impacted deceased relatives, recognising the suffering and undeserved shame and stigma they endured while alive, as an additional form of redress.

Recommendation 46

The IP recommend that work begin on the creation of an educational module relating to mother and baby institutions, Magdalene laundries, Workhouses and related pathways and practices for delivery on the Northern Ireland Curriculum at Key Stage 3, with input into its design by victims-survivors.

4.2.5 Relating to access to records

Recommendation 47

The IP recommend the **immediate** establishment of a central digital index of all NI adoption and care records to ease access to records in advance of the establishment of the permanent public archive. The IP note that TEO and the Department of Health met with the Health and Social Care NI (HSCNI) Trusts in January 2026 to discuss such a development. The IP recommend that the necessary resources be allocated as a matter of urgency, and that the Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI) be involved in the planning and implementation of such an index.

Recommendation 48

The IP recommend that the necessary legislative measures be adopted to designate all institutional records as public records, and that they be stored in a single archive. This accords with the wishes of victims-survivors as expressed in the IP's consultation with them about archives. In our view, this is the best way to ensure the safety and security of the records while at the same time ensuring that access to them can be guaranteed in accordance with law. See the full text of the IP's recommendations for the permanent archive in **Appendix 2 of Volume 1** of our final report.

Recommendation 49

The IP recommend the **immediate** provision of significant resources to the HSCNI Trusts to process requests for access to records within the three-month timeframe specified in the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Recommendation 50

The IP recommend that HSCNI Trusts take **immediate** steps to urgently address the recommendations made by PRONI in relation to record storage. PRONI identified inconsistencies in the physical storage of records between different Trusts, absence of consistent or reliable lists or catalogues, and lack of staff resources to locate and retrieve personal records. The Trusts should be cognisant of their obligations under the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act 2022.

Recommendation 51

The IP recommend the **immediate** establishment of a straightforward mechanism of application for court records relating to adoption. The application process should be accessible, without charge, to birth mothers, and all adults adopted in NI, or their relatives if the adopted person is deceased. The process should enable applicants to receive copies of NI court records relating to their or their child's adoption, in full, within one month from the date of receipt under the UK GDPR.

Recommendation 52

The IP recommend that all records from care and court services pertaining to a victim-survivor's time as an adolescent be made available to the public inquiry. It is essential that all information be shared with any person who has spent time in any institution as determined by the court.

Recommendation 53

The IP recommend that the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) take **immediate** steps to urgently address the recommendations made by PRONI about record storage arrangements and preservation of court records. NICTS should be cognisant of their obligations under the Preservation of Documents (Historical Institutions) Act 2022.

Recommendation 54

The IP recommend that a mechanism for access by adopted people to medical records of deceased parents be explored. The aim of this is to better balance their right to information about their identity and family health history against their parents' right to privacy and confidentiality of their own medical records. The full text of the IP's recommendations for the permanent archive includes details relating to proposed access rights and procedures.

Recommendation 55

The IP recommend access for immediate birth and adoptive family members to adoption and institutional records of deceased relatives' 'prescribed relatives', through development and implementation of regulations for the Adoption and Children Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

Recommendation 56

The IP recommend the **immediate** removal of means testing for legal aid for access to records requests by victims-survivors and their relatives, in relation to the institutions under scrutiny, related pathways and practices, and family separation. Although the Access to Records Guidance the IP has published includes advice on accessing remedies for failure to comply with access rules, we consider that access to these remedies is likely to be more effective if legal representation is provided. We recommend review and amendment of the relevant legislation. This recommendation was made by the IP in our interim report published in May 2024 and has yet to be actioned.

Recommendation 57

The IP recommend that TEO continue to support efforts to secure access to relevant records that are held in the Republic of Ireland (RoI). Co-operation to this effect was agreed at a meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in September 2024, and subsequent discussions included the suggestion that a Memorandum of Understanding be put in place between TEO and the Department of Children, Disability and Equality in RoI, to be supplemented by specific data-sharing agreements between relevant organisations, such as PRONI and Tusla. The IP recommend that TEO pursue these discussions as a matter of urgency, with a view to expediting access to records such as those relating to St Joseph's Baby Home and the associated St Clare's Adoption Society, Stamullen, Co Meath (currently held by Tusla) and to other relevant institutions.

Recommendation 58

The IP recommend that the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 be examined as a potential model for designating institutional records as public records. Section 3(1)(b) of that Act states that public records include 'records created by or on behalf of a contractor' in carrying out the functions on behalf of a public authority. The introduction of such a change in NI would have significant record-keeping benefits but also very significant resource implication for PRONI. The IP recommend that TEO consult with PRONI on such matters and that consideration be given to introducing such a change on a phased or sector-by-sector basis.

Recommendation 59

The IP recommend that the Department of Health, the HSCNI Trusts, and other public and voluntary agencies that create, maintain and manage records relating to institutions, adoption or state 'care' adopt participatory record-keeping approaches. This means that affected persons should have an input into the development of record-keeping policies and procedures, in discussion and consultation with the relevant public agencies and PRONI.²

Recommendation 60

The IP recommend that all government departments review arrangements relating to commercial off-site storage of records. The survey reports compiled by PRONI provide an insight into relevant storage and environmental issues. The driver for records management storage for statutory organisations at present is directly linked to cost and the Value for Money agenda. Preservation of records which are identified in Retention and Disposal Schedules for permanent or long-term preservation has been neglected. While commercial facilities will charge additional fees for environmentally managed storage facilities which meet the requirements for archival storage, it is the IP's view that such requirements should be met for those records identified for long-term retention. This is particularly the case when records relate to identity, personal experience, family history and early life experiences of affected persons.

Recommendation 61

The IP recommend that steps be taken and resources allocated to increase awareness of, and compliance with, record-keeping requirements in government departments and public agencies, which are often unaware at operational levels of matters such as records retention and disposal, legislative obligations, the role of PRONI as the national archive and the process of transferring records to PRONI, as per agreed Records Retention and Disposal Schedules, the Public Records Act (Northern Ireland) 1923 and the Disposal of Documents Order (Northern Ireland) 1925. Budget and resourcing difficulties may account for some of these issues, which risk deliberate or accidental disposal or loss of records, including those relating to personal identity, memory, family history and early life experiences of affected persons.

Recommendation 62

The IP note that the Department of Health is in the early stages of reviewing and updating its Good Management, Good Records (GMGR) guidelines, which includes the Retention and Disposal Schedule for a wide range of health and social care records. The IP recommend that the revision of GMGR be based on participatory record-keeping principles. This means that affected persons should be consulted as part of the review process.

Recommendation 63

The IP recommend that the following points be addressed as part of the review of GMGR:

1. Retention periods for adoption records, and the creation and management of adoption records generally, should be informed by recent developments in England and Wales regarding good practice guidance for record-keepers and care professionals issued by the Archives and Records Association.³
2. Transfer of adoption records to PRONI should take place earlier than the 75 years currently stipulated in the Adoption Agency Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989. This would facilitate the records being stored and preserved in an environment appropriate to their age, to arrest or slow their material degradation, and to mitigate any risk of loss of the historical and personally significant information they contain. Discussions are currently underway between the Department of Health and PRONI in this regard, and the IP recommend that the Trusts undertake the necessary adjustments to record-keeping procedures to facilitate an earlier transfer of such records to PRONI, for example, by closing files after an agreed period, with no further papers to be added. Revised procedures should also stipulate the access arrangements to be put in place for files that have been transferred to PRONI. Future management of these records will also be impacted by the IP's recommendations for the establishment of a permanent archive.
3. The retention of medical records should be reviewed. Access to and knowledge of family medical history is a core concern for affected persons, and the Department of Health should seek input and feedback from affected persons with regard to future retention and disposal of medical records.

Recommendation 64

In the immediate term, the IP recommend that all Trusts take steps to ensure that staff are familiar with the Better Records Together guidelines⁴ issued by the Information Commissioner and that appropriate steps be taken to implement the guidelines when dealing with access requests and other aspects of record-keeping.

4.2.7 Relating to National Archives

Recommendation 65

The IP recommend that the UK's online legislation database be reviewed to ensure that it contains historical Northern Irish legislation. Much important historic legislation relating to NI is absent from the UK's online legislation database, legislation.gov.uk, which is operated by the National Archives. Even where legislation is available, it is often published in a format that is not searchable, making research more difficult and time-consuming. This legislation is an important part of NI's legal history. In the context of the right of victims-survivors to pursue legal remedies, the fact that so much of it is inaccessible to the public must be considered an access to justice issue.

4.2.8 Relating to the Police Service of Northern Ireland

Recommendation 66

The IP recommend that when dealing with future complex non-recent abuse cases or investigations, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) develop a fully trauma-informed communication strategy and operational practice to ensure that victims-survivors are updated on any developments in their complaint. The PSNI should consider co-designing such a strategy with the involvement of victims-survivors.

4.2.9 Relating to voluntary agencies holding records

Recommendation 67

The IP recommend that the public inquiry consider investigating the current and past experiences of victims-survivors in accessing personal records relating to the institutions from voluntary agencies. The examination of these practices will enable the inquiry to make findings that could ensure that any new arrangements for accessing records involving these agencies will be empathetic, trauma-informed and based on best practice. For victims-survivors access to their records is a critical issue and the mitigation of difficulties from past practices would be welcomed.

4.3 Recommendations for future independent panels

Recommendation 68

The IP recommend the appointment of any independent panel's Chairperson in advance of establishment of the whole panel. If this had been actioned for the Truth Recovery IP, where the Co-Chairs had been able to take up post ahead of the rest of the Panel, it would have enabled them to oversee planning for the Panel's most significant workstreams. This could have included: securing access to institutional records before the Panel began its work; ensuring processes had been completed to recruit testimony facilitators; and securing accommodation for the taking of those testimonies early in the Panel's work.

Recommendation 69

The IP recommend that in future the Chairperson of any such panel have responsibility for overseeing the work of the other panel members and secretariat, lead engagement with stakeholders, and liaise with government departments. The IP advise that a Chairperson does not have an active role in day-to-day operational tasks but takes an overarching leadership and governance role facilitating balanced participation and guiding towards strategic, well-governed decision-making.

Recommendation 70

The IP recommend that any future independent panel be given greater control over its own budget. A truth recovery process of this type requires agility and innovation to make a case to victims-survivors that the process is truly designed in their own interest. Bureaucracy should be at an absolute minimum, while also ensuring clear auditing of expenditure and the decision-making behind that expenditure. The IP's ability to move forward at pace was delayed by the constraints involved in having to work within public sector procurement procedures that are not designed for a time-limited and highly sensitive tasks such as the one required for the IP's work. The impacts of these restraints included: the appointment and training of testimony facilitators much later than was desirable due to the length of the procurement process; and the need to appoint testimony facilitators on a part-time rather than a full-time basis due to issues related to the financial limits placed on differing procurement processes. However, by far the most significant issue was the long delay in awaiting Executive sign-off on the budget for the IP's outreach campaign. This included leafleting of every home in NI, and social media and YouTube advertising. This did not commence until almost two years after the IP began its work.

Volume 2

Mother and Baby Institutions and Pathways and Practices



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

Content:

This section discusses:

Preface: Comparative statistics related to these institutions

- 1.0** Clogrennan Mother and Baby Institution
- 2.0** Deanery Flats
- 3.0** Hopedene Hostel
- 4.0** Kennedy House
- 5.0** Malone Place
- 6.0** Marianvale Mother and Baby Institution, Newry
- 7.0** Marianville Mother and Baby Institution, Belfast
- 8.0** Mater Dei Hostel
- 9.0** Mount Oriel Hostel
- 10.0** Thorndale House
- 11.0** Private nursing homes
- 12.0** Private domestic residences (including the role of CURA and Life)
- 13.0** Baby institutions

Preface: Comparative statistics related to these institutions

Table 1: Admission numbers to mother and baby institutions

Name of institution	No. of girls and women admitted
Clogrennan (1970–75)	No records
Deanery Flats (1972–91)	Not applicable*
Hopedene Hostel (1943–85)	726 (no records available: 1968–83)
Kennedy House (1922–56)	168 (no records available: 1922–50)
Malone Place (1922–1949) (no records available 1944–49)	2,523
Marianvale (1955–84)	2,408
Marianville (1950–90)	2,278
Mater Dei Hostel (1942–99)	1,418 (no records available: 1984–95)
Mount Oriel Hostel (1969–78)	53 (no records available: 1969–74; 1976–78)
Thorndale House (1922–77)	2,488
Total	12,062

Table 2: Deaths recorded for those mothers and babies linked to the mother and baby institutions

Name of institution	Deaths of mothers	Deaths of babies (live births)	Deaths of babies (stillbirths)
Clogrennan	No records	No records	No records
Deanery Flats	Not applicable*	—	—
Hopedene Hostel	0 (incomplete records)	3	3
Kennedy House	0 (incomplete records)	3	
Malone Place	0	127	85
Marianvale	0	19	13
Marianville	0	39	37
Mater Dei Hostel	0	88**	
Mount Oriel Hostel	0 (incomplete records)	0	0
Thorndale House	7	71	23
Total	7	350	161

*Following assessment of the history of Deanery Flats, the IP advised TEO that this institution should not be included in the Truth Recovery investigation going forward. This initiative was a liberal-minded development that was created to assist single mothers in establishing a family life with their child.

** The infant deaths for Mater Dei are not broken down into live and stillbirths in their records.

It should be noted that most deaths did not happen in a mother and baby institution. Girls and women who were admitted to Clogrennan; Hopedene Hostel; Kennedy House; the Marianvale; Marianville; Mater Dei Hostel; and Mount Oriel Hostel typically gave birth in a local National Health Service (NHS) hospital or a private nursing home. Furthermore, many of the deaths of babies are recorded in the institutional records even though they took place weeks or months after the child and mother had left the institution. The number of deaths is higher for Malone Place and Thorndale House because births did take place there.

The recorded deaths of girls and women admitted to the three St Mary's institutions range in dates from the 1920s through to very recent years. Those deaths recorded from the 1980s to 2010s are for women who were in one of the St Mary's institutions when they closed and were then moved to sheltered accommodation within the community. In many cases, they retained strong links with the Sisters and they were generally buried in a communal burial plot owned by the GSS.

1.0 Clogrennan Mother and Baby Institution

- Clogrennan operated as a mother and baby institution from 1970 to 1975.
- It was located in Larne.
- The institution was managed by County Antrim Welfare Committee.
- No admission records have been identified for this institution.
- There was space for 12 mothers and their babies.
- Clogrennan employed a matron and an assistant matron.

The value of testimonies was demonstrated by the fact that it was through the receipt of testimony that Clogrennan's role as a mother and baby institution was identified. The birth mother involved compared it favourably to Thorndale House, where she also spent time. This suggests a more liberal approach than those mother and baby institutions that had operated for decades under a religious ethos.

2.0 Deanery Flats

- Deanery Flats was operated by Barnardo's from 1973 to 1991, in Belfast.
- It offered single mothers the opportunity to establish a family life.
- It provided living accommodation and childcare while these women went out to work.
- The institution comprised six self-contained flats.
- The day nursery could accommodate up to 25 children.
- The IP advised TEO to remove Deanery Flats from the list of institutions for redress.
- It is an example of more progressive thinking about single mothers from the 1970s onwards, making it a small but significant institution.

3.0 Hopedene Hostel

3.1 Introduction

- Hopedene operated from 1943 to 1985, in Belfast.
- It was managed by a committee containing influential individuals from the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian Church and Salvation Army.
- Records are only available for 1950–68 and 1983–85, with other records believed to have been destroyed in a fire.
- This gap means admission numbers must have been higher than the 726 in the remaining records.

3.2 History of Hopedene

- The Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Committee viewed Hopedene as having a complementary role to Kennedy House.
- It opened at a time of rising concerns about the numbers of single women giving birth during World War Two.
- In 1950, it registered as a voluntary children's home; it was also closely associated with the Church of Ireland Adoption Society.

3.3 Finances at Hopedene

Hopedene received financial support from charitable donations and from the state:

- The development of the welfare state brought payments via National Assistance, maternity, sickness or supplementary benefits.
- Some girls or women, and their families, paid privately to avoid the shame and stigma that society imposed on them.
- Private payments were also made for those from RoI with no right to UK benefits.

3.4 How many girls and women were admitted to Hopedene

Admissions were:

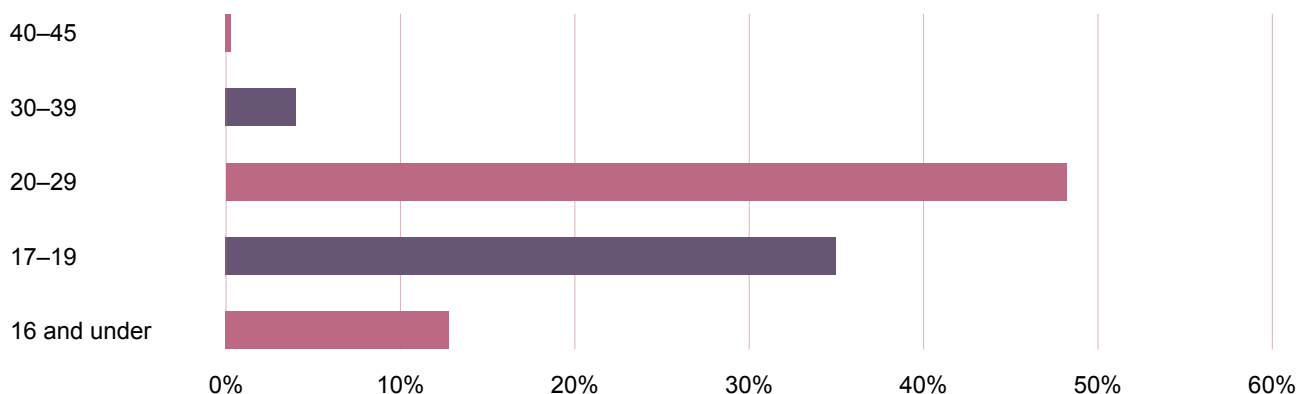
- 670 (between 1950 and 1968)
- 56 (between 1983 and 1985).

3.5 How long did girls and women stay in Hopedene

Data on this issue is not available for all girls and women. Hopedene operated a nursery where babies could stay while their mothers went out to work, which meant that some girls and women remained for longer periods than in the other mother and baby institutions.

3.6 What were the ages of girls and women admitted to Hopedene

Figure 1: Age of girls and women admitted to Hopedene



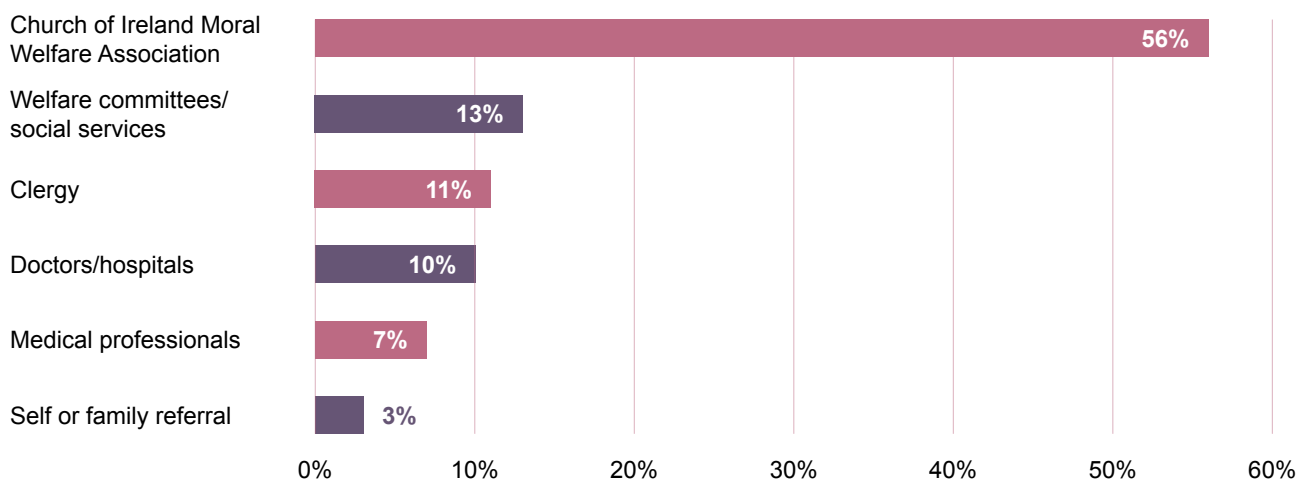
	16 and under	17-19	20-29	30-39	40-45
No. of girls and women	76	210	289	24	1
%	12.7	35.0	48.2	4.0	0.2

3.7 Where did girls and women admitted to Hopedene come from

The vast majority of girls and women were from NI, at almost 95% in 1950–68. The remainder were from RoI and other parts of the UK. The vast majority were from Protestant family backgrounds.

3.8 Who sent girls and women to Hopedene

Figure 2: Who sent girls and women to Hopedene



3.9 Why were girls and women admitted to Hopedene

- Secrecy and shame around pregnancy outside of marriage:
 - This included young women attempting to conceal their pregnancy from their own parents.
 - More commonly, the birth mother's parents were involved in the concealment of the pregnancy.
- As a consequence of rape or incest:
 - As is the case with the other mother and baby institutions, a number of admissions cite rape as the cause of pregnancy.
 - As noted above, almost 13% of admissions were under the age of sexual consent.
 - The Hopedene records indicate police involvement in some of these cases but in the majority there is no mention of Royal Ulster Constabulary involvement.

3.10 Daily life in Hopedene

Surviving inspection records for Hopedene describe it as 'institutional rather than domestic' and 'well maintained but with few creature comforts'. Birth mothers commented in testimonies as follows:

- Food was 'plain but sufficient'.
- The work routine was viewed as punitive: 'you've screwed up and this is your punishment'.
- There was hard physical labour for heavily pregnant girls and women, described by one birth mother as 'hard labour, to atone for your wrongdoing'.
- All but two birth mothers complained about work tasks at Hopedene.
- Birth mothers cared for the babies of mothers who left the institution or were going out to work.

3.11 What was the role of religion in Hopedene

Testimonies shared with the IP noted that:

- The staff were evangelical Christians and ‘they regarded us as fallen women and were in the home due to our own loose morals’.
- Testimonies consistently referenced a sense of being punished.
- There were reports of being walked publicly to a local gospel hall with locals ‘laughing at us’. Then, ‘these men got up and preached and said about you’ve sinned and this and that’.
- Another birth mother said: ‘Everybody could see that these were the Hopedene girls. These were the fallen women. The whole congregation would have known, so they would have.’
- Bible reading at Hopedene ‘wasn’t done in a way of love... There was hardness, coldness and judgement, the way it was portrayed to us.’
- One birth mother described her experience of sexual abuse by a predatory male who visited the institution.
- Another noted an absence of emotional support, and a social worker who visited Hopedene concurred that it ‘wouldn’t have been a terribly loving atmosphere’.

3.12 Where did girls and women go when they left Hopedene

- It appears that over three in four (78.0%) returned to family or relatives.

3.13 Where did babies go when they left Hopedene

The records indicate:

- adoption (46.1%)
- returned to mother’s home (30.5%)
- placed in another institution (7.2%)
- foster placement (6.6%)
- with welfare or social services (6.3%)
- baby died (1.5%)

- at an address not with mother (1.2%)
- private nursing home (1.6%)
- two babies sent into RoI
- comparison of the 1950s and 1960s with 1983–85 suggests adoption was a much less likely outcome by the 1980s.

3.14 What testimony tells us about the experience of adoption from Hopedene

Themes in testimony include the following:

- shame and stigma and their role in discussions of adoption;
- the pressure girls and women felt that they should agree to adoption;
- the viewing of babies at Hopedene by potential adoptive parents;
- birth mothers recalled how they travelled from Hopedene to the Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association in Belfast city centre where their baby was handed to the adoptive parents with no guarantee for their welfare.

3.15 Deaths and burials of babies at Hopedene

- Three babies were stillborn.
- Three babies died shortly after birth in hospital.

3.16 Conclusion on Hopedene

- Hopedene styled itself as a more modern and progressive institution, with the aim of assisting mothers to avoid adoption if that was their desire.
- However, this intention was often not what happened in practice and adoption was the outcome for the largest proportion of mothers and their babies.
- Many of the birth mothers who were sent to Hopedene – by clergy, family, GPs or social workers – faced the same shame and stigma that was imposed on all unmarried girls and women, leading to enormous pressures to agree to adoption. Testimonies about Hopedene offer similar details on the hard work carried out and the sense that it was a form of punishment.

- Several birth mothers described the religious rituals associated with Hopedene as shame-inducing.
- One testimony also included disturbing recollections of a sexual assault by a male visiting the institution.

4.0 Kennedy House

4.1 History of Kennedy House

- Kennedy House (first known as the Church of Ireland Rescue League Home) began its work in 1911 and closed in 1956.
- It was under the management of the Church of Ireland Rescue League.
- The institution operated from several locations in north Belfast. It was renamed Kennedy House in 1947.
- Its records are incomplete.

4.2 How many girls and women were admitted to Kennedy House

Admissions were:

- in the 1920s and 1930s, around 40 per year
- around 20 in the final year before closure in 1956.

4.3 Finances at Kennedy House

It received charitable donations and contributions from county welfare committees.

4.4 What were the ages and backgrounds of girls and women admitted to Kennedy House

No consistent information on age was recorded.

Of the admissions, 90% were from NI and 10% from RoI.

4.5 Daily life in Kennedy House

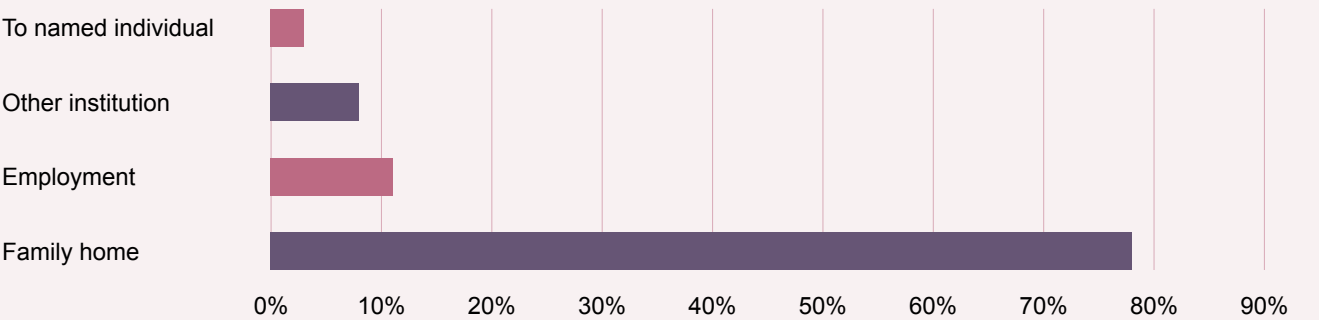
Annual reports suggest that the ‘girls attend church with one of the staff as their health permits’. It is added that several who were ‘staying for long periods with their babies worked hard and willingly at improvements to the institution under Matron’s direction’. In addition, ‘instruction and help in making baby clothes and handicrafts was given by staff’.

4.6 Deaths and burials of babies at Kennedy House

Records are incomplete, but three babies linked to Kennedy House are recorded as dying between 1950 and 1955.

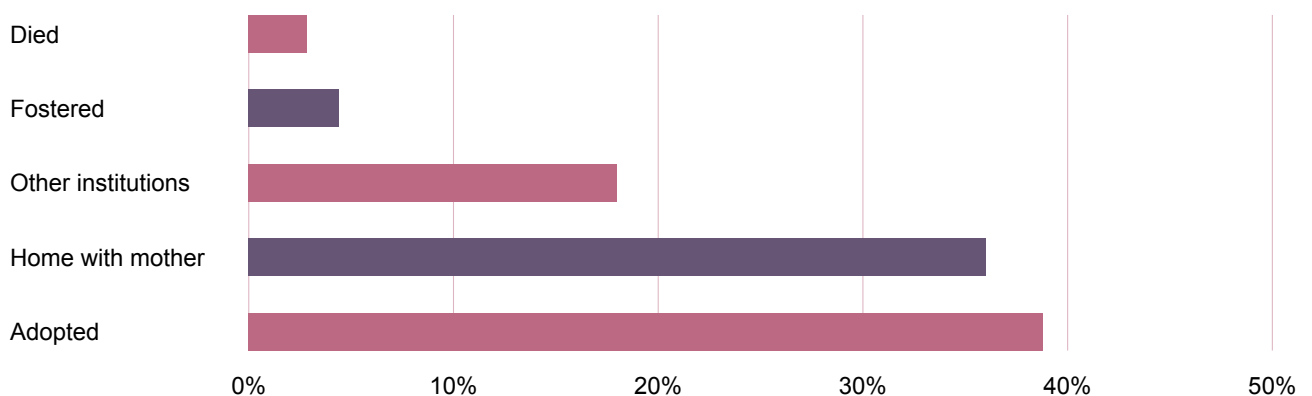
4.7 Where mothers and their babies went when they left Kennedy House

Figure 3: Where girls and women went after leaving Kennedy House



	Family home	Employment	Other institution	To named individual
No. of girls and women	99	14	10	4
%	78.0	11.0	7.9	3.1

Figure 4: Where babies went after leaving Kennedy House



	Adopted	Home with mother	Other institutions	Fostered	Died
No. of babies	54	50	25	6	4
%	38.8	36.0	18.0	4.3	2.9

4.8 Conclusion on Kennedy House

Based on the sparse records available, it appears that more mothers (36.0%) left Kennedy House with their babies than was the case with many of the other mother and baby institutions, where the recorded figure was around 25%. However, the one testimony available to us conflicts with the tone of some of the archival evidence. This testimony describes a traumatic separation of a young woman from her baby.

Evidence from annual reports suggests some willingness to encourage girls and women to keep their babies. However, it also indicates that if a girl or woman's parents were against this, Kennedy House facilitated their wishes rather than those of the birth mother. Evidence from testimony supports this assessment.

5.0 Malone Place

5.1 History of Malone Place

- Malone Place was founded in 1860 as the Belfast Midnight Mission.
- It moved to Malone Place in 1876.
- Malone Place was purchased by the Northern Ireland Hospitals Authority in 1949 and continued to operate as a maternity hospital until 1981.

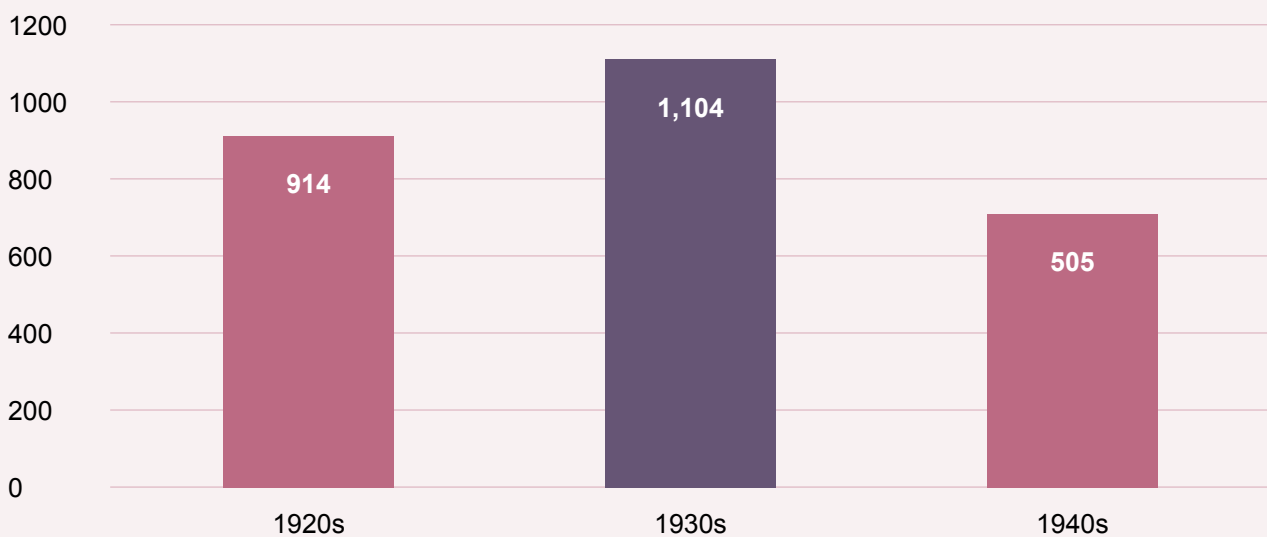
5.2 Finances at Malone Place

- Financial contributions came from the local welfare authorities for cases involving mothers who were not married.
- It also raised money from charitable donations.
- Private patients (usually married women) paid fees.

5.3 How many girls and women were admitted to Malone Place

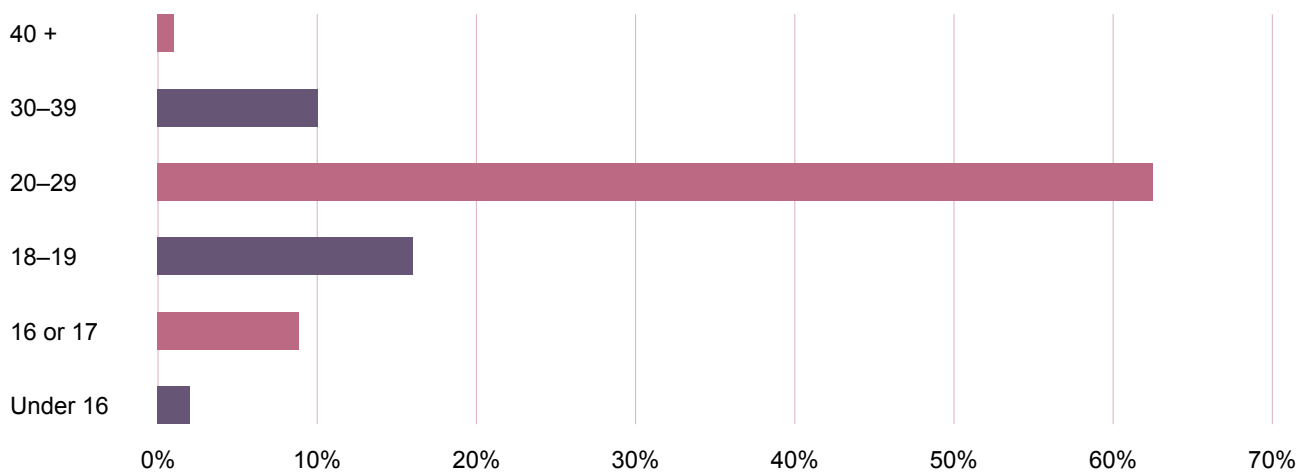
Between 1922 and 1944, when records are available, 2,523 girls and women were admitted. The overwhelming majority (2,301) were single, while 213 were married women. In nine cases, marital status was not recorded.

Figure 5: Number of girls and women admitted to Malone Place per decade, 1922–44



5.4 What were the ages of girls and women when they were admitted to Malone Place

Figure 6: Ages of girls and women admitted to Malone Place



	Under 16	16 or 17	18–19	20–29	30–39	40 +
No. of girls and women	43	191	353	1376	221	19
%	2.0	8.7	16.0	62.5	10.0	0.9

5.5 Where did girls and women admitted to Malone Place come from

- The majority of girls and women (85.4%) came from NI, with 13.2% from RoI.
- Of the girls and women, 83.0% were from Protestant backgrounds, 16.8% from Catholic backgrounds and 0.2% from Jewish backgrounds.

5.6 Reports of pregnancy resulting from rape and incest

- A number of pregnancies were the result of rape and incest.
- 113 girls admitted were under 17.

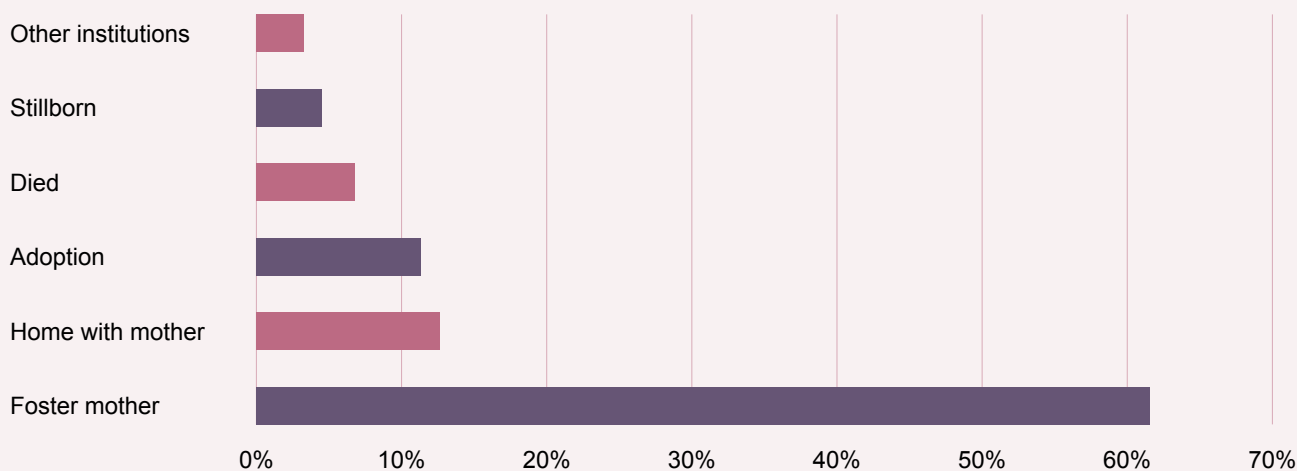
5.7 Daily life in Malone Place

The IP only had access to one testimony from a birth mother who was admitted to Malone Place in the 1940s. She described hard physical labour, including doing the washing of items belonging to the married, private fee-paying patients.

5.8 Where did mothers and their babies go when they left Malone Place

The records do not provide detailed information about where girls and women went after they gave birth at Malone Place. **Figure 7** sets out where babies went after leaving Malone Place.

Figure 7: Where babies went after leaving Malone Place



	Foster mother	Home with mother	Adoption	Died	Stillborn	Other institutions
No. of babies	1144	233	207	127	85	61
%	61.6	12.5	11.1	6.8	4.6	3.3

5.9 Deaths and burials of babies at Malone Place

- As births took place at Malone Place, it experienced higher levels of infant mortality than other mother and baby institutions where births did not take place.
- Records note 127 deaths (including 51 babies who died after leaving the institution).
- The total number of infant deaths equates to 6.8% of births to mothers who were not married who gave birth at Malone Place.
- Another 85 (4.6%) babies were recorded as stillborn.
- This period (1920s to 1940s) was a period of high infant mortality.
- 121 of the burials have been located as taking place at Belfast City Cemetery, Milltown Cemetery or Dundonald Cemetery.

5.10 Conclusion on Malone Place

Notable among these findings is that only around one in ten babies born to single mothers in Malone Place left the institution with them. The majority went to foster placements or adoptive families. After Malone Place was incorporated into the NHS, it continued to receive significant numbers of unmarried girls and women who arrived to give birth.

6.0 Marianvale Mother and Baby Institution, Newry

6.1 History of Marianvale

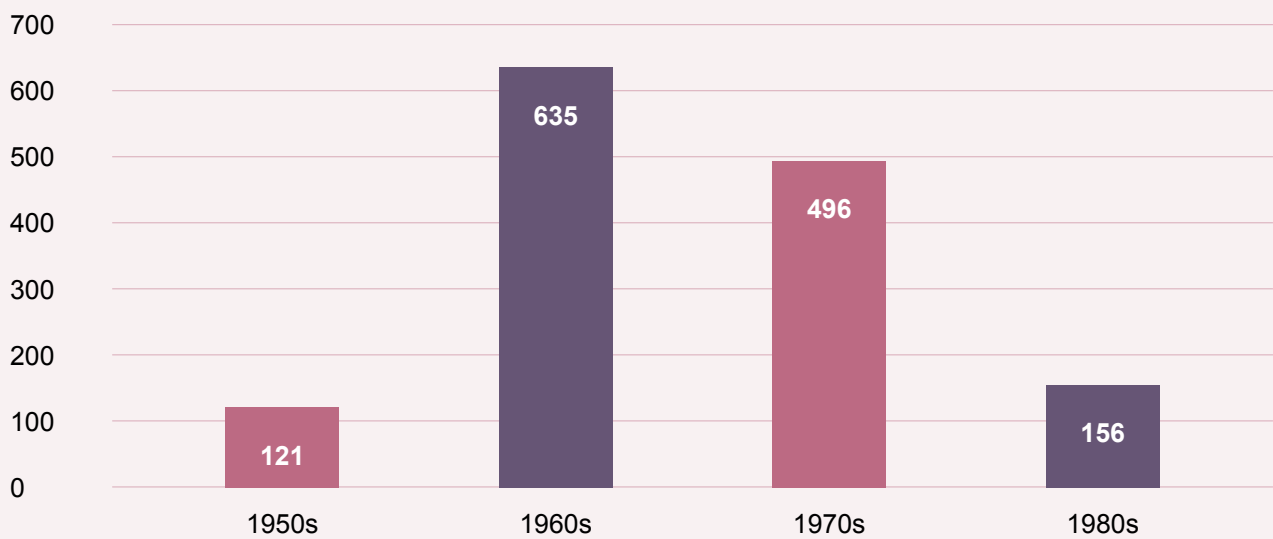
- Marianvale operated at the Good Shepherd Convent site, Armagh Road, Newry from 1955 to 1984.
- It was managed by the GSS, who also operated a St Mary's institution on the site, which operated a commercial laundry. Marianvale closed in 1984.

6.2 How many girls and women were admitted to Marianvale and what was their background

Records note:

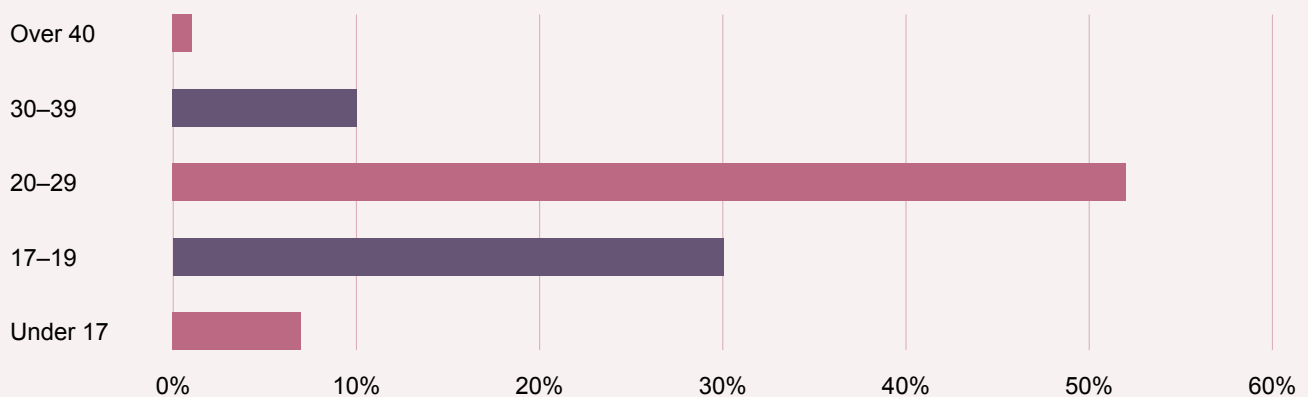
- a total of 1,408 were admitted
- the majority of admissions (82.3%) were from NI
- 202 (14.4%) admissions were from RoI
- 43 (3.1%) were from Britain
- the vast majority were from Catholic backgrounds, with a small number of Protestants admitted.

Figure 8: Number of girls and women admitted to Marianvale per decade, 1955–84



6.3 What were the ages of girls and women admitted to Marianvale

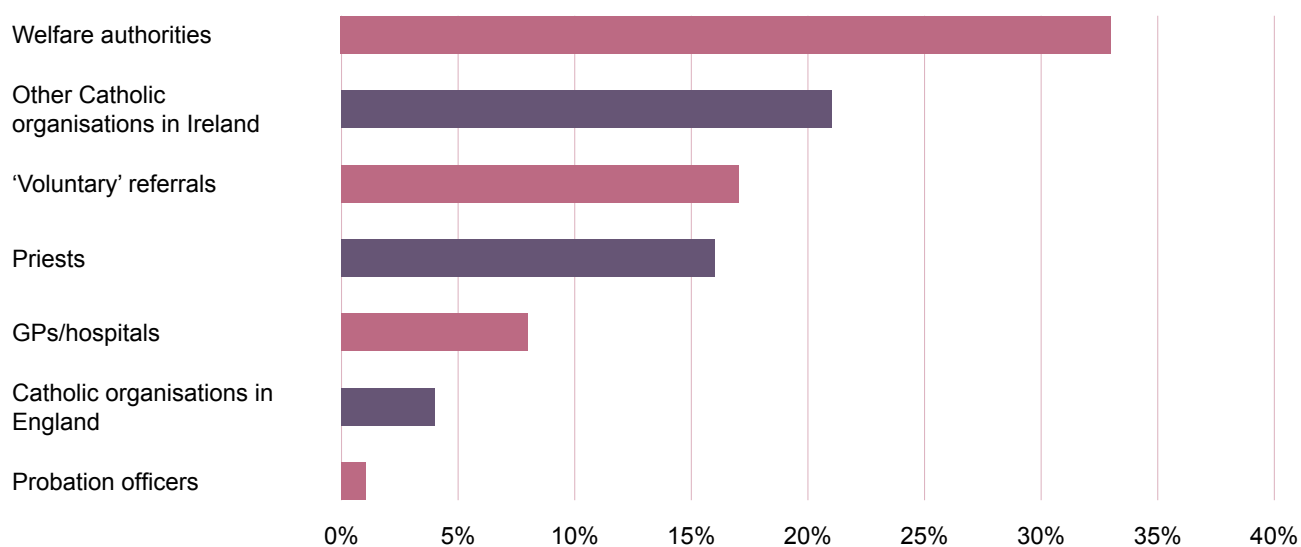
Figure 9: Ages of girls and women admitted to Marianvale



	Under 17	17–19	20–29	30–39	Over 40
No. of girls and women	97	416	719	140	20
%	7.0	29.9	51.7	10.1	1.4

6.4 Who sent girls and women to Marianvale

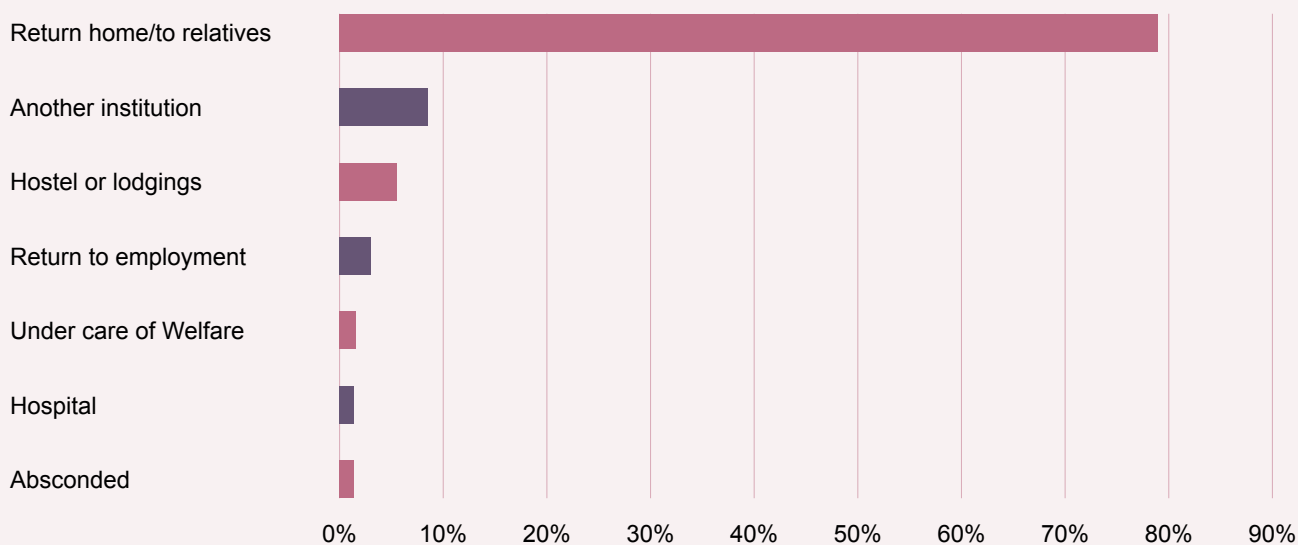
Figure 10: Who sent girls and women to Marianvale



	Probation officers	From Catholic organisations in England	GPs/hospitals	Priests	'Voluntary' referrals	Other Catholic organisations in Ireland	Welfare authorities
No. of girls and women	11	50	100	204	212	262	416
%	0.9	4.0	8.0	16.3	16.9	20.9	33.1

6.5 Where did girls and women go when they left Marianvale

Figure 11: Where girls and women went after leaving Marianvale

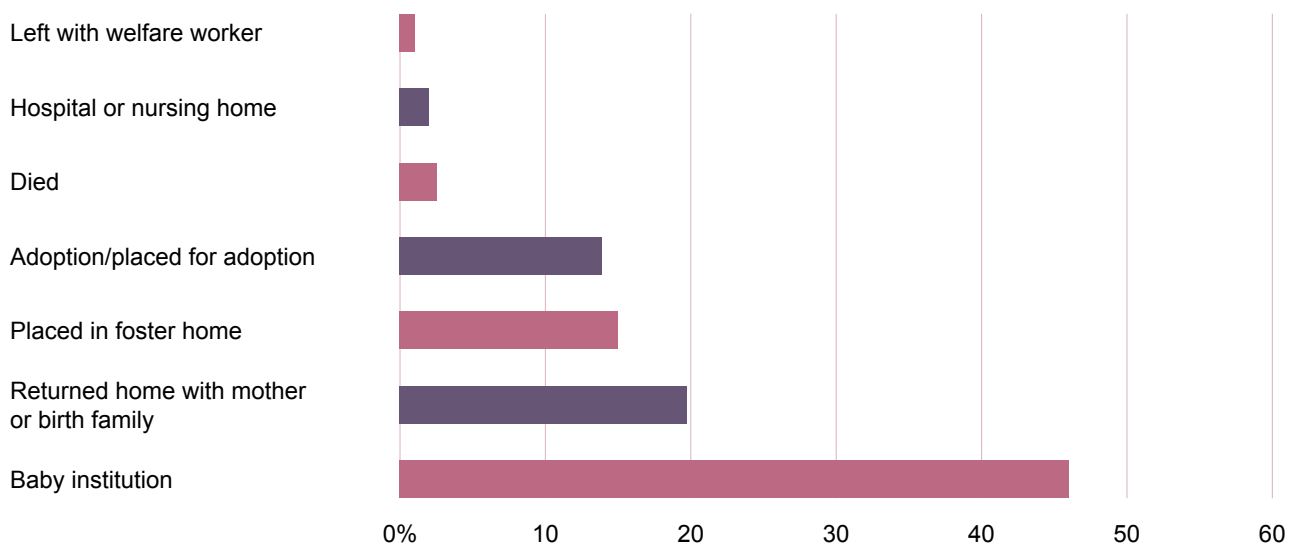


	Absconded	Hospital	Under care of Welfare	Return to employment	Hostel or lodgings	Another institution	Return home/to relatives
No. of girls and women	17	17	20	38	76	111	1046
%	1.3	1.3	1.5	2.9	5.7	8.4	78.9

Of the 111 who transferred to another institution, 77 were sent to the St Mary's institution that was next door to Marianvale where they worked in its laundry.

6.6 Where did babies go when they left Marianvale

Figure 12: Where babies went after leaving Marianvale



	Baby institution	Returned home with mother or birth family	Placed in foster home	Adoption/ placed for adoption	Died	Hospital or nursing home	Left with welfare worker
No. of girls and women	569	244	185	170	32	25	11
%	46.0	19.7	15.0	13.8	2.6	2.0	0.9

The statistics often capture only the immediate movement of children and do not represent the final outcome. For example, in many cases those placed in a baby institution or for fostering will have been adopted.

6.7 Cross-border movement and adoption from Marianvale

- From Marianvale, 225 babies were sent to baby institutions in RoI, including:
 - 111 to St Joseph's Baby Home, Stamullen, Co Meath
 - 57 to Nazareth House, Fahan, Co Donegal
 - 37 to St Patrick's, Temple Hill, Co Dublin.

- In one case, a birth mother returned to reunite with a child she thought had been sent to a baby institution in NI, but the child had been sent into RoI and her whereabouts were unknown.
- The GSS maintain that opening up adoption files will demonstrate all legal regulations were followed.
- A significant number of girls and women (14.4%) arrived at Marianvale from RoI.
- Dealing with two separate jurisdictions causes added difficulties for children, now adults, searching for their birth family.

6.8 Other issues related to adoption

- Testimonies report that up until 1970, potential adopters visited Marianvale to view babies.
- Correspondence indicates the involvement of the GSS in some adoptions to England.
- Correspondence indicates the GSS putting pressure on a birth mother to proceed with an adoption in one case.

6.9 What testimony tells us about Marianvale

- A minority of testimonies were from those who wanted to offer their support to the GSS. These testimonies included:
 - accounts of Marianvale offering a safe haven from family anger
 - accounts of the GSS assisting in the concealment of a pregnancy from the wider family
 - accounts of the GSS assisting with the educational needs of teenage girls during their time in Marianvale.
- The majority offered testimony that was more critical of the institution. These accounts included:
 - physical mistreatment
 - inadequate medical treatment
 - internal examination taking place in view of other girls and women

- regular provision of strong sedatives
- hard physical labour (typically cleaning)
- a religious ethos imposing a sense of sinfulness and shame on the pregnant girls and women.

6.10 Deaths and burials of babies at Marianvale

- Investigations of the site in 2017 by an independent consultant archaeologist (commissioned by the landowner) and in 2023 by a forensic archaeologist and a forensic geoscientist (commissioned by PSNI) found no evidence of unmarked burials.
- Neither the PSNI nor the IP have heard testimony from anyone that reports any first-hand evidence of burials at Marianvale or reports any named person whose burial site is unknown.
- 32 babies associated with Marianvale died between 1957 and 1982:
 - 19 live births
 - 13 stillbirths.
- Many deaths took place at Daisy Hill Hospital or in other locations when babies had been transferred elsewhere.
- No deaths took place in Marianvale.
- The IP identified the civil death registrations for 18 of the 19 live births
- The statutory Register of Stillbirths (which was only introduced from 1961) is not publicly searchable, making it impossible to check if all stillbirths were recorded.
- Lack of records for Daisy Hill Hospital and incomplete records for private cemeteries inhibit the ability to trace all burial locations.
- The IP have seen no credible evidence that indicates that any child connected with Marianvale was buried illegally in its grounds.

6.11 Conclusion on Marianvale

- Questions that remain about cross-border movement of babies from Marianvale for adoption can only be answered fully via consultation of the relevant adoption and social services files.
- Testimony on Marianvale is particularly complex.
- A minority recall being treated well.
- The majority are critical of Marianvale as an institution and the practices that birth mothers experienced there.
- Most obviously, this was the case when birth mothers reflected on its role as a site at which the trauma of family separation took place.
- Testimonies also discuss issues such as:
 - anxiety about being sent to the 'class' (the GSS St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Newry)
 - harsh family response to their pregnancy
 - societal shaming
 - the role of social workers in adoption decision-making.

7.0 Marianville Mother and Baby Institution, Belfast

7.1 History of Marianville

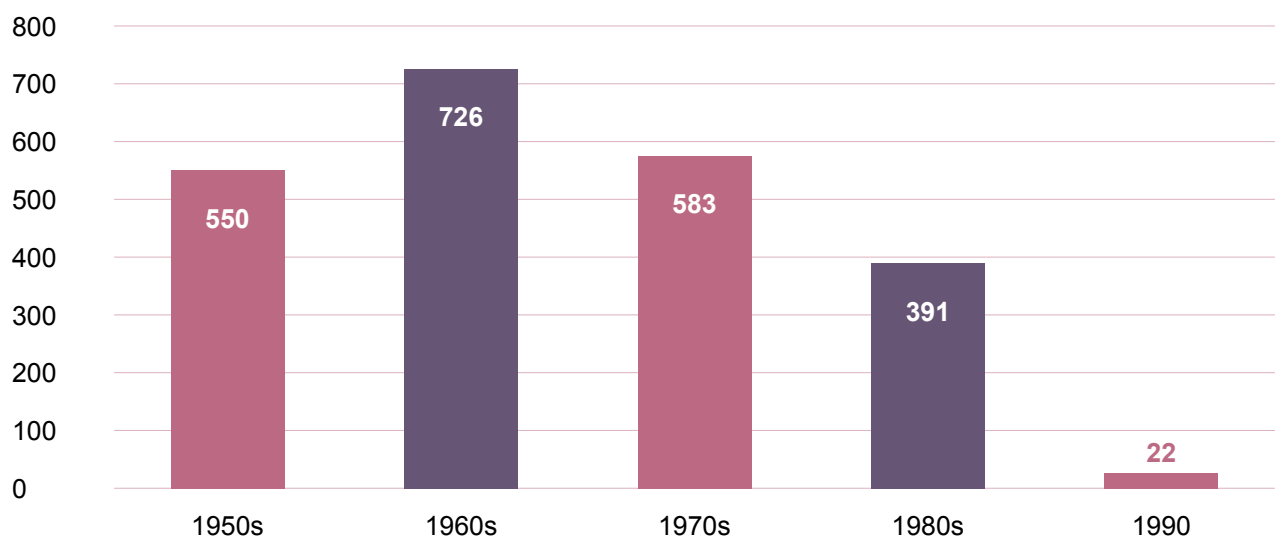
Marianville operated between 1950 and 1990 at the Good Shepherd Convent site, Ormeau Road, Belfast. It was managed by the GSS.

7.2 How many girls and women were admitted to Marianville and what was their background

Records show:

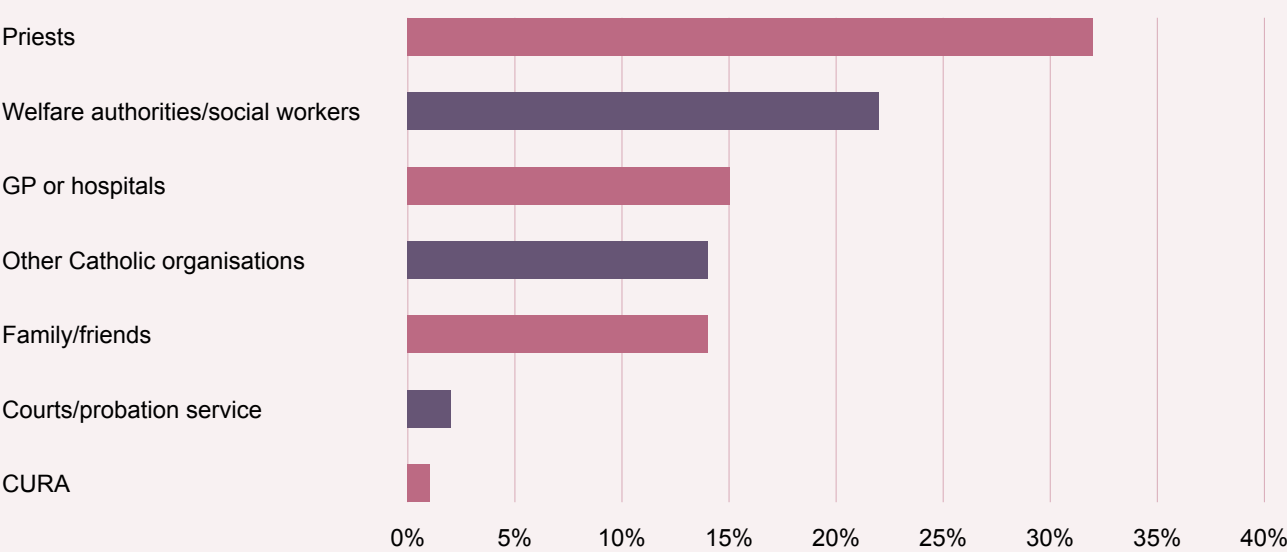
- a total of 2,278 were admitted
- the majority (89.7%) were from NI
- 9.1% were from RoI
- 1.1% were from Britain and elsewhere
- the vast majority were from Catholic backgrounds, with a small number of Protestants and other religious denominations.

Figure 13: Number of admissions to Marianville per decade, 1950–90



7.3 Who sent girls and women to Marianville

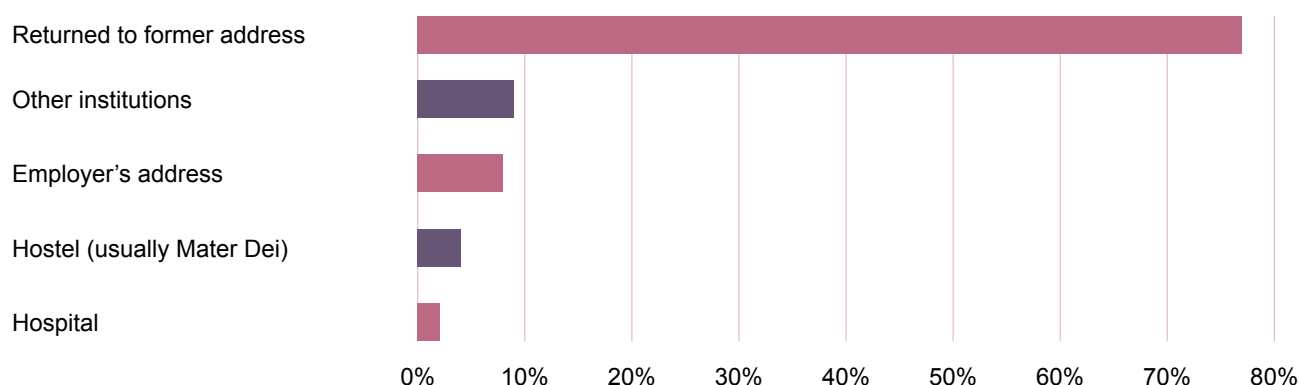
Figure 14: Sources of referrals to Marianville



	CURA	Courts/ probation service	Family/ friends	Other Catholic organisations	GP or hospitals	Welfare authorities/ social workers	Priests
No. of girls and women	22	44	308	308	330	484	704
%	1.0	2.0	14.0	14.0	15.0	22.0	32.0

7.4 Where did girls and women go when they left Marianville

Figure 15: Where girls and women went after leaving Marianville



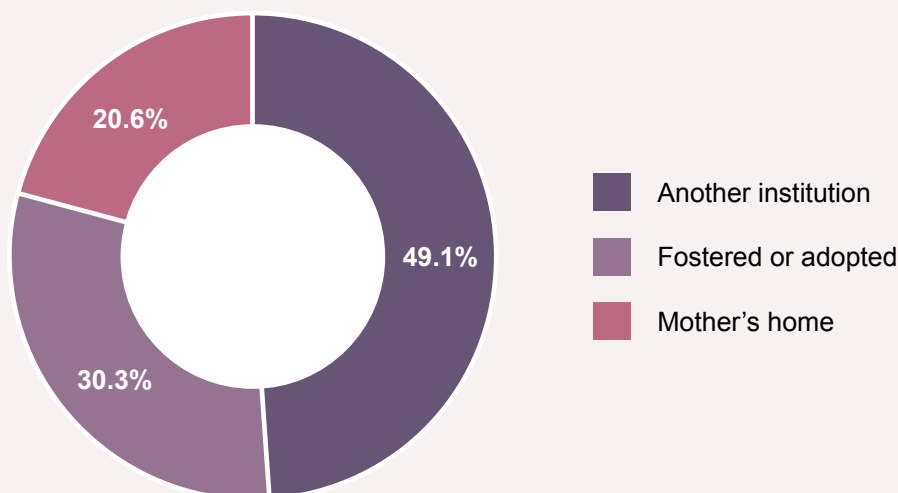
	Hospital	Hostel (usually Mater Dei)	Employer's address	Other institutions	Returned to former address
No. of girls and women	39	72	155	169	1442
%	2.1	3.8	8.3	9.0	76.8

7.5 Marianville and St Mary's, Belfast

- At least 65 girls and women went to the GSS St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Belfast, which was adjacent to Marianville. They included:
 - girls whose pregnancy was the result of rape and incest;
 - girls and women whose families had arranged with the GSS that their daughter or sister be sent to the laundry following her pregnancy;
 - girls and women identified by family, priests or the GSS as being in 'moral danger' or by the courts or social workers as in need of a Fit Person Order that placed them in the institution.

7.6 Where did babies go when they left Marianville

Figure 16: Where babies went after leaving Marianville



- The 30.3% underestimates the eventual adoption figures.
- The 49.1% sent to a baby institution included many adopted later.

7.7 Cross border movement and adoption from Marianville

- 190 babies were moved across the border to baby institutions, many for adoption.
- The Marianville records indicate that between 1950 and 1970 it acted as a third-party adoption agency.
- Testimonies indicate that planning for some adoptions took place well before a child's birth.
- Children were baptised in the adoptive family name with no trace of their birth parents on records.
- Testimonies describe feeling pressurised to agree to adoption from a variety of sources while in Marianville (including family, social workers and nuns).
- The GSS maintain that social services were the primary agents arranging adoptions and not the Order.
- In relation to cross-border adoption, the GSS told the IP that they did not consider the border 'an impediment' to their mission.

- The GSS have ‘no corporate memory’ of cross-border transfers being raised as a concern by the welfare authorities.

7.8 Inspections by the state

- Department of Health and Social Services inspections between 1984 and 1990 are positive about Marianville.
- One from 1988 describes a ‘warm and comfortable environment in which the needs of unmarried mothers and when necessary, babies can be met by a totally committed staff’.
- The ‘residents’ were reported to be ‘unanimous in their praise of the Sisters’.
- This is in contrast to the majority of testimonies shared with the IP.
- In 1984, it was noted that Marianville had failed to identify a designated ‘visitor’: a person to whom girls and women could make complaints.
- The failure to identify and resolve this matter was identified in the HIAI report as a systemic failing by the GSS, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Social Work Advisory Group.⁵

7.9 What testimony tells us about Marianville

- A minority of testimonies about Marianville were very affirmative in their view that the GSS had been supportive of the girls and women and attentive to their needs.
- The majority of girls and women shared testimony that was very different, in a significant number of cases starkly so.

The more positive testimonies included:

- highlighting the institution’s role as a sanctuary from parental anger about their pregnancy: ‘the two nuns were very, very supportive’
- acknowledging performing physical labour when heavily pregnant but did not ‘think it was cruel or anything like that’
- maintaining they felt under no pressure from the GSS to agree to adoption.

The more negative testimonies included:

- recalling that it felt like ‘a prison’;
- having their names changed by the GSS and not being allowed to discuss personal details with other girls and women;
- being required to carry out heavy labour when pregnant;
- being punished for not complying with the directions of the GSS, which included making a confession to a priest who asked for details of the sexual activities leading to a pregnancy;
- feelings of being on public display and stigmatised when attending Mass at the church next door to Marianville.

7.10 Gynaecological and internal examinations by Sister Z

A significant number of testimonies also include discussion of the serious actions carried out by a member of staff we call Sister Z. These include:

- testimony by women who described sexual abuse taking place under the guise of gynaecological and internal examinations
- testimony from other women who do not use that term but described deep concerns about their own similar experiences with Sister Z
- testimony from a social worker who revealed that at the time social workers were discussing their concerns about Sister Z and internal examinations
- the views of an experienced midwife who was asked about the practice of internal examinations
- the reply of the GSS to the IP’s commentary on Sister Z.

7.11 Medical issues in Marianville

- Several testimonies report poor-quality medical care.
- This includes testimony about slow response to a stillbirth in Marianville.
- Tests were carried out on girls and woman (and their babies) for syphilis.

7.12 Deaths and burials of babies at Marianville

- There were no maternal deaths.
- The records note that 66 children died:
 - 39 live births
 - 27 stillbirths.
- 65 deaths took place at hospitals or other locations.
- One stillbirth took place at Marianville.
- Death registrations have been found for 36 of the 39 babies who later died.
- The statutory Register of Stillbirths, available only from 1961, is not open for public searching. This makes it impossible to assess if all 27 stillbirths were registered.
- The chapter provides the information on burial sites that the IP identified from the available records.

7.13 Conclusion on Marianville

- Marianville operated with many similarities to other mother and baby institutions. For example, large numbers of referrals came from the clergy, GPs, social workers or family members.
- Priests were by far the biggest source of referral in the first decades. By the 1970s and 1980s, social workers were most prevalent.
- The state had a more visible role as time progressed.
- Most testimonies describe a culture of cleaning and physical work, which birth mothers experienced as a form of punishment for their pregnancy.
- However, a smaller number of testimonies acknowledged carrying out work while pregnant but did not view it critically.
- The Marianville records indicate the number of girls and women whose pregnancy was the result of rape and incest. The GSS maintain they believed it was for social services to make reports to the police and not for them.
- In numerous instances, once they gave birth, these girls and women were sent to the St Mary's institution, adjacent to Marianville, to work in its laundry.

- The testimonies containing allegations against Sister Z were not matched by any similar testimony for the other mother and baby institutions, and the public inquiry may wish to explore them in more detail.
- Questions remain to be answered about adoptions from Marianville that can only be answered by access to relevant adoption files and social service records:
 - questions about how cross-border adoptions were arranged
 - questions about Marianville's role as a 'third-party adoption agency'
 - questions about following the required legal timeline for adoption.

8.0 Mater Dei Hostel

8.1 History of Mater Dei

- Mater Dei was established in 1940 by the Legion of Mary, a Catholic lay organisation concerned with social activism.
- It was managed by volunteer lay Catholic women who styled themselves as 'Sisters'.
- A priest acted as Spiritual Director for Mater Dei.
- They also took on the role of facilitating adoptions, becoming a registered adoption agency, Mater Misericordiae, under the Adoption of Children Act (Northern Ireland) 1950.
- From 1942–99, it operated on the Antrim Road, Belfast.
- Records indicate that from the late 1980s much smaller numbers of pregnant girls and women were admitted, with the institution mainly used for crisis accommodation for women and families.

8.2 Finances at Mater Dei

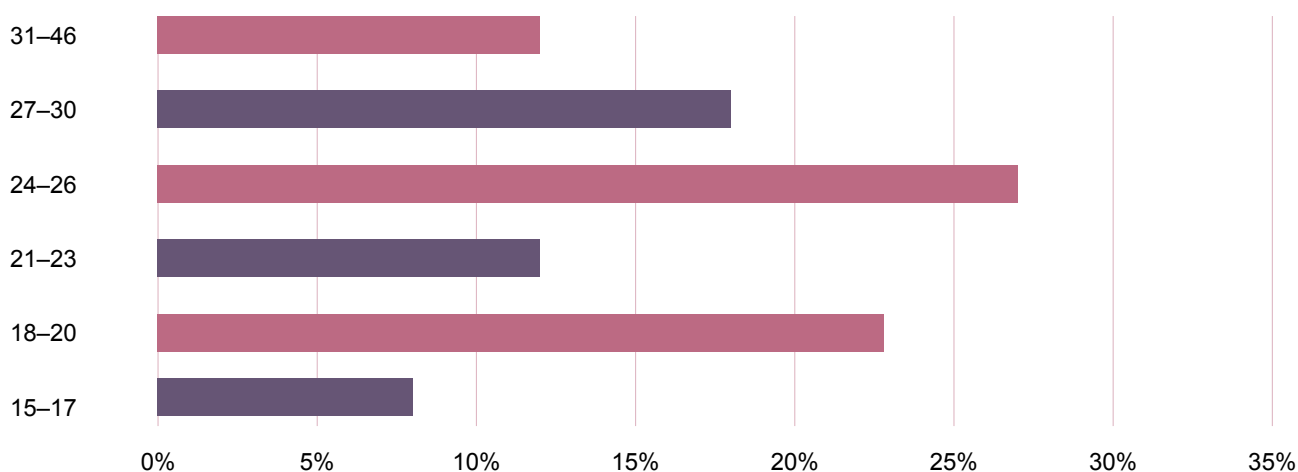
- Mater Dei differed from many of the other mother and baby institutions in that women were often expected to work outside of the institution. Mater Dei assisted them in finding local part-time employment, generally domestic service jobs. Families of some girls and women paid privately, including those from RoI.
- Involvement of the state prior to 1948 was through the Poor Law Board of Guardians. After 1948, various state benefits were the source of payments to Mater Dei.

8.3 How many girls and women were admitted to Mater Dei and what was their background

- Between 1942 and 1984, there were 1,418 admissions.
- Small numbers of admissions continued until 1999.
- The highest numbers were during the 1940s, with a further peak in the 1960s.
- The majority of girls and women admitted were Catholic with very small numbers of Protestants admitted.
- The majority of girls and women (76.6%) were from NI.
- Aside from this, 21.1% were from Rol.
- The remaining 2.3% were from Britain and elsewhere.

8.4 What were the ages of girls and women admitted to Mater Dei

Figure 17: Ages of girls and women admitted to Mater Dei



	15-17	18-20	21-23	24-26	27-30	31-46
No. of girls and women	90	260	136	305	204	136
%	8.0	23.0	12.0	27.0	18.0	12.0

8.5 Who sent girls and women to Mater Dei

Admissions came by a variety of sources which also changed over the years:

- Catholic organisations in England
- Mater Dei visits to maternity hospitals to identify unmarried Catholic girls and women
- family members
- GPs
- priests
- other Catholic institutions and organisations in NI and RoI
- social workers.

8.6 What testimony tells us about Mater Dei

- A number of women discuss the secrecy and shame around their pregnancy.
- There was denial of rape by family members and blame placed on the victims.
- Testimonies recount fear of a pregnancy being revealed to friends, family or neighbours.
- The Panel heard of the long-term, deep, emotional and psychological impacts of a secret pregnancy and adoption.
- Women were sent out to work in local homes with earnings being paid to Mater Dei. This appears to have been instead of making handicrafts within the institution (as was the case in Marianvale and Marianville). This was problematic, not least when the women found themselves working alone with a male householder. This is intimated in the Mater Dei files and confirmed as problematic in one testimony that reports sexually predatory behaviour.
- Unlike many of the other mother and baby institutions, there is no testimony on having to carry out hard labour, particularly cleaning.
- Notably, on one occasion the Spiritual Director (a local priest) had spoken out against the use of this form of work as punishment for the pregnant girls and women.

- As was the case in several other institutions (Hopedene, Thorndale House, Marianville), the girls and women felt that going to the local church put them on display: 'We were made spectacles of because we had sinned.'
- The use of private nursing homes for births has led to confusion for children, now adults, faced with that unknown address on their birth certificate.

8.7 Daily life in Mater Dei

Matters of note in this respect include:

- monitoring of visitors
- removal of reading material from girls and women that Mater Dei deemed 'inappropriate'.

8.8 Adoption and fostering from Mater Dei

Information from testimonies include:

- Prospective adopters visited to view babies.
- One birth mother explained her son's anger when learning of this, as he feels his adoptive parents 'found him in a department store'.
- She also recalled: 'I remember you had to dress them up. People were coming to look at your babies.'
- She recalled trying to capture the number plate of the car in which her son was driven away from Mater Dei.
- Another birth mother recalled receiving no advice on what adoption would involve.
- Others explained how prior to 1950 birth mothers paid for newspaper advertisements seeking foster or adoptive placements for their child.
- They also had to finance a 'premium', a cash payment towards the cost of raising their child.

Information from Mater Dei records includes:

- evidence of a priest being brought in to put pressure on a woman wavering about an adoption decision;

- lack of emotional support for girls and women being separated from their child;
- babies adopted in England, the USA and Scotland, with correspondence in the files suggesting legal compliance;
- babies adopted in ROI or sent to mother and baby institutions there, with correspondence including discussion regarding legal compliance in some adoption cases.

8.9 Deaths and burials of babies at Mater Dei

- There were 88 baby deaths recorded between 1940 and 1984.
- This was highest between 1942 and 1946 (46 in total).
- This represented an average infant mortality rate of 212 per 1,000 births over the period: much higher than for the general population.
- Mater Dei records cite poor maternal health and an outbreak of gastroenteritis as factors.
- They report that the Medical Officer for Belfast considered closing Mater Dei at this point.
- Mater Dei records reveal long correspondence with local welfare committees and various hospitals around the issue of burials and their costs.

8.10 Where did girls and women go when they left Mater Dei

Their next destination included:

- other religious institutions:
 - including being sent to a St Mary's institution to work in its laundry
- to take up domestic service jobs:
 - including in hospitals, private nursing homes or private homes.

8.11 Where did babies go when they left Mater Dei

- Nearly 40% were placed in baby institutions.
- Around 25% went home with their mother:
 - 20% in the 1940s rising to virtually all by 1990.

The patchy nature of the records and the fact that they do not necessarily record the final outcome for a child is revealed by the fact that they recorded only 47 babies as leaving Mater Dei to be adopted. However, from other records, it is apparent that the Misericordiae Adoption Society arranged 312 adoptions in its 20-year existence between 1950 and 1970.

8.12 Conclusion on Mater Dei

- The policy of sending girls and women to work in local homes created potential risks, as testimony demonstrated.
- It operated to 1999, but from the late 1980s admitted small numbers of pregnant girls and women and was used more for emergency accommodation for women and families.
- It had a complex relationship with several nearby private nursing homes.
- Cross-border adoptions took place from Mater Dei.
- There is no evidence of any protocol for reporting cases of statutory rape or incest, but there is evidence of the police visiting to take a statement on one occasion when a teenage girl aged under 17 was in Mater Dei.

9.0 Mount Oriel Hostel

9.1 History of Mount Oriel

- Mount Oriel operated between 1969 and 1978 on the Saintfield Road, Belfast.
- It was managed by the County Down Welfare Department and then the Eastern Area Health and Social Services Board.
- Comparatively few records exist.

9.2 How many girls and women were admitted to Mount Oriel and what was their background

- For the period where records are available (1974–76), there were three to five girls or women in the hostel at any time.
- The majority were between 16 and 19 years of age:
 - records include a 13-year-old, a 14-year-old and two 15-year-old girls.
- The majority were Protestants.

9.3 What testimony tells us about Mount Oriel

- Testimonies suggest that unlike the older mother and baby institutions with a religious ethos, Mount Oriel did not have a focus on work such as cleaning.
- One birth mother recalled that her social worker recommended she go to Mount Oriel for this reason.
- In other respects, Mount Oriel testimonies bore similarities to those from women who were admitted to the other institutions. These included:
 - experience of poor medical treatment that the birth mother linked to her status as an ‘unmarried mother’
 - reports of family separation being the outcome following admission to Mount Oriel.

9.4 Conclusion on Mount Oriel

- Testimony on Mount Oriel suggests it operated a more relaxed and less openly punitive system than some of the longer-established institutions.
- Despite this, all three testimonies from birth mothers in the chapter on this institution carry evidence of stigmatising language being used about them.
- The testimonies reveal that their experiences remained extremely traumatic. In these cases, accounts of sexual abuse and the death of babies were tragic factors in the testimony.
- They also indicate that despite some liberalisation of societal views, seen in the evidence that Housing Executive accommodation was becoming a possibility for single mothers by the 1980s, in other ways conservative attitudes remained strong.

10.0 Thorndale House

10.1 History of Thorndale House

- Thorndale House was operated by the Salvation Army, who first opened a rescue home that also admitted pregnant girls and women in Belfast in 1886.
- In 1920, they acquired Thorndale House on the Antrim Road, north Belfast, and turned it into a mother and baby institution which operated until 1977.
- There was also a maternity unit for married women who paid privately for medical care.
- Thorndale House also provided some facilities for women who remained with their children.

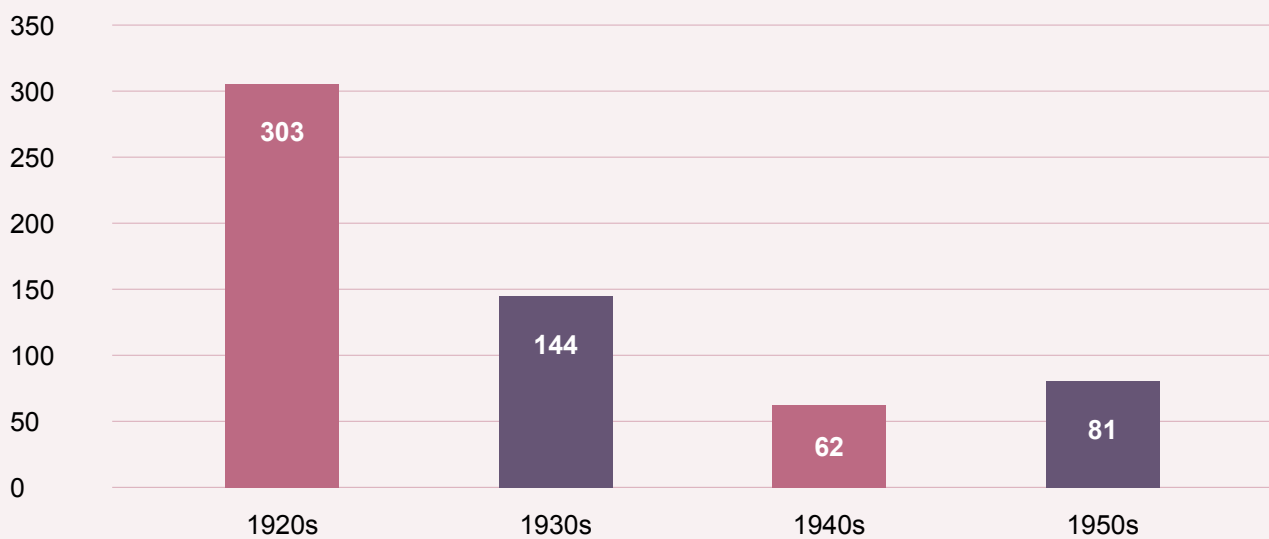
It was also the site of Thorndale Industrial Home (see details on that institution below).

10.2 How many girls and women were admitted to Thorndale House and what was their background

The records indicate:

- 2,488 girls and women were admitted
- the majority, 91.8%, were from NI
- 5.8% were from RoI
- 2.4% were from Britain and elsewhere
- the vast majority were from Protestant backgrounds.

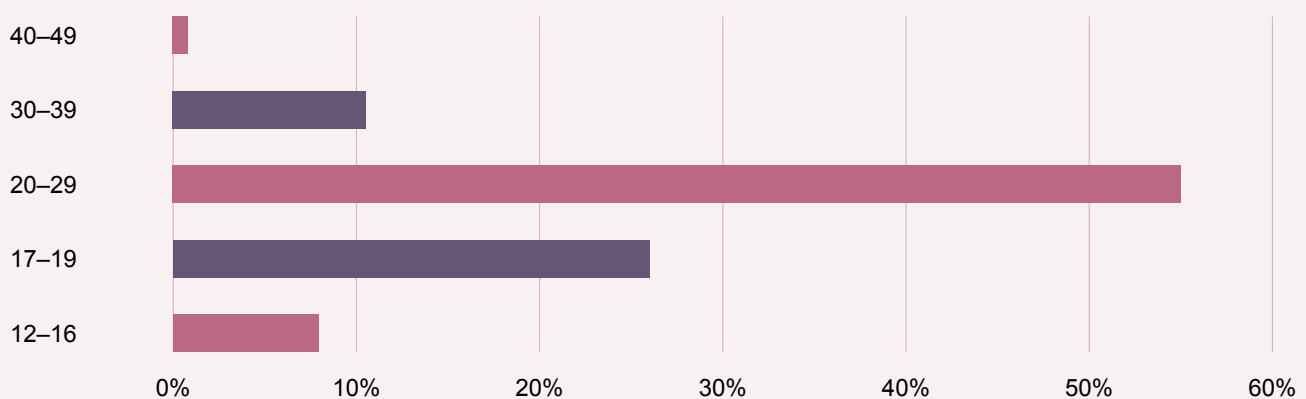
Figure 18: Number of girls and women admitted to Thorndale House per decade, 1922–77



10.3 What were the ages of of girls and women admitted to Thorndale House

- Ages ranged from 12 to 43.
- 170 girls were under 17, which was the age of sexual consent. In 18 of these instances, the records indicate that the man involved had come to the attention of police or courts.

Figure 19: Ages of girls and women admitted to Thorndale House

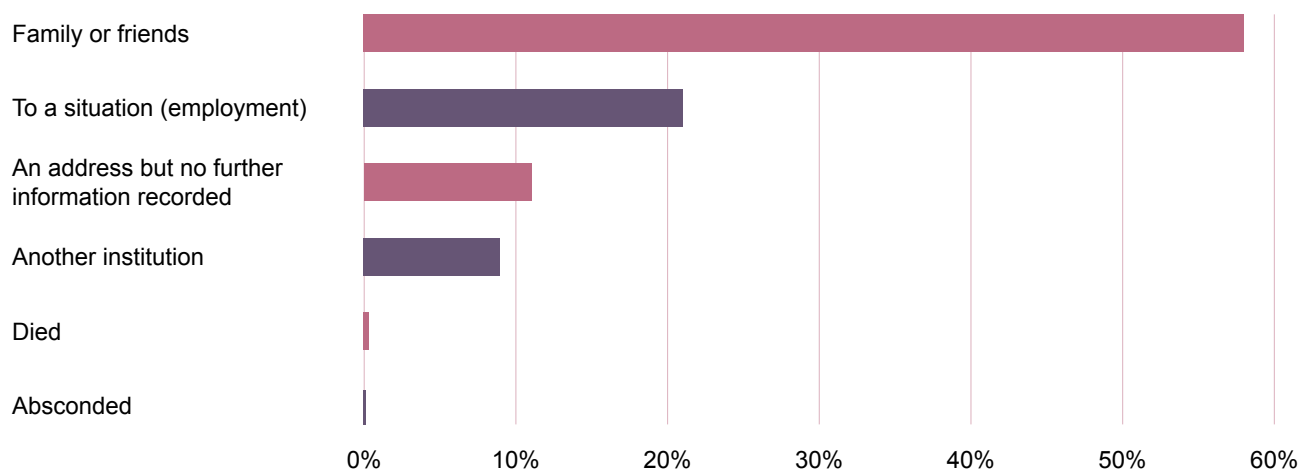


	12–16	17–19	20–29	30–39	40–49
No. of girls and women	170	560	1,186	222	18
%	7.9	26.0	55.0	10.3	0.8

10.4 Where did girls and women go when they left Thorndale House

- 79 girls and women are recorded as going elsewhere within Thorndale House.
- Prior to 1955, some of these girls and women may have gone to the Industrial Home.
- However, most of these departures were after this date and it is assumed that the records refer to the separate aftercare facility for mothers who had just given birth that was part of Thorndale House.

Figure 20: Where girls and women went after leaving Thorndale House



	Absconded	Died	Another institution	An address but no further information recorded	To a situation (employment)	Family or friends
No. of girls and women	3	7	185	222	425	1,171
%	0.1	0.3	9.2	11.0	21.1	58.2

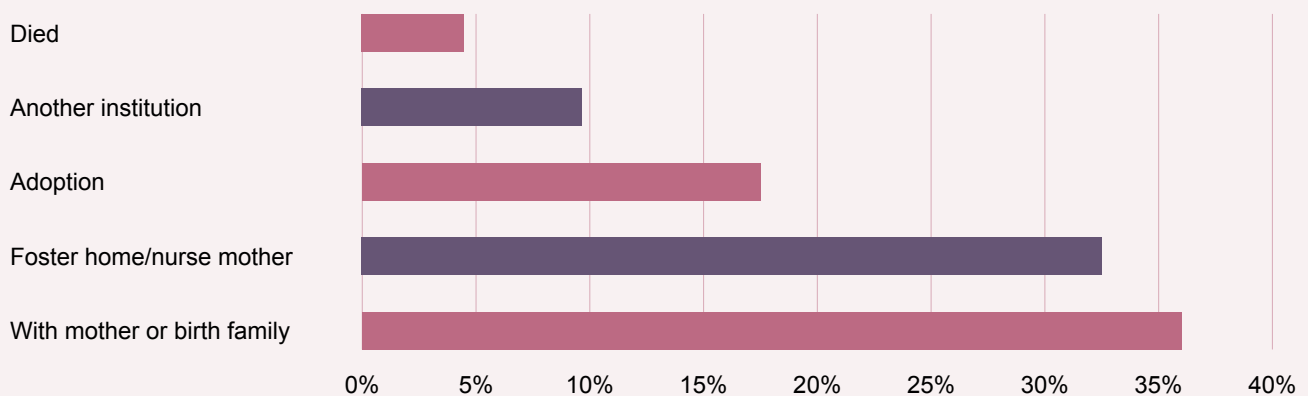
10.5 Where did babies go when they left Thorndale House

Like all the statistical data in this report, Figure 21 does not reflect the complexity of the outcomes. For example, the 35.9% of children reported to have left with mothers or their wider family will have included a significant number where the family may have intended to pass off the child as that of its grandmother or another older married female member of the family.

A small number were transferred into RoI:

- 28 crossed the border with their mothers.
- Eight were recorded as going to foster mothers or ‘nurse-mothers’ in RoI.
- Two were adopted in RoI.
- 20 went to children’s institutions in RoI.

Figure 21: Where babies went after leaving Thorndale House



	With mother or birth family	Foster home/nurse mother	Adoption	Another institution	Died
No. of babies	750	679	364	203	94
%	35.9	32.5	17.4	9.7	4.5

10.6 Deaths and burials of mothers and babies at Thorndale House

- Seven mothers died during childbirth or relatively shortly afterwards:
 - one in Thorndale House.
- 94 babies died:
 - 71 live births
 - 23 still births.
- This represents approximately 4% of total births.

- The highest mortality levels were in the 1930s and 1940s.
- Burial locations have been traced for 89 babies (Belfast City Cemetery).

10.7 Anatomical research

- The remains of five babies were taken for anatomical research at QUB.
- Two of the five were babies of private patients at Thorndale House (they were not in the mother and baby institution).
- Three were from the mother and baby institution.
- These three babies died in 1929, 1950 and 1952.
- There is no evidence of consent for this research by the mothers.
- The PSNI investigated this in 2022 and found 'no evidence of unlawful practices'.

10.8 State inspections of Thorndale House

As is the case with other institutions, surviving records of inspections are limited. Those that exist, for the 1950s, describe the staff as well trained.

10.9 What testimony tells us about Thorndale House

- One testimony reported no negative experiences, but this was not the case for others.
- There were reports of tough physical labour (such as scrubbing floors) when heavily pregnant, which was described as being a punishment.
- Girls and women experienced judgemental and discriminatory language.
- They experienced humiliation on walks to religious services at the Salvation Army citadel.
- Reports cited inadequate medical treatment, including an incident where a teenage girl's baby died a few days after birth.
- This birth mother reports not being allowed to attend her child's baptism.
- There is a report of sexually predatory behaviour by a cleric who visited Thorndale House to see this birth mother after the bereavement.

- Birth mothers give traumatic descriptions of the ‘handover’ of their children for adoption.
- Testimony describes the use of newspaper advertisements to find foster or adoption placements.
- Before 1950, birth mothers were involved in this process.

10.10 Conclusion on Thorndale House

- Thorndale House’s records are patchy, reflecting the record-keeping practices of the time.
- They do enable us to assess Thorndale House’s changing practices: for example, its response to outbreaks of ill health among birth mothers or their babies and changing hygiene practices. However, the written records contain only a few entries that enable us to understand the lived experience of the girls and women who were admitted to Thorndale House. Only testimony enables this. The testimonies are largely critical of the institution. The testimonies also serve to identify some of the factors that left the strongest impressions on birth mothers. Some of these focus on broader societal factors such as the support (or lack of it) of family members. Many other factors identified in testimonies centred on the Thorndale House regime, which many described as having many punitive elements.
- The HIAI Redress Board has dealt with applicants who were admitted to Thorndale House as schoolgirls. One testimony participant, whose mother has sadly passed away, shared details of the Redress Board’s ruling in her mother’s application. The ruling noted that the work she was asked to carry out was ‘effectively as a punishment or atonement for a perceived sin’. It also assessed that the institution had demonstrated a lack of ‘empathy or concern for her’. She was a schoolgirl during her time at Thorndale House.

11.0 Private nursing homes

11.1 Private nursing homes: Context

- There are very few written records that relate to private nursing homes.
- They were privately operated, often by one individual nurse or midwife, and they offered privacy to those who wanted it. NI’s largest cities (Belfast and Derry/Londonderry) had numerous private nursing homes, but they could also be found in smaller towns.
- They were frequently used by married women from more affluent families for maternity services, particularly before the formation of the NHS in 1948.

- They were also used by unmarried girls and women for maternity care.
- Private nursing homes were not subjected to the regulations faced by children's institutions and were not inspected in that context. However, welfare officials and social workers were aware of the use of private nursing homes for the birth of children to mothers who were unmarried for the concealment of those births, and for the subsequent separation of mother and child.

11.2 Births in private nursing homes

- Births in private nursing homes in NI accounted for 15% of all births in 1945.
- This had dropped to less than 1% by the late 1960s.
- Therefore, their role in the overall number of births to 'unmarried mothers' is also likely to have been a tiny proportion of the overall total.

11.3 Inspection of private nursing homes

- The Midwives and Nursing Homes Act (Northern Ireland) 1929 specified that:
 - these institutions had to be staffed by qualified nurses or midwives
 - inspection could be carried out by municipal medical officers.
- Local authorities could refuse a licence if staffing or premises were deemed insufficient.
- The Children's Act 1908 and the Children Amendment Act 1931 gave Boards of Guardians powers to prevent abuses where the children of unmarried women were fostered for private financial gain often at risk to the child's wellbeing. Abuses were often termed 'baby farming'.

11.4 'Baby farming'

- The report discusses 'baby farming' in NI.
- It focuses on the Strand Nursing Home, Portstewart, in the 1940s.
- Its nurse and owner was imprisoned for manslaughter of an infant.

- The case demonstrates the desperation and shame of unmarried women who had given birth (and that of their families).
- It also demonstrates the commercial exploitation of this shame.

11.5 What testimony tells us about private nursing homes

- The majority of testimonies from children, now adults, provide the following:
 - information they have obtained primarily from records related to their birth and its immediate aftermath
 - evidence of several private nursing homes being part of the pathways and practices of mother and baby institutions
 - evidence of false names used for birth mothers.
- Those testimonies from birth mothers suggested some private nursing homes carried out some of the functions of mother and baby institutions:
 - concealment of pregnancy
 - involvement of clergy and GPs in referrals and the practices of private nursing homes
 - isolation of a girl or young woman against her wishes
 - separation from the child at birth.
- In addition, testimonies bore similarities to those from mother and baby institutions in other ways:
 - use of the same adoption agency or social worker
 - allegations of consent forms signed under duress and in inappropriate locations.

11.6 Conclusion on private nursing homes

- A major frustration for any person born in a private nursing home is the lack of records for these small-scale and private institutions.

- A fuller analysis of the role of a small number of private nursing homes in facilitating family separations and an assessment of their role as de facto mother and baby institutions could be carried out via analysis of birth certificates at GRONI against names of adopted children. Some of the testimonies shared about private nursing homes were among the most graphic the IP encountered. The criminal activities of the owner of the Strand Nursing Home are disturbing to read about and are a sharp reminder of the vulnerabilities of many ‘unmarried mothers’ and their infant babies. Her actions also indicate how important it was for all institutions associated with childbirth to face thorough and regular inspections. Unfortunately, she appears to have escaped this, and more generally it appears that the regulation of private nursing homes was too narrowly defined.

12.0 Private domestic residences (including the role of CURA and Life)

12.1 Private domestic residences: Context

- Private homes were also locations at which births could be concealed and family separations quietly arranged.
- In one case, the private domestic residence was the primary site at which family separation took place.
- At another, there was a link to CURA.
- In other cases, girls and women were concealed in private domestic residences before they entered a mother and baby institution.

There are two forms in which this practice occurred:

- informal arrangements:
 - ad hoc arrangements made between a private householder and a birth mother or her family
 - such arrangements made it very hard to identify the extent to which such practices were carried out
 - on occasion, the authorities in RoI and NI were deliberately misinformed in terms of birth certification
 - raises the possibility of hidden ‘adoptions’ that involved no legal process

- formal arrangements, including organised placements in family homes by:
 - Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association
 - pregnant girls and women concealed in other people's family residences in advance of admission to Hopedene
 - CURA (established by Irish Catholic Bishops, 1977)
 - anti-abortion organisation
 - closely tied to many of the agencies and institutions involved in Catholic mother and baby institutions
 - placed pregnant girls and women with Catholic families
 - Life (established in England in 1970 and launched in NI in 1980)
 - also had an anti-abortion ethos
 - established a hostel in Belfast.

12.2 What testimony tells us about private domestic residences

- Many testimonies from birth mothers reported being hidden away in other people's homes prior to admission to a mother and baby institution:
 - In one example, the teenage girl involved was forced to work in the family home in which she was hidden.
 - In another example, a woman from RoI stayed with friends in NI before entering Mater Dei prior to giving birth.
- In one testimony there was no connection with a mother and baby institution:
 - This enabled a child to be taken from the private residence by a couple who registered him as their son.
 - This was an 'adoption' with no legal basis.
 - A priest (in RoI) and a GP (NI) were involved in this subterfuge.
 - The child, now adult, who was 'adopted' in this way only discovered this when he was in his fifties.
 - He later learnt that the priest was involved in more than one case like this one.

- Testimony on Life:
 - Testimony from Catholic and Protestant birth mothers reveals that Life was a cross-denominational organisation.
 - Leaders were united by their anti-abortion stance.
 - A number of young women moved from Marianville to the hostel accommodation Life made available in Belfast.
 - Life was compared favourably against Marianville.
 - It was also described positively in other testimonies.
- Testimony on CURA:
 - Testimony reports that a family tasked to care for a pregnant teenage girl were ill-prepared to look after her psychological wellbeing.
 - It also reports pressure on birth parents to agree to adoption.

12.3 Conclusion on private domestic residences

- Placements of pregnant single girls and women in private family homes demonstrate that these were another location in which pregnancies were hidden.
- They could also enable adoptions to take place in secrecy to help stop the birth mother experiencing stigma and shame and save her family from the loss of respectability that was the perceived outcome in many cases of unmarried pregnancy for much of the twentieth century.
- The example featured here of the ‘adoption’ with no legal basis might be an exceptional case, but it is difficult to assess if it was and that it should be declared to be unique.
- Given the relatively late formation of CURA and Life and the Church of Ireland Moral Welfare Association’s family placement scheme, the numbers of girls and women impacted by them were relatively small in comparison with the much larger numbers who were admitted to mother and baby institutions. However, testimony shared with the IP reveals that their impact was equally significant on the individuals.
- It is notable that these organisations emerged after the Abortion Act 1967 in England, Scotland and Wales, reflecting concerns of the Catholic Church and most Protestant denominations in RoI and NI that girls and young women might cross the Irish Sea to seek terminations of their pregnancies in Britain.

13.0 Baby institutions

13.1 Baby institutions: Context

- In NI, mothers and babies usually spent relatively short periods of time in mother and baby institutions after babies were born.
- This was unlike mother and baby institutions in RoI, where mothers often spent up to two years and children often remained for longer.
- The IP examined a number of baby institutions involved in the pathways in which babies born in NI were placed following separation from their mother.
- Between 1922 and 1995, around 2,000 babies went directly from mother and baby institutions to baby institutions. This is approximately 20% of all the children, now adults, associated with the mother and baby institutions.
- There were also admissions to baby institutions from a variety of other pathways for a range of reasons.

13.2 Institutions included

- The chapter on Baby Institutions discusses a number of institutions in both NI and in RoI.
- This includes institutions managed by religious orders or other voluntary organisations as well as others managed by the state.

13.3 Significant elements of the findings on baby institutions

This chapter contains:

- discussion of very high infant mortality rates in a number of institutions, particularly:
 - St Joseph's Babies' Home, Belfast
 - Nazareth House, Fahan, Co Donegal
- testimony and discussion of other factors, including:
 - overcrowding
 - poor hygiene
 - inexperienced staff

- deaths and burials associated with these institutions and the IP's findings on registration and burial locations
- inspection and regulation of baby institutions
- the role of private nursing homes in pathways and practices
- the placement of children with nurse-mothers
- medical research and vaccine trials, in 1962, at an unidentified institution, involving QUB scientists and Glaxo Laboratories Limited.

The discussion focuses on several institutions, in particular:

- St Joseph's Babies' Home, Belfast
- Nazareth House, Portadown
- Nazareth House, Fahan, Co Donegal
- St Joseph's Baby Home, Stamullen, Co Meath
- Brefne, Belfast.

13.4 Conclusion on baby institutions

- It is vital to assess baby institutions in NI to develop an appreciation of how well the state and the voluntary organisations cared for the babies with whom they were entrusted.
- From the HIAI report, we know much more about the experiences of the very large number of children who were moved to large-scale children's institutions, than we know about baby institutions often operated by the same organisations.
- The availability of records for some institutions but not for others leaves the IP unable to offer commentary on all institutions. This includes baby institutions operated by Barnardo's and the Sisters of Mercy.
- It is apparent that infant mortality in several baby institutions was extremely high. This was particularly the case between the 1920s and 1940s, before improving slowly from the 1950s onwards.

- Evidence suggests that the major cause of these fatalities was the overcrowding in these institutions and inadequate staffing numbers. In addition, there appear to be issues around underfeeding or insufficient diet, resulting in malnutrition of babies both in institutions and also while they were ‘nursed out’. Some institutional inspections discussed these matters between the 1950s and 1980s. The lack of care and stimulation for young and vulnerable babies within institutions is likely to have resulted in many of them not being enabled to meet their developmental milestones and maximise their full potential due to harsh, un-nurturing and at times unsafe environmental factors.
- The issue of cross-border movements of babies features again in the discussion of baby institutions. Very large numbers of babies are recorded to have been transferred to Nazareth House, Fahan. Given its very high infant mortality rates, that is concerning.
- Those individuals who, as young children, were taken across the border face great difficulties in negotiating two sets of bureaucracies in seeking basic information about their birth origins and identity.

Volume 3

Magdalene Laundries, Industrial Homes
and Workhouses



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

Content:

This section discusses:

Preface: Comparative statistics related to these institutions

- 1.0 Thorndale Industrial Home
- 2.0 Introduction to GSS St Mary’s institutions and laundries
- 3.0 St Mary’s, Belfast
- 4.0 St Mary’s, Derry/Londonderry
- 5.0 St Mary’s, Newry
- 6.0 Workhouses

Preface: Comparative statistics related to these institutions

Figure 22: Admissions of girls and women to the St Mary’s institutions (Magdalene laundries) and the Thorndale Industrial Home

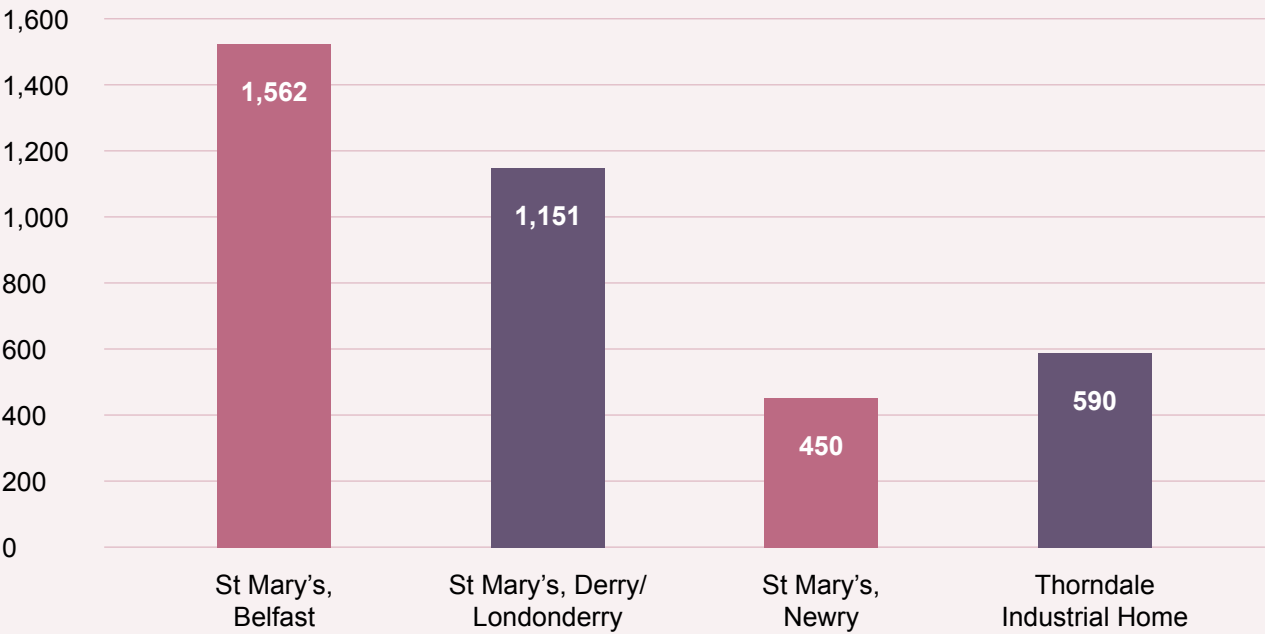
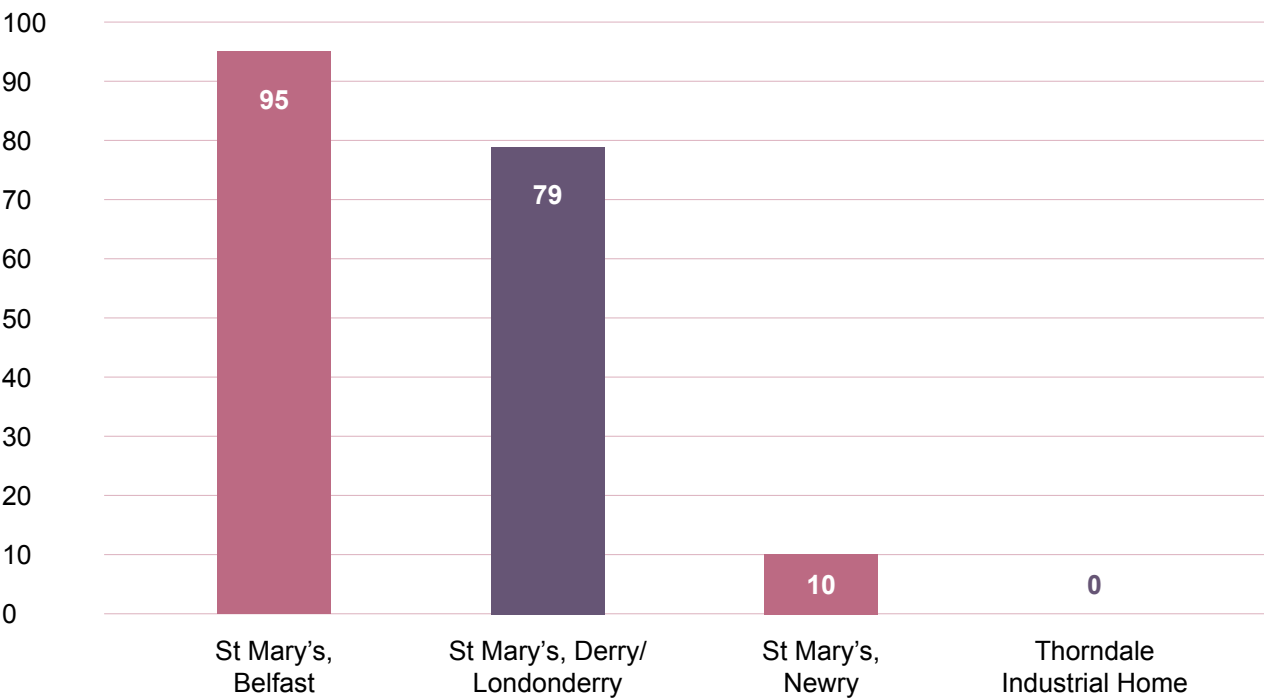


Figure 23: Deaths of girls and women linked to the St Mary’s institutions and Thorndale Industrial Home



1.0 Thorndale Industrial Home

1.1 History of Thorndale Industrial Home

In 1886, the Salvation Army opened a ‘Rescue Home’ for girls and women in Belfast.

- Its first industrial home, or ‘shelter for young women’, was opened on the Malone Road, Belfast in 1905.
- The industrial home moved to Thorndale House off the Antrim Road in 1922.
- The industrial home was refocused as ‘a girls’ training home’ in 1948 and continued in this role until its closure in 1955.

The Salvation Army explains that girls and women ‘undertook needlework, producing sewn garments and embroidery’. For doing this work:

“the women and girls were not paid a wage for their labour but were provided with fully catered accommodation for the duration of their training. The proceeds from the sale of their products were treated as contributions towards their maintenance, with any excess going towards the Salvation Army’s charitable work more widely.

1.2 Finances at Thorndale Industrial Home

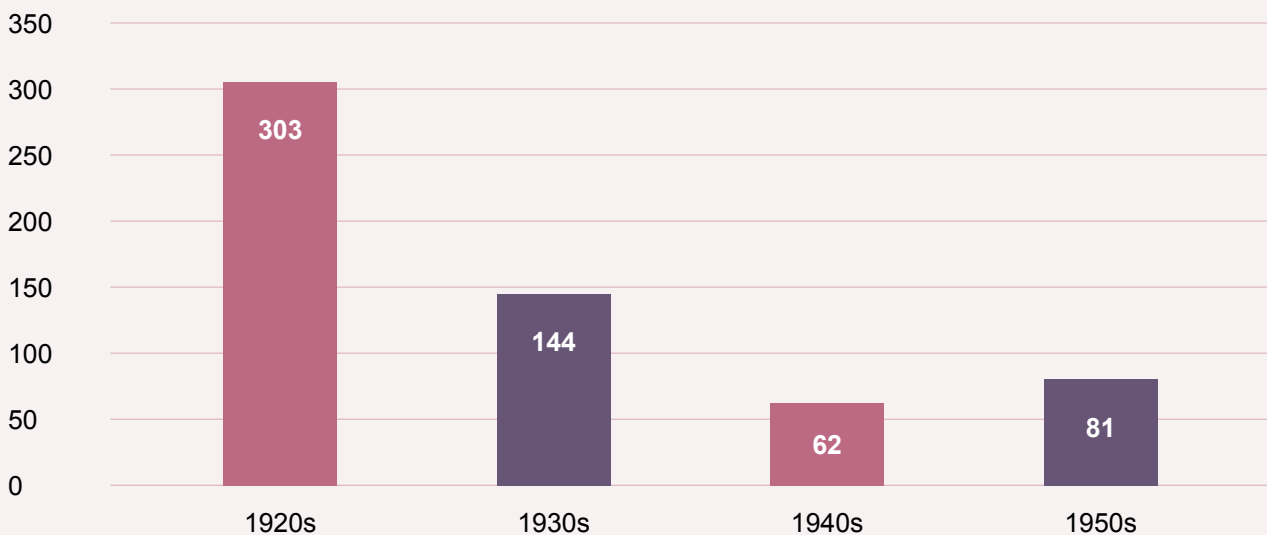
The institution was funded by:

- money raised by the sale of handicraft products made by the girls and women
- payments by the state for individuals placed in the institution on probation or court orders of various types
- donations following charitable appeals.

1.3 Background and number of girls and women admitted to Thorndale Industrial Home

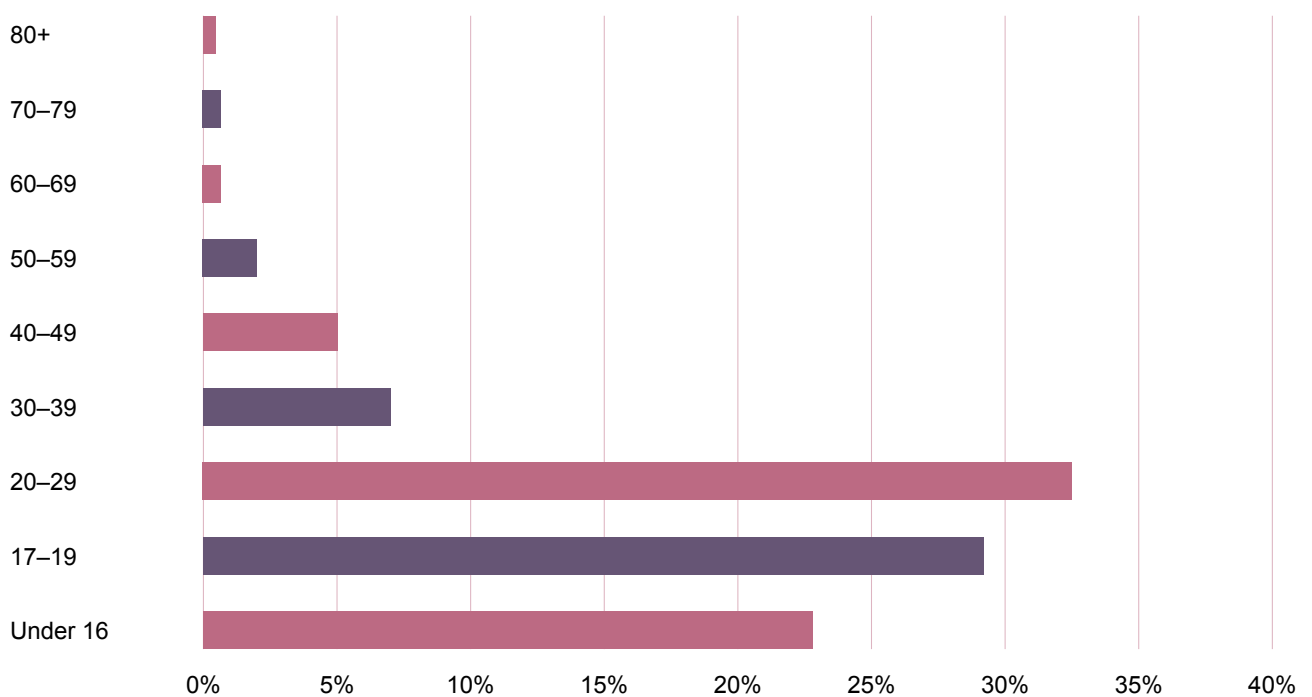
- A total of 590 girls and women were admitted between 1922 and 1955.
- Of these, 85.3% were from NI.
- A further 9.9% were from Rol.
- The remainder were from England and Scotland.

Figure 24: Number of girls and women who were admitted to Thorndale Industrial Home per decade, 1922–55



1.4 What age were girls and women admitted to Thorndale Industrial Home

Figure 25: Ages of girls and women admitted to Thorndale Industrial Home

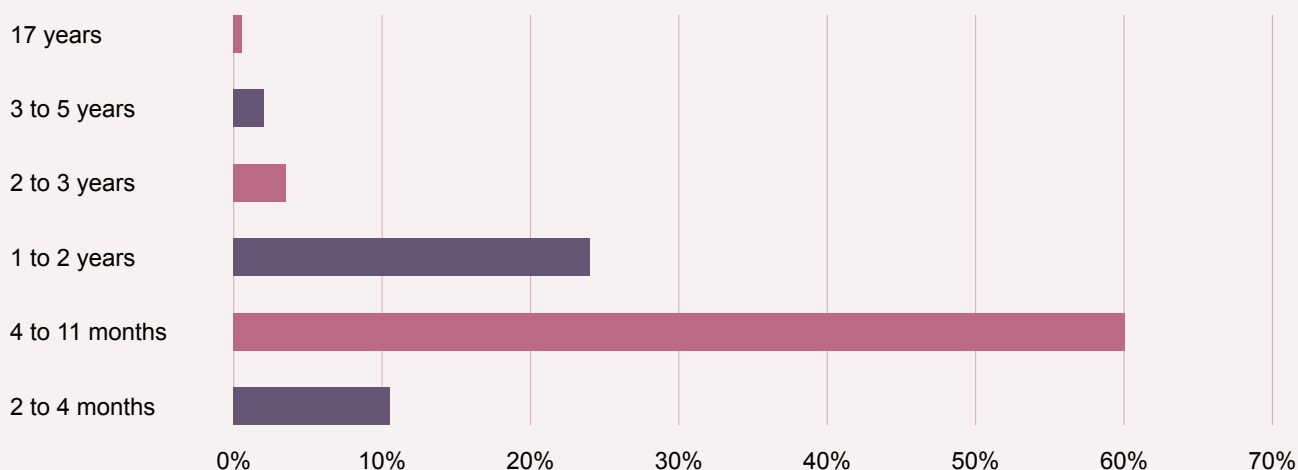


	Under 16	17-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80+
No. of girls and women	123	158	176	37	27	11	3	3	2
%	22.8	29.3	32.6	6.9	5.0	2.0	0.6	0.6	0.4

1.5 How long did girls and women stay in Thorndale Industrial Home

The length of time varied considerably from an overnight stay to a woman who remained for 17 years. She may have been employed in some form or capacity. **Figure 26** illustrates the length of stay of the 280 girls and women who remained in Thorndale Industrial Home for longer than two months.

Figure 26: Length of time girls and women stayed in Thorndale Industrial Home



	2 to 4 months	4 to 11 months	1 to 2 years	2 to 3 years	3 to 5 years	17 years
No. of girls and women	29	168	67	10	5	1
%	10.4	60.0	23.9	3.6	1.8	0.4

1.6 Who sent girls and women to Thorndale Industrial Home

The records are not very detailed on this issue. Some examples are:

- 29.9% recorded as being referred for ‘personal’ reasons or ‘personally’
- 15.1% from the police court or the police directly
- 13.0% referred by the Salvation Army
- 12.3% with ‘family or ‘friends’ recorded as the source of referral
- 5.7% ‘brought’ or ‘sent’ (no further details included)
- 4.2% with only a name recorded
- 1.1% referred by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

1.7 Why were girls and women sent to Thorndale Industrial Home

The major reasons were:

- sent from the courts as an alternative to prison
- brought directly by the police (e.g., for 'associating with undesirable characters')
- brought by their family because they were 'out of control'
- placed there due to mental health issues
- placed there due to addiction issues
- destitution or homelessness.

1.8 Daily life in Thorndale Industrial Home

As no one came forward to share testimony about this institution, the limited information on this topic is drawn from the Salvation Army records:

- Most girls and women were engaged in needlework.
- There was training in domestic work, and girls and women worked in the laundry which serviced Thorndale House.
- This training was in preparation for a return to the outside world and employment.

1.9 Where did girls and women go when they left Thorndale Industrial Home

The records note:

- 37.6% recorded as leaving for employment
- 30.2% who left with family or friends
- 8.7% who left to go to hospital, including for both physical and mental health issues
- 5.3% recorded as going to other institutions
- 1.8% recorded as leaving in the care of welfare authorities or returning to prison
- 7.8% who 'left wilfully', ran away or were dismissed.

1.10 Conclusion on Thorndale Industrial Home

- The Salvation Army Thorndale Industrial Home shares some historical similarities with the GSS St Mary's institutions.
- They both emerged from the 'rescue home' movement of the Victorian era that saw evangelical Christians of all denominations attempt to counter what they viewed as the moral degeneration of the urban working classes.
- They saw it as their Christian duty to reform girls and women who had 'fallen' or were at risk of 'falling' in big cities like Belfast.
- Like the GSS, the Salvation Army identified a life of piety and prayer alongside labour as the means through which to reform the girls and women admitted to the Thorndale Industrial Home.
- Like the GSS, the Salvation Army appears to have admitted girls and young women who were referred by the courts, their own families, members of the clergy, the police and welfare workers.
- Thorndale Industrial Home's comparatively early closure in 1955 means that most of the girls and women admitted to it are no longer able to provide testimony about daily life in this institution.
- Salvation Army industrial homes have not been the subject of either historical or contemporary debates about the conditions within them or how they operated practically and financially. This also reduces the prospect of any woman who spent time in Thorndale Industrial Home coming forward with testimony about the institution.

2.0 Introduction to GSS St Mary's institutions and laundries

2.1 Rationale for this chapter

To prevent repeating the historical debates about the origins of Magdalene laundries, the IP decided to include a chapter providing a detailed discussion of these themes.

2.2 Content

The chapter discussed:

- the GSS and how they operated their St Mary's institutions
- political debates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about their laundries and the issue of girls and women working there unpaid

- the HIAI's examination of girls in the St Mary's institutions in NI
- discussion of Magdalene laundries and the impact of long-term institutionalisation
- detailed histories of the three GSS St Mary's institutions in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Newry.

3.0 St Mary's, Belfast

3.1 History of St Mary's, Belfast

- The GSS arrived in Belfast in 1867, moving to the Ormeau Road in 1868, where a convent, a church and the St Mary's institution with laundry facilities were built.
- The laundry closed in 1977.
- At that time, the St Mary's institution still accommodated a number of elderly women.
- They remained in the main convent building until 1996, when sheltered accommodation and the Greenvale Residential Home were built on the Good Shepherd Convent site.

3.2 Finances at St Mary's, Belfast

- Finance came from profits from the commercial laundry.
- Welfare or social services made payments to the GSS for girls and women placed there under their supervision.
- Charitable donations were made to the GSS from local Catholics.
- The GSS records seen by the IP do not suggest that any significant profit was made from the commercial laundry.

3.3 The issue of work and the laundry

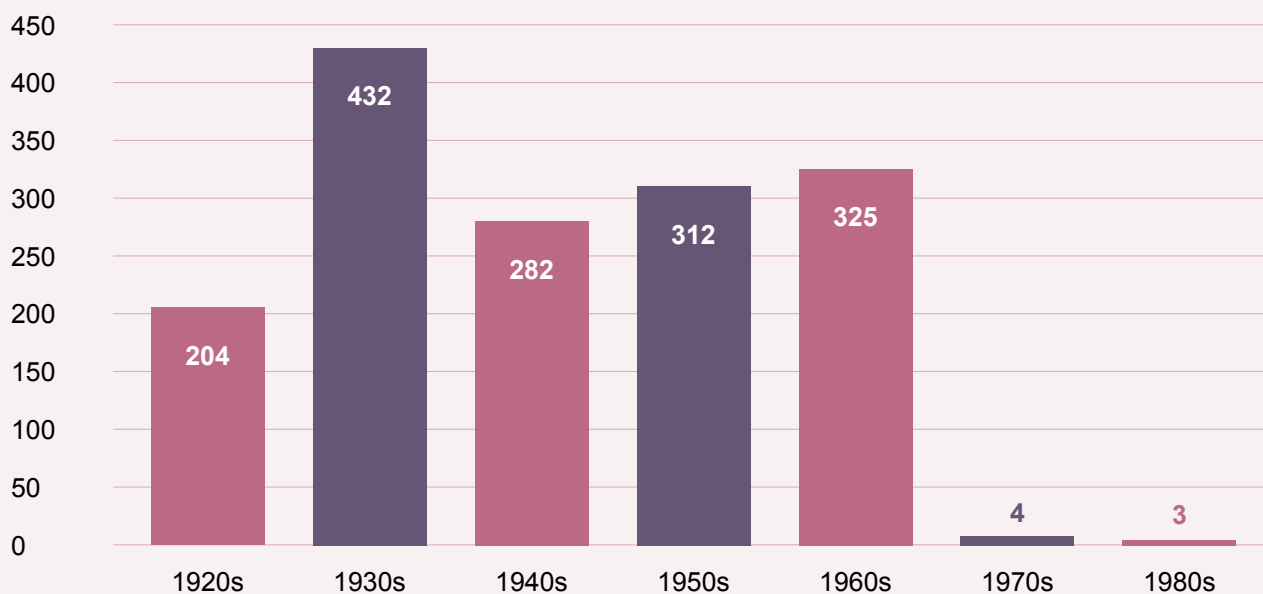
- The chapter discusses the nature of work in the laundry.
- It draws on what the HIAI said about girls working in the laundry.

- Testimony on the laundry from some of those who worked there and from their relatives is discussed.
- The GSS perspective on the laundry is also included.

3.4 Background and number of girls and women who were admitted to St Mary's, Belfast

- Records show 1,562 girls and women admitted between 1922 and 1984.
- Just over 80% of those admitted arrived from addresses in NI.
- A further 14.5% came from RoI.
- Small numbers came from other countries.
- The vast majority were from Catholic families but 15 were Protestant and a further six had one Protestant parent.

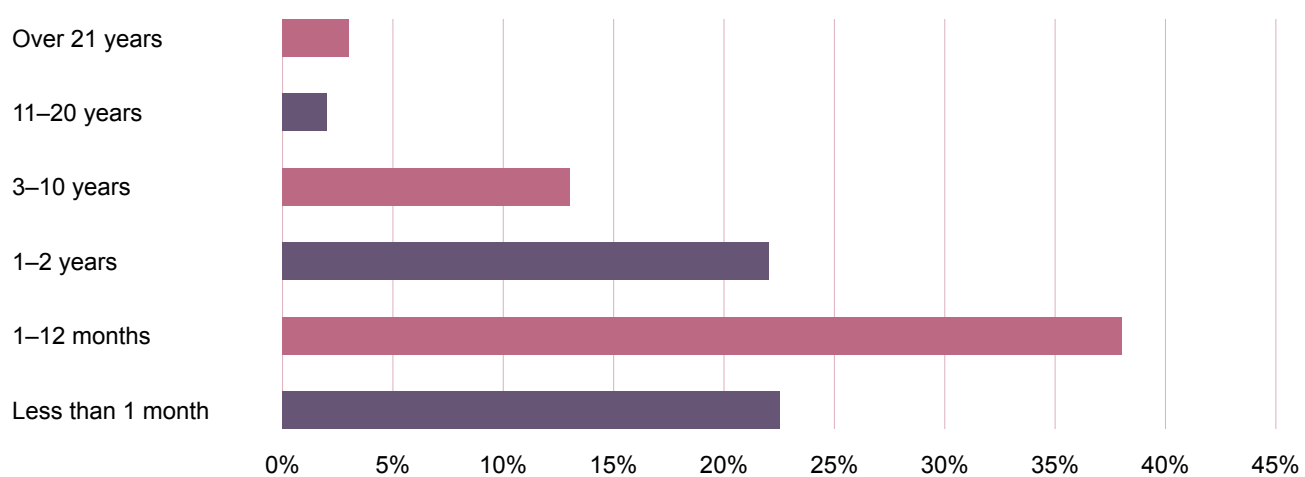
Figure 27: Number of girls and women who were admitted to St Mary's, Belfast per decade, 1922–84



3.5 How long did girls and women stay in St Mary's, Belfast

Girls and women stayed for various lengths of time, including some who remained in the institution for many years. The data cannot capture the full detail of events and this is discussed more fully in the chapter on St Mary's, Belfast.

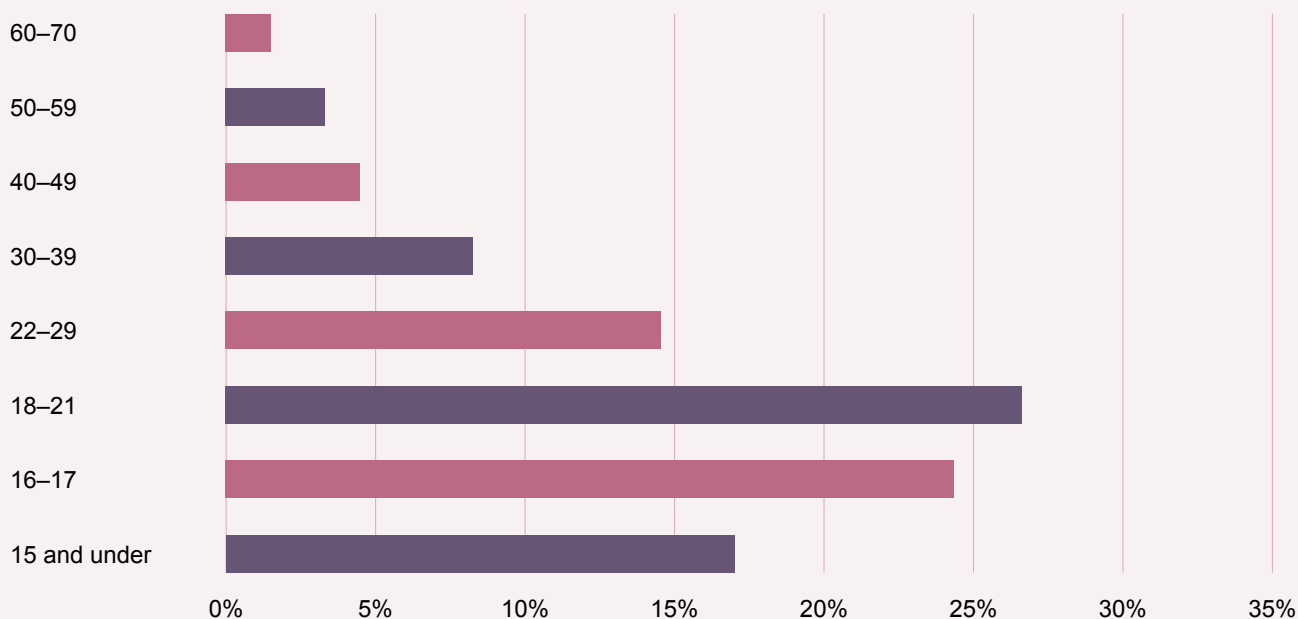
Figure 28: Length of time girls and women stayed in St Mary's, Belfast



	Less than 1 month	1-12 months	1-2 years	3-10 years	11-20 years	Over 21 years
No. of girls and women	169	287	166	98	13	23
%	22.4	38.0	22.0	13.0	1.7	3.0

3.6 What age were girls and women admitted to St Mary's, Belfast

Figure 29: Ages of girls and women admitted to St Mary's, Belfast



	15 and under	16-17	18-21	22-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-70
No. of girls and women	223	321	352	193	108	60	43	20
%	16.9	24.3	26.7	14.6	8.2	4.5	3.3	1.5

- It is assumed that any of these girls who were under 15 would have been placed in the Sacred Heart Home and gone to school each day, and that those who had reached the school-leaving age (14 before 1947 and 15 between 1947 and 1972) would have been required to work in the St Mary's, Belfast laundry.

3.7 Who sent girls and women to St Mary's, Belfast

Table 3: Who sent girls and women to St Mary's, Belfast

Source	No.	Percentage
Court	189	29.7
Religious orders (excluding GSS)	84	13.2
Marianville	61	9.6
Social services/welfare	55	8.6
Legion of Mary	44	6.9
Clergy	33	5.2
Police	33	5.2
Self-referral	32	5.0
GSS	31	4.9
Family	20	3.1
Sacred Heart Home	17	2.7
Hospital	11	1.7
Middletown Training School	8	1.3
Named nun	8	1.3
Marianvale	3	0.5
Probation officer	2	0.3
Prison	2	0.3
Doctor/solicitor	2	0.3
National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	2	0.3

3.8 Where did girls and women go when they left St Mary's, Belfast

Information on this is limited, but records indicate:

- 23.7% simply record 'left'
- 24.6% were recorded as returning to family or 'home'

- 13.3% left to take up employment (often in domestic service)
- 11.0% transferred to another religious institution
- 4.0% 'ran away'
- 2.8% were 'expelled' from the institution by the GSS
- 31 women remained when the institution closed in 1984, many of whom were still living there when they were moved into sheltered accommodation in 1994.

3.9 Deaths and burials at St Mary's, Belfast

- There were 95 deaths identified associated with St Mary's, Belfast.
- The records were incomplete and difficult to work with.
- The death registrations of 81 women (who died between 1935 and 2019) were located.
- Death registrations for a further 14 could not be located based on the information provided to the IP.
- Burial locations have been discovered for 87 of the 95 women.
- The remaining eight could not be found due to inadequate or inaccurate information.
- Burials commonly took place in Milltown Cemetery or Belfast City Cemetery.
- As late as 2019 plots were unmarked, while others had headstones with names that have been erected in recent years.
- The GSS recently told the IP that all graves now have headstones and names.

3.10 What testimony tells us about St Mary's, Belfast

Testimony includes:

- testimony from women sent from Marianville after separation from their child (or from their family members);
- testimony from women about their fear and anxiety about possibly never being allowed to leave the institution;

- testimony from family members of girls and women who had been pregnant as the result of rape but who were themselves effectively punished by placement in the institution;
- testimony from one woman about experiencing electroconvulsive therapy;
- testimony about the role of social services in the placement of girls and women in St Mary's, Belfast;
- positive accounts of the Sacred Heart Home (part of the same building but for school-age girls);
- the difficulties social workers experienced when trying to provide appropriate care for the elderly women who left the institution after it closed;
- testimony about how the GSS arranged the funerals of women who died;
- testimony from relatives of the women questioning why so many were kept in the institution for decades.

3.11 Conclusion on St Mary's, Belfast

- St Mary's, Belfast was an institution that accommodated a multigenerational and diverse range of girls and women.
- They were referred to the GSS on behalf of the state by welfare committees, the Special Care Committee, police officers and probation officers, as well as non-state referrals from members of the clergy and other religious orders, and the families of the girls and women.
- In a small minority of cases, girls and women presented themselves at St Mary's, Belfast to seek crisis accommodation.
- These girls and women included (among others):
 - those on probation
 - girls and women who were admitted as 'special care' cases
 - teenage victims of incest or rape
 - individuals with alcohol dependency and without family support
 - individuals fleeing abusive partners

- young women who were sent to ‘the class’ after they had given birth outside of marriage
- girls and women identified as being in ‘moral danger’.
- The wide spectrum of individuals admitted to St Mary’s, Belfast was in keeping with the GSS’ principle that no one deemed to be in need should be turned away by the Order.
- The St Mary’s institutions operated a regimented culture and repetitive work regime.
- The GSS explained that their policy was to offer mentorship and support for girls and women in the St Mary’s institutions. However, this seems at odds with the policy of renaming new arrivals, imposing silence during meals and punishing infringements of rules in ‘a cruel and demeaning fashion’ as concluded by the HIAI.
- The evidence indicates that the regime in the St Mary’s institutions and their laundries became more benign from the late 1960s, the result of factors that included the impact of more liberal Catholic ideology plus increasing financial support from the welfare state.
- The women who worked in the St Mary’s laundries began to receive modest amounts of ‘pocket money’ during the 1970s, which they could spend on themselves.
- There were also increased educational opportunities, mainly in the form of evening classes, which enabled some women to spend time away from the convent.
- These were improvements on the conditions experienced by the previous generations of St Mary’s women. However, life in the St Mary’s institutions was still comparatively regulated and restricted.
- Many of the testimonies identify a punitive element in the decision to send a girl or woman to St Mary’s, Belfast and discuss the roles of other family members, priests or social workers in arranging this with the GSS.
- To varying degrees, all the testimonies regret that the laundry regimes existed in the form in which they did. This includes testimonies with Sister 1 and Sister 2 which express the GSS’ remorse that, in their view, there was no economic alternative to girls and women working unpaid in the laundries. There were also more critical views that bluntly describe the system as being a fundamentally exploitative practice.
- Concerns about the financial and economic model operated by the GSS laundries have been debated since at least the 1890s. However, there is no evidence that the state in NI considered these matters even though it benefited from their existence. This was obviously apparent during World War Two when the GSS laundries in St Mary’s, Belfast and Derry/Londonderry were called upon to help the war effort by laundering military uniforms.

4.0 St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

4.1 History of the GSS St Mary's Institution and Laundry, Derry/Londonderry

- The GSS arrived in Derry/Londonderry in 1919 after they purchased land on the Dungiven Road in the Waterside district of the city.
- The laundry in this St Mary's institution was established by October 1921.
- The laundry closed in 1982, and the St Mary's institution closed in 1984.
- It was registered as a residential home and the women subsequently moved to residential and sheltered accommodation on a site adjacent to the convent.
- Unlike the GSS convents in Belfast and Newry, there was no mother and baby institution on the site.

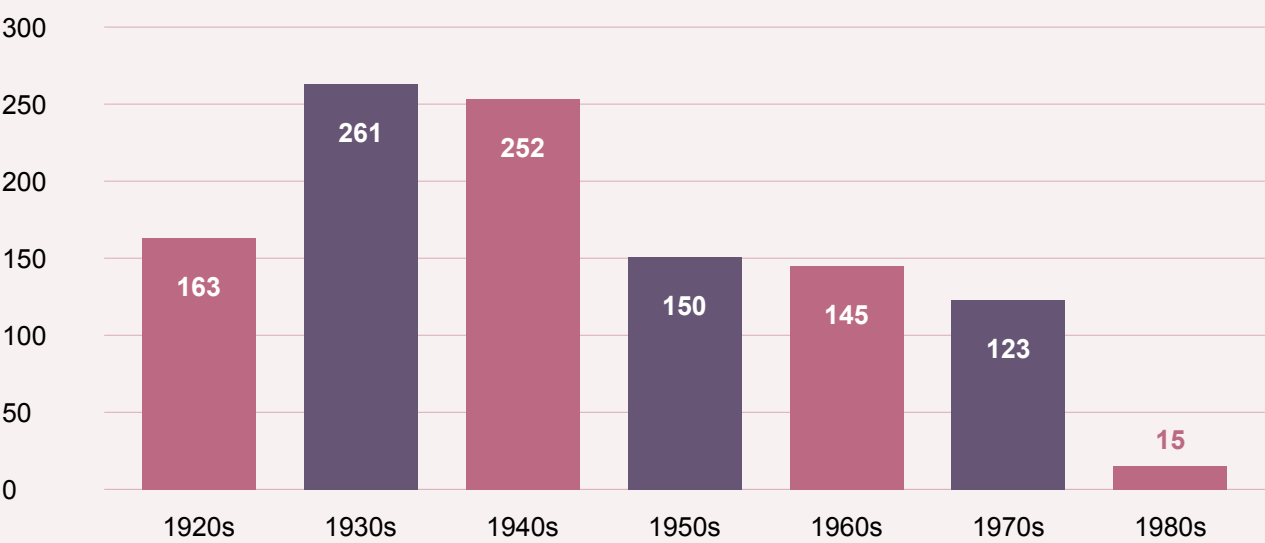
4.2 Finances at St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

- Profits from the laundry, which was used by local businesses and householders, was one source of finance.
- Charitable donations from local Catholics was another source.
- Payments from welfare authorities that had placed girls or women in the institution also contributed to running costs.
- The financial records suggest that profits were not significant. The one exception to this was during World War Two, when St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry (and St Mary's, Belfast) were awarded contracts for laundering by the American, British and Canadian military.
- The state was aware of the moral debates about the non-payment of wages in the St Mary's institutions. It reached its own agreements and understandings with the GSS on this issue and continued to place girls and women in the institutions.

4.3 Background to and number of admissions of girls and women to St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

- Between 1922 and 1984, 1,151 girls and women were admitted.
- More than one in three girls and women were from RoI. This reflects this institution's proximity to Donegal and other border counties in RoI.

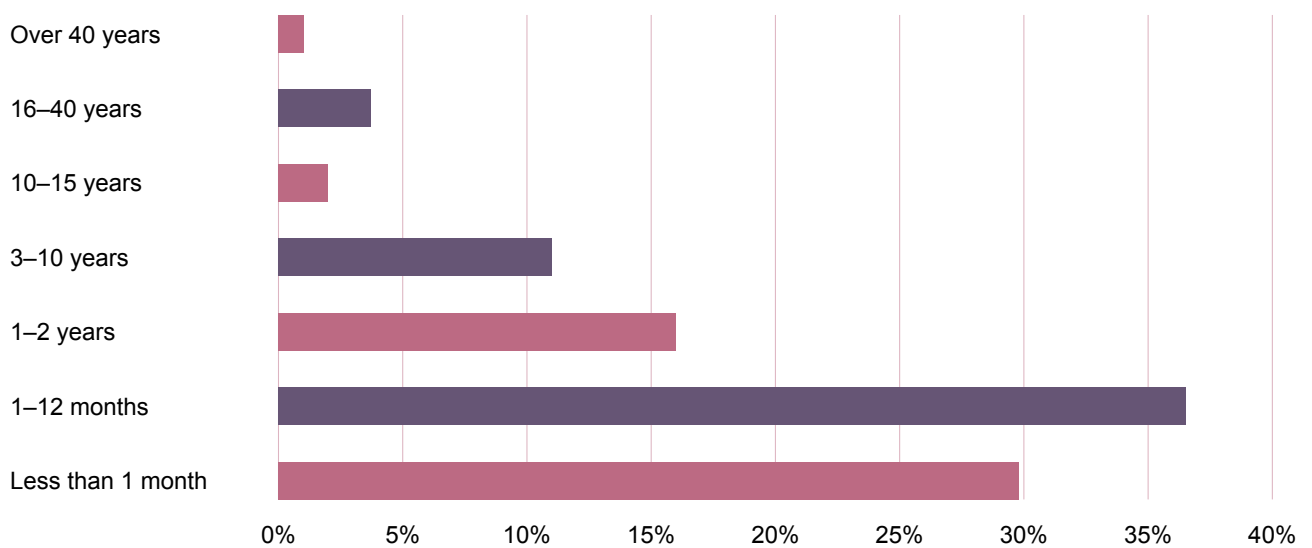
Figure 30: Number of girls and women admitted to St Mary’s, Derry/Londonderry per decade, 1922–84



4.4 How long did girls and women stay in St Mary’s, Derry/Londonderry

Girls and women stayed for various lengths of time, including some who remained in the institution for many years. The data cannot capture the full detail of events and this is discussed more fully in the chapter on St Mary’s, Derry/Londonderry.

Figure 31: Length of time girls and women stayed in St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

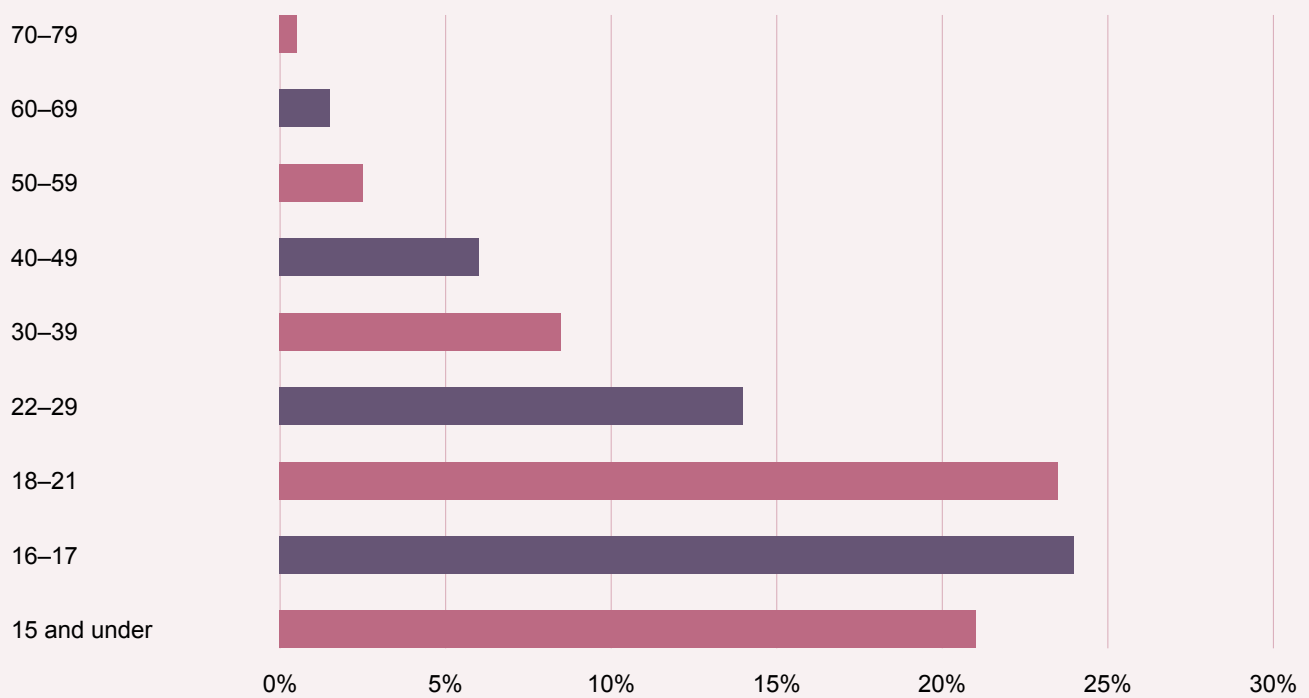


	Less than 1 month	1-12 months	1-2 years	3-10 years	10-15 years	16-40 years	Over 40 years
No. of girls and women	236	289	127	85	17	29	8
%	29.8	36.5	16.1	10.7	2.1	3.7	1.0

4.5 What age were girls and women admitted to St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

- Ages ranged from 6 to 78.
- The IP's assessment is that the HIAI underestimated the number of girls under 18 who were admitted.
- It is assumed that the very youngest girls, such as the six-year-old, did not work but were placed in the Sacred Heart Home, which was part of the St Mary's institution and accommodated school-age girls.

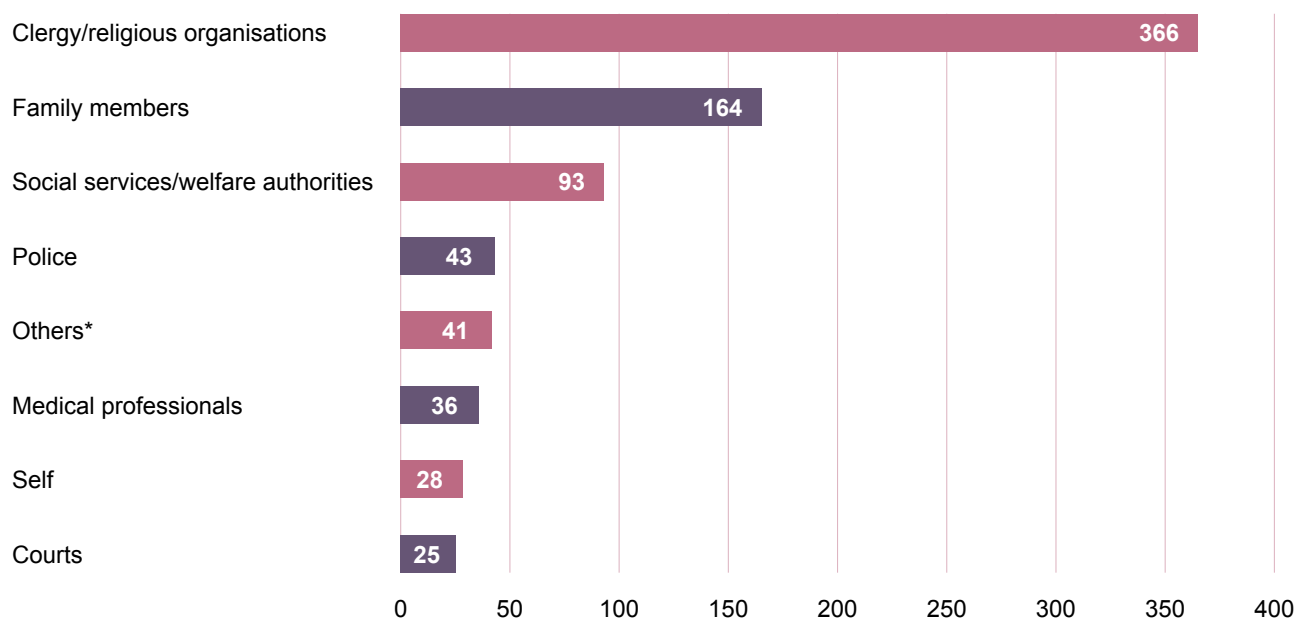
Figure 32: Ages of girls and women admitted to St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry



	15 and under	16-17	18-21	22-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79
No. of girls and women	188	217	212	126	70	52	23	13	5
%	20.8	24.0	23.4	13.9	7.7	5.7	2.5	1.4	0.6

4.6 Who sent girls and women to St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

Figure 33: Who sent girls and women to St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry



*Others: employers, friends, named individuals.

4.7 Why were girls and women sent to St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

Girls and women were sent to St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry for a variety of reasons:

- transferred after giving birth after time in a mother and baby institution
- perceived to be in 'moral danger'
- placed under a Fit Person Order or some other court order:
 - among these were girls who were the victims of rape and incest
- placed by the Special Care Committee
- placed under terms of probation
- transferred from a children's institution when they reached 15 or 16
- transferred from prison

- brought by the police:
 - including girls under paramilitary or communal threat during the Troubles
- women often deemed as 'self-referrals':
 - including victims of domestic violence
 - including women with addiction issues.

4.8 Daily life in St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

- For most girls and women work in the laundry was a central aspect of life (for which they went unpaid).
- There was a policy of renaming girls and women and giving them a 'class name'.
- The institution had a very strong religious ethos.
- The structured regime included silence during mealtimes.
- There were punishments that the HIAI ruled as a form of 'humiliation and emotional abuse'.
- Before the mid-1960s, there were limited if any opportunities to time outside the institution.
- Leisure activities included participation in musical events and concerts within the institution.
- From the late 1960s there was some liberalisation:
 - short annual holidays, shopping trips, etc.
 - more opportunities for part-time education in the evenings
 - small amounts of money provided for personal use.

4.9 Where did girls and women go when they left St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

Records often do not record this detail. Of those that are recorded, destinations include the following:

- 217 simply state 'left'.

- 157 left with a family member.
- 82 were reported to be 'dismissed' but rarely was an explanation added.
- 56 were recorded to have run away.
- 54 were transferred to another institution (including another GSS St Mary's institution).
- 54 left to take up employment.
- 45 left for a hospital, including psychiatric hospitals.

4.10 Deaths and burials at St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

- The IP identified 79 deaths that took place between 1925 and 2019 of women who were admitted to St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry.
- The deaths that followed the closure of St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry were of those women who were in the residential home or who moved to sheltered residential accommodation after its closure.
- The GSS purchased burial plots at Ardmore Cemetery on the outskirts of the city.
- Burial locations were identified for 55 of the 79.
- Of those whose burial location is unknown, at least six died in locations other than St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry.
- Death certificates have been located for 69 of the 79 women.
- The 'first funeral from the house', as the GSS recorded it, took place in 1925.
- This is one of the deaths for which no death certificate or burial record has been located.
- The GSS suggest that, in some of the 24 cases where burial location has not been identified, the women were taken for burial by family members.
- The communal plots at Ardmore Cemetery have headstones and the women's names inscribed (some of which appear to have been erected in recent years).
- In one testimony, the IP learnt that one woman's name was incorrect and her family took legal advice to have it changed.
- Testimonies reported examples where funerals took place at the GSS convent and that family members were in attendance.

4.11 What testimony tells us about St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

Testimonies shared with the IP about this institution discussed:

- the 'disappearance' of relatives (in one case a mother, in another an aunt) who were in St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry
- women working without pay in the institution
- the length of time they remained in the institution
- the institutionalisation of these women
- the difficulty of their re-entry into the outside community after many years in St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry
- description of funeral and burial arrangements
- a testimony discussing one woman's negative experience with one of the Sisters (her testimony was positive otherwise).

4.12 Conclusion on St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry

- Like the other two GSS St Mary's institutions, this was a complex, multigenerational institution.
- It admitted a very broad group of girls and women.
- It operated a catch-all solution to a wide range of issues identified by social workers, probation officers, the police, GPs, members of the clergy and Catholic religious orders, and, in some cases, family members of the girls and women who were sent to the institution.
- As noted for the St Mary's, Belfast summary (above) these aims may have met with GSS policy to not turn away anyone 'in need', but any intention to offer support must have been undermined by the policy of renaming new arrivals, imposing silence during meals, and punishing infringements of their rules in a cruel and demeaning fashion as judged by the HIAI.
- The regime in the St Mary's institutions and in their laundries became less severe from the late 1960s as a more liberal approach was introduced and with greater levels of income from the state. The girls and women in the institution began to receive small amounts of 'pocket money', were taken away once a year for a short holiday at a local seaside resort and were given some opportunities to engage in part-time evening classes.

- Two perspectives emerge from testimonies.
 - One woman who spent most of her life in the institution did value numerous aspects of her life in St Mary's, despite the belittling experience she had with one nun.
 - Testimonies from two GSS nuns highlight the positive things they believe they did for those sent to the institution.
 - Other testimonies are less positive. They discuss issues such as punishment, a harsh environment, and the institutionalisation of girls and women, particularly those who remained there for very long periods of time. This included the reflections of a social worker that these women had lost their independence and autonomy via practices such as the removal of their names on entry to the institution.
- The public inquiry may wish to carry out further investigation around details of burials and death certification for some of the women connected to St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry for whom it has not been possible to locate this information.

5.0 St Mary's, Newry

5.1 History of St Mary's, Newry

- St Mary's, Newry operated between 1947 and 1984 at Armagh Road, Newry, Co Down.
- Like the other GSS St Mary's institutions, it included a commercial laundry in which girls and women sent to St Mary's worked without pay. The laundry, which serviced local hotels among other customers, appears to have closed in 1977.
- Also on the site was the GSS Marianvale Mother and Baby Institution.

5.2 Finances of St Mary's, Newry

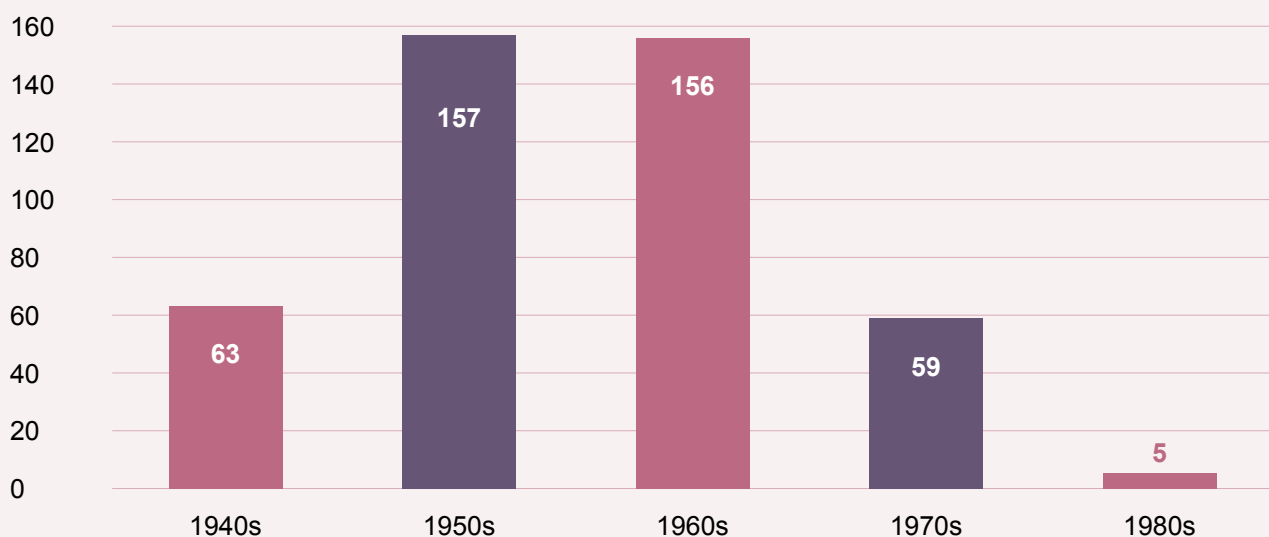
- Income from the commercial laundry was one source of finance.
- Payments made by welfare committees or social services for girls and women they sent to St Mary's, Newry was another source.
- Charitable donations were the third source.

5.3 Background to and number of girls and women admitted to St Mary's, Newry

The records note:

- 450 admissions
- 69% of these were from NI
- 28% were from RoI
- 3% were from England or Scotland.

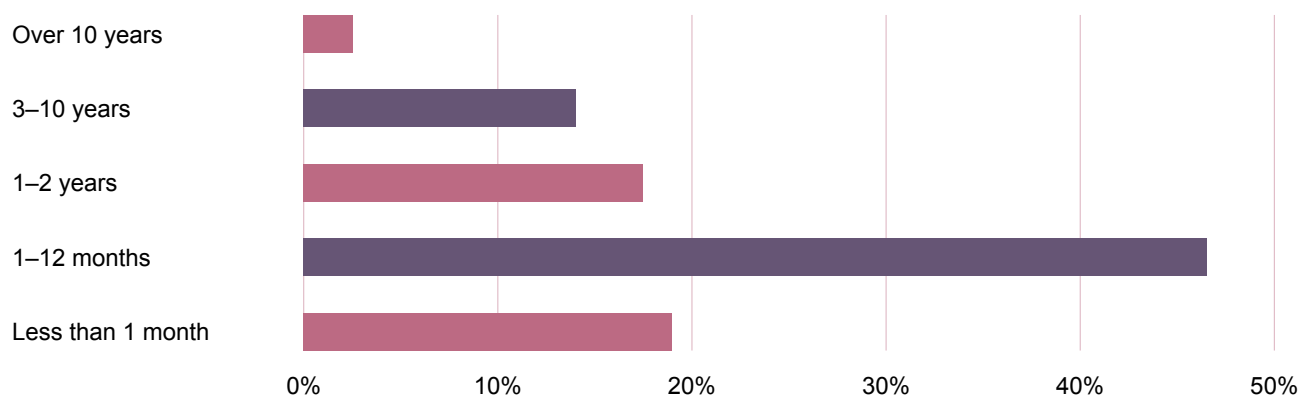
Figure 34: Number of girls and women admitted to St Mary's, Newry per decade, 1947–82



5.4 How long did girls and women stay in St Mary's, Newry

Girls and women stayed for various lengths of time, including some who remained in the institution for many years. The data cannot capture the full detail of events and this is discussed more fully in the chapter on St Mary's, Newry.

Figure 35: Length of time girls and women stayed in St Mary's, Newry

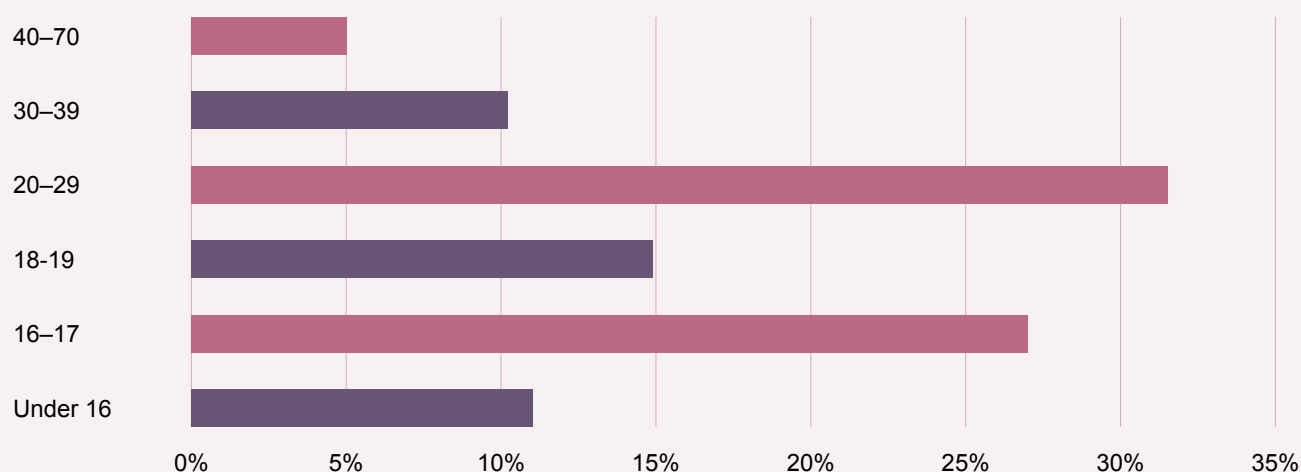


	Less than 1 month	1–12 months	1–2 years	3–10 years	Over 10 years
No. of girls and women	73	176	67	53	10
%	19.3	46.4	17.7	14.0	2.6

5.5 What ages were girls and women admitted to St Mary's, Newry

- The youngest ages recorded were two ten-year-old children who were admitted in 1957 and 1967 respectively. It is assumed that they were not expected to work in the laundry.
- The oldest woman admitted to the institution was a 67-year-old who arrived in Newry in 1967 and was transferred to St Mary's, Derry/Londonderry in 1984 when she was aged 84.
- The IP believe that the HIAI underestimated the number of teenage girls admitted to St Mary's, Newry.

Figure 36: Ages of girls and women admitted to St Mary's, Newry



	Under 16	16–17	18-19	20–29	30–39	40–70
No. of girls and women	29	71	39	82	27	13
%	11.1	27.2	14.9	31.4	10.3	5.0

5.6 Who sent girls and women to St Mary's, Newry

Those referring girls and women included:

- 288 sent by priests or religious organisations:
 - the latter including the GSS themselves via transfers from other St Mary's institutions
- 49 sent by welfare committees (later known as social services)
- 47 'voluntary' admissions:
 - in most cases a reference to a girl or woman being admitted by her family
- seven girls and women admitted from Newry Workhouse when it closed in 1948
- six admitted by Special Care Orders
- three brought by the police:
 - often in cases of a woman being found on the streets and deemed vulnerable.

5.7 Why were girls and women sent to St Mary's, Newry

Girls and women were sent to St Mary's, Newry for a variety of reasons:

- transferred after giving birth after time in a mother and baby institution
- perceived to be in 'moral danger'
- placed under a Fit Person Order or some other court order:
 - among these were girls who were the victims of rape
- placed by the Special Care Committee
- brought by the police.

5.8 Where did girls and women go when they left St Mary's, Newry

For those for whom this detail was recorded:

- 136 went to live with family.
- 54 were transferred to other St Mary's institutions.
- 52 left to take up employment.
- 40 were transferred to other religious institutions.
- Two women ran away.

5.9 Inspection reports on St Mary's, Newry

Inspections carried out in the 1950s and 1970s provided a positive assessment of the institution. They noted:

- provision of television and other 'amusements'
- the girls and women 'going for walks on shopping expeditions in groups'
- that (in 1973) paid employees were working in the laundry alongside those who came in from St Mary's.

5.10 Daily life in St Mary's, Newry

- Life was structured and regimented.
- Work in the laundry was a central focus.
- The religious ethos was also central.
- Girls and women were given 'class names' on arrival.
- At Mass, the girls and women were segregated from those who were in Marianvale.
- Before the late 1960s, regimented behaviours were enforced, such as silence at mealtimes.
- Occasional musical events were also a feature of life in St Mary's, Newry.
- From the late 1960s there was a slightly more liberal regime:
 - more opportunities for part-time education
 - one holiday away per year and outings for shopping provided
 - linked to 'spends' being provided to girls and women.

5.11 Deaths and burials at St Mary's, Newry

- Ten women died between 1955 and 1985.
- At least five of them died in nursing homes.
- Of the five who died in St Mary's, Newry, the burial place of three has been identified.
- Death registrations have been located for eight of the ten women.
- Searches for burial locations have been less successful:
 - No burial locations can be confirmed.
 - Five women died in other locations and not at St Mary's.
 - There is evidence suggesting that two women are buried at Carrickcruppen Cemetery.

- GSS records indicate that another woman is buried at Ardmore Cemetery but she is not recorded in that register.
- It is not possible to suggest where the remaining two women are buried.
- However, the GSS maintain that some women were taken for burial by family members.

5.12 Testimony

- Testimonies from those who spent time in St Mary's, Newry recalled:
 - the institutionalisation of those admitted
 - the routinisation of the day
 - the religious ethos
 - a lack of empathy (e.g., not acknowledging a teenage girl's birthday)
 - inadequate care for an elderly woman with terminal cancer
 - a 14-year-old girl being required to work in the laundry
 - the issue of those working in the laundry missing out on National Insurance contributions and the potential impact on their state pensions.
- Testimonies from relatives of women who were in the institution discussed:
 - how one woman left only when her sister came to take her home
 - teenage girls running away and being returned by the police
 - one participant recalling her mother's strong relationship with the GSS after she spent seven years there following a pregnancy as a result of rape when she was a 14-year-old girl.

5.13 Conclusion on St Mary's, Newry

- St Mary's, Newry accommodated a multigenerational and diverse range of girls and women.
- Referrals to the institution were from welfare committees, the Special Care Committee, police officers, members of the clergy and other religious orders, and the families of the girls and women involved.

- They included girls and women sent by the courts (e.g., by Place of Safety Orders), those admitted as 'special care' cases, teenage victims-survivors of incest or rape, individuals with alcohol dependency and without family support, individuals fleeing abusive partners, young women who were sent to 'the class' after they had given birth outside of marriage, and girls and young women identified as being in 'moral danger'.
- The GSS argue that this diverse range of individuals is evidence of their principle that no one deemed to be in need should be turned away by the Order. But as was the case for the Belfast and Derry/Londonderry St Mary's institutions, policies that involved renaming new arrivals, imposing silence during meals and harshly punishing infringements of rules were all not well designed to meet the emotional and psychological needs of those who were admitted to the institution.
- From the late 1960s, the institution became somewhat more liberal but testimonies about the 1970s in St Mary's, Newry suggests that it was still experienced as cold and harsh by those admitted to it.
- The analysis of death and burial records has revealed unanswered questions about places of burial and appropriate certification processes that the public inquiry may want to address before it can satisfy itself on this matter.

6.0 Workhouses

6.1 History of Workhouses

- Workhouses were established in Ireland in 1838. Each was managed by the local Board of Guardians. They were tasked with providing relief to the poor and destitute, and for this reason those that made use of their services were often stigmatised.
- The Workhouses remained operational following the establishment of NI as mixed institutions, meaning that they were meeting the health needs of the young and the elderly, the chronically ill and the disabled poor. They were widely seen as the most unattractive form of medical care in NI.
- The Poor Law system was ended in 1948 with the establishment of the NHS and welfare state. However, Workhouse buildings continued to be utilised in new roles and under new institutional names: frequently as hospitals.

6.2 Unmarried, pregnant girls and women in the Workhouse

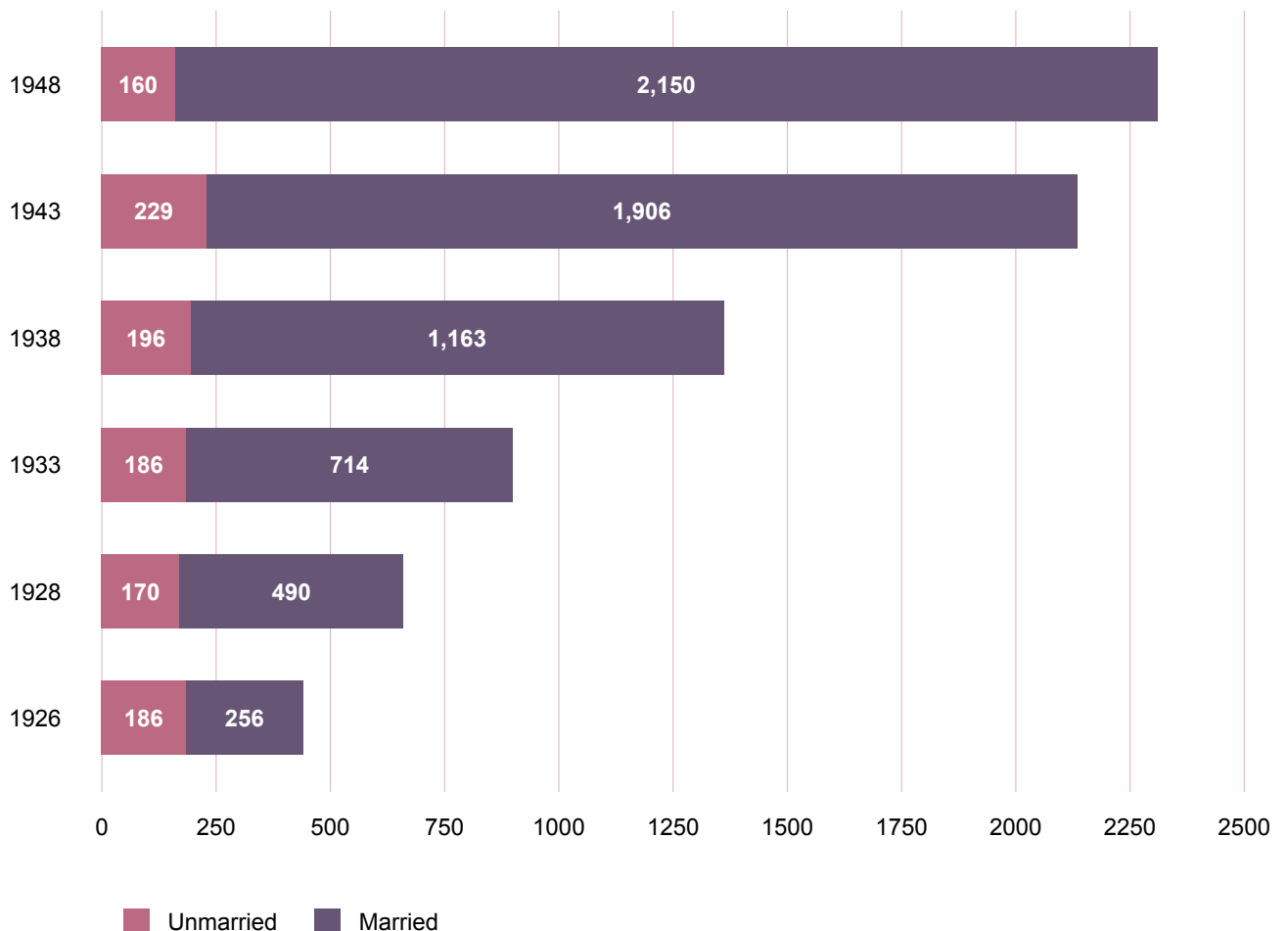
- Unmarried, pregnant girls and women frequented Workhouses from their establishment in the nineteenth century, as a place to access maternity services.

- Poor single mothers were economically vulnerable, and the Workhouse offered them a last resort.
- In many cases they had been deemed ‘immoral’ by family and community.
- The Workhouse may have been chosen by some as having a less religious and strict regime than a mother and baby institution.

6.3 Case study: Belfast Union Workhouse

The IP examined the Belfast Union Workhouse in detail because it was the largest Workhouse in NI. Across the period 1922–48, married girls and women outnumbered unmarried girls and women who used the Belfast Workhouse Maternity Hospital.

Figure 37: Number of births at Belfast Workhouse Maternity Hospital, 1926–48



- However, the significance of Workhouse maternity services was much greater for unmarried girls and women.

- In 1926, the 186 births in the Belfast Workhouse to mothers who were not married made up 57% of all births outside of marriage in Belfast County Borough; in contrast, only 3% of all births within marriage occurred in the Workhouse that year.
- In 1928, 50% of all births to unmarried girls and women took place in the Workhouse compared with 5% of births to married women.

6.4 Coleraine and Enniskillen Union Workhouses

Two other Workhouses where birth records were available were also examined in detail. The IP looked at records for 1928, 1933, 1938 and 1943 for the Enniskillen and Coleraine Workhouses. Numbers of births in these institutions were considerably smaller than in Belfast, but the figures also showed a clear pattern of use of these Workhouses by mothers who were not married.

Table 4: Proportion of births to unmarried girls and women in Coleraine and Enniskillen Workhouses

	1928	1933	1938	1943
Coleraine	40%	62%	58%	53%
Enniskillen	79%	55%	56%	43%

6.5 Boarding out and nursing out

This was the process by which the Board of Guardians sent children to foster parents rather than having them admitted to a children's institution:

- Children of married and unmarried parents could be boarded out, but it was most often children who were born outside of marriage who were boarded out.
- Concerns about 'baby farming' also arose in connection with boarding out and nursing out.

6.6 Testimony about the Workhouses

The IP heard several testimonies from individuals whose mothers gave birth in a Workhouse and were then separated from their child. They provided:

- information on the 'premium' paid by birth mothers to assist with adoption costs
- an example of unsatisfactory record-keeping and communication with a birth mother about adoption

- an example of an adoption of a child born as a result of an affair, with the birth mother then returning to husband and older children
- evidence of admissions to the Workhouse arranged by family angered by a pregnancy, or intervention or arrangement of adoption by parish priest
- an example of a teenage girl admitted following rape by her step-father
- an example of a woman who was sent to the Workhouse by her brother and who remained there with her young children for several years
- an example of one of those children being exploited as free labour via the 'boarding out' scheme
- an example of how single women with children in the Workhouse lived with the fear of being labelled mentally deficient, with the consequence of further institutionalisation.

6.7 Conclusion on Workhouses

- Before 1948, a very large proportion of births to single unmarried girls and women took place in the Workhouse. As in other aspects of their role, Workhouses were associated with stigma and shame in the context of mothers who were unmarried.
- There are a relatively small number of testimonies on the Workhouses, which is not surprising given their closure date was 1948. However, the testimonies that have been cited here, including one from the oldest person to share testimony (a 101-year-old), have added depth to our understanding of how these institutions were experienced by mothers who were not married and their children, as well as their role in overseeing family separations on behalf of the state.
- The Board of Guardians were responsible for the separation of mothers from their babies and young children. This was carried out via a variety of arrangements: fostering out, boarding out, nursing out and adoption.
- It is evident that the process of boarding out could be problematic. It is unclear how detailed the inspection process of families and homes was and what level of oversight there was for babies once they were placed in this way.
- Examples in the chapter on Workhouses indicate that there was the potential for babies to disappear from the supervisory view of the state or for boarded-out children to be exploited by the families with whom they were placed.

Volume 4

Serious Human Rights Issues
and Harms and Impacts



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth

Content:

This section discusses:

1.0 Serious human rights issues

2.0 Harms and impacts

1.0 Serious human rights issues

1.1 Introduction

The IP sought to situate the experiences of participants in a framework based on dignity and equality. The IP considered the evidence they gathered through the lens of the UK's human rights obligations with a view to identifying the most serious human rights issues to be investigated by the public inquiry, including areas of potential systemic failure.

The UK's human rights commitments provided a set of standards against which the performance of the state can be assessed. The key rights, in this context, are:

- equality
- the right to life and the prohibition of torture and inhuman and degrading treatment
- the prohibition of forced labour
- the right to liberty
- the right to respect for private and family life.

The IP acknowledge, in this context, that the modern international framework of human rights protection was not established until the middle of the twentieth century, and that the interpretation of international human rights treaties has evolved over time. The IP also recognise that many of the human rights enshrined in international law were inspired by rights and principles already recognised in British law and legal tradition before they were defined and guaranteed as human rights at the international level.

The IP looked at the national laws applicable to the institutions and pathways and practices under investigation to assess whether they were adequate to protect the human rights of the people they affected. The IP paid special attention to the overarching responsibility of the state as the protector and vindicator of human rights, analysing the adequacy of the applicable frameworks of regulation and inspection. In looking at whether human rights were adequately protected, the IP tried always to consider the law not as it was on the page but as it was experienced by people in the real world.

Having considered the testimony and archival evidence gathered, the IP identified the following serious human rights issues for further investigation by the public inquiry.

1.2 Serious human rights issues for further investigation by the public inquiry

1.2.1 State oversight

1.2.1.1 St Mary's institutions and Thorndale Industrial Home

The IP find that regulation and inspection of the St Mary's institutions and the Thorndale Industrial Home was less effective than it should have been. There is scant evidence of inspection of these institutions by the authorities for compliance with rules relating to conditions of work, special care of people with disabilities, probation and child protection. Of particular concern to the IP was the apparent agreement on the part of the Ministry of Labour not to inspect the St Mary's institutions if they did not undercut commercial laundries. The IP consider this as new and compelling evidence of the state's abdication of its responsibilities to the girls and women admitted to the St Mary's institutions. These are serious human rights issues meriting further investigation.

1.2.1.2 Mother and baby institutions and their pathways

The IP find that the rules designed to protect mothers in mother and baby institutions went largely unenforced in most of the institutions within its remit. The rules designed to protect children in mother and baby institutions – and their institutional pathways – were better enforced, though there appears to have been a period between 1972 and 1980 when inspections stopped. The IP also found that inspection of foster homes and adoptive homes appears to have been much less rigorous than it should have been. The IP found that there is evidence of a systemic failure on the part of the state to exercise effective oversight of the operation of the mother and baby institutions and baby institutions, and the foster placements and adoption placements forming part of their pathways. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

1.2.1.3 Workhouses

The IP note that the Workhouses in NI were operated by the state itself through the Poor Law Commissioners and the Boards of Guardians. The Workhouses closed after World War Two, just as the modern system of international human rights law was being established, and it is hard to see how the Poor Law could have been compatible with the respect for human dignity at the heart of the new human rights law. The archival evidence and testimony gathered by the IP suggests that living conditions in the Workhouses were harsh, that care was inadequate, and that discrimination and humiliation were part of

everyday life. Children boarded out by the Boards of Guardians were not checked up on properly to make sure they were safe. Pregnant women and new mothers ‘resident’ in them were required to work without pay caring for other ‘residents’. The IP consider that, given the time that has passed since the Workhouses closed, it is unlikely that further investigation of conditions in the Workhouses by the public inquiry will add significantly to these findings.

1.3 Equality

The IP considered equality first because equal dignity of all human beings is the founding principle upon which the concept of human rights is based. The IP considered the applicable rules of international and national law relating to equality and discrimination. Developing social attitudes as evidenced in primary sources and academic commentary were also considered. The IP analysed the testimony and the records gathered for evidence of discrimination on the basis of gender, marital status, religion, birth status, race (including Traveller ethnicity) and disability.

The IP concluded that the existence of the mother and baby institutions, St Mary’s institutions and Thorndale Industrial Home was fundamentally incompatible with respect to the principle of equality. While it is true that the institutions and their pathways and practices reflected the attitudes and norms in Northern Irish society, and responded to them, they also reinforced and compounded those attitudes and norms. The state endorsed and co-operated in discrimination against unmarried women and their children. Instead of promoting equality and confronting discrimination, the state used the institutions for its own purposes. Its judges, doctors and social workers sent girls and women to them. It funded them directly and indirectly. It participated willingly in their pathways and practices. When it came to regulation and inspection, there is evidence of systemic failure. The very fact that these institutions were permitted by the state to exist at all points to a systemic failure on its part to guarantee equal treatment and to prevent discrimination. The IP consider this a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

The IP recommend that the public inquiry investigate where children with disabilities born to women ‘resident’ in mother and baby institutions were sent. The IP found very few records relating to the pathways taken by these children.

1.4 The right to life and the prohibition of torture and inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment

1.4.1 St Mary’s institutions

On the basis of the records the IP have seen and the testimony it has heard, no woman or girl should have been sent to the St Mary’s institutions, whether by the state or by her family or because there was nowhere else for her to go. This is especially so given that the institutions were not properly regulated or inspected, and that there was, accordingly,

no effective protection for ‘residents’ against abuse and neglect. The IP consider the treatment of girls and women in the St Mary’s institutions to be a serious human rights issue. The IP recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

1.4.2 Mother and baby institutions and their pathways

Many participants who spoke to the IP spoke of abuse and neglect in mother and baby institutions. In many cases, the experience described amounted to degrading treatment, especially given the level of vulnerability of the girls and women at the time. In some cases – as in the reports of sexual assault by Sister Z in Marianville – the experiences described are likely to reach the threshold of harm or inhuman treatment.

The IP consider the treatment of girls and women in the mother and baby institutions to be a serious human rights issue. The IP recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

The IP did not find evidence of systemic abuse or neglect of children in mother and baby institutions. Insofar as the experiences of children in the institutional pathways are concerned, the IP note the very high mortality rates in St Joseph’s Babies’ Home, Belfast in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, and the clear evidence of neglect of children there during this period. The IP have been unable to access death records for private nursing homes, but such evidence as the IP has seen suggests that the treatment of children in the private nursing homes is a serious human rights issue. The IP recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

The IP consider that when children left the institutions, both the archival records and the testimony of participants suggest that there were systemic deficiencies in the regime for the selection and inspection of foster homes and adoptive homes, leading to failures to protect children in these homes against abuse and neglect. The IP consider these deficiencies to be a serious human rights issue and recommend that they be further investigated by the public inquiry.

The IP also consider the drug trial that took place in 1962 by QUB and the health departments of Counties Antrim, Down and Belfast County Borough on behalf of Glaxo Laboratories Limited to be a serious human rights issue. The IP recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

1.5 Freedom from forced labour

1.5.1 St Mary’s institutions

The IP consider that the evidence of women who worked in the St Mary’s institutions, taken together with the records of those institutions, suggests that labour laws were not respected in them. In particular, women who worked in them were not paid for the work

that they did. Given that few women entered these institutions voluntarily, it is likely that many women experienced forced labour in them. The IP consider the work done by girls and women in the St Mary's institutions a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

1.5.2 Thorndale Industrial Home

Women sent to and required to work in the Salvation Army Thorndale Industrial Home were also unpaid. The IP consider the work done by girls and women in Thorndale Industrial Home a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

1.5.3 Mother and baby institutions

Many participants who gave testimony to the IP spoke of being required to work in mother and baby institutions, or of being sent out to carry out domestic labour in private homes. In some cases, the experience described may have amounted to forced labour inasmuch as it was involuntary and unpaid. Moreover, it is hard to reconcile the work regime in some of the institutions with the labour laws relating to pay and working conditions applicable at the time. Some of the work described – washing windows while standing on ladders, scrubbing floors – was manifestly unsuitable for pregnant women or women who had recently given birth. The IP consider the work done by girls and women in the mother and baby institutions a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

1.6 Liberty

1.6.1 St Mary's institutions and Thorndale Industrial Home

Between the establishment of NI and the closure of the St Mary's institutions and Thorndale Industrial Home, approximately 300 women were detained in them by court order. Many girls were detained in them at the behest of their families. It is likely that many more were not technically detained but, because they had nowhere else to go, were constrained to stay. Even where there was a legal basis for detention in a St Mary's institution or Thorndale Industrial Home, it is difficult to understand how such laws, though valid domestically, could be consistent with the UK's human rights commitments once they came into force. From at least 1953, the UK was committed by Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights to guarantee the right to liberty and security of the person, requiring a relationship of proportionality between the detention and the reason behind it. In the view of the IP, it is impossible to conceive of a set of circumstances that would objectively justify the detention of a woman or a girl in such a place, given, in particular, the vulnerability of the women concerned, the work which was required of them, the risk of long-term institutionalisation and the lack of independent oversight.

The IP consider that the state should not have committed girls and women to the St Mary's institutions or to Thorndale Industrial Home. This practice was discriminatory inasmuch as it only affected women. Although girls and women were sometimes sent to these institutions for their own protection, alternative solutions should have been available. The IP consider the involuntary placement of girls and women in the St Mary's institutions and Thorndale Industrial Home a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

1.6.2 Mother and baby institutions

Many participants who spoke to the IP told of being committed to mother and baby institutions against their will. Some said they were prevented from leaving, and there is evidence that some who left were brought back by police. Others said that they could not leave because they had nowhere else to go. In this context, the state's failure to put in place an effective system of support for one-parent families is particularly significant. Even though girls and women were not detained in the mother and baby institutions in a legal sense, the evidence considered by the IP suggests that their presence there can rarely be described as voluntary in any meaningful sense. In some cases, the experience described may have amounted to deprivation of liberty. The IP consider the involuntary placement of girls and women in mother and baby institutions a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry.

1.7 Respect for private and family life

The right to respect for private and family life is of particular importance in the context of the IP's work, given that so many people who gave testimony spoke of separation from their children or their mothers, of lack of respect for their autonomy, and of struggles to access information about their identity.

Respect for private life means, in addition to respect for individual freedom in decision-making, respect for the physical and psychological integrity of a person. It requires that everyone is able to determine the details of his or her identity.

Respect for family life means respect for the closest and most fundamental bonds of love and kinship. A key ingredient of respect for family life is the principle of family unity: that members of families should be allowed and encouraged to be together.

1.8 Reproductive justice

Lack of access to sex education and contraception contributed to the discriminatory denial of reproductive justice to women in NI during the period 1922–95. Information about and access to abortion may also have been a factor.

1.9 One-parent families and the state

Considering the obligation of the state to respect and ensure respect for family life, the IP observe that a great deal more could have been done by the authorities, especially after World War Two, to protect the family unity of one-parent families. In particular:

- During the period 1922–95, the social welfare system never provided an effective bulwark against poverty for one-parent families.
- As a mechanism of support for one-parent families, the affiliation order system was inadequate, both in terms of its procedure and its substance. Even if the application succeeded, the amounts that could be ordered to be paid were small.

Faced with discrimination, stigma, poverty and an indifferent state, many mothers without alternative means of support had no meaningful choice but to enter the mother and baby institutions (or similar places such as private nursing homes and private homes operating as de facto mother and baby institutions) and to place their children for adoption. The position could have been different had an effective system of state support for one-parent families been available. Had family unity been properly recognised as a value worthy of the law's full protection, it is likely that many mothers and children who were separated would have been able to stay together, and that so much pain and loss could have been avoided.

1.10 Adoption and family separation

On the basis of the records and testimony it has considered, the IP find that in many cases, it appears that inappropriate pressure was exerted on vulnerable girls and women by family members, by religious figures, by adoption agencies and by social workers. This pressure was applied to ensure that they placed their children for adoption. Susceptibility to this pressure was certainly increased by institutionalisation. In these cases, the safeguards in place to ensure that consent was given, and that the consent was full, free and informed – for example, the requirement to have consent forms witnessed by a Justice of the Peace, and the involvement of guardians ad litem – appear to have been inadequate. There is, in these cases, evidence of forced family separation. The IP find that the practices surrounding the giving of consent to adoption in the mother and baby institutions raise serious human rights issues, including forced family separation. The IP recommend that these practices should be further investigated by the public inquiry. In particular, the practices of Social Worker A merit special attention, given the concerns expressed by mothers with whom she had contact and by her social work colleagues who spoke to the IP.

In the context of cross-border movement of children for adoption, the IP are concerned at the lack of evidence of compliance with formalities in the institutional records. The IP recommend that the public inquiry investigate compliance with the rules relating to cross-border movement of children organised by the institutions, the state and voluntary adoption agencies associated with their operation.

1.11 Access to information

The IP observe that access to information about their lives, and about the lives of family members, is a priority for many victims-survivors. Where access to such is impeded, it may amount to a violation of human rights that continues into the present day. Some of the information sought by victims-survivors relates to civil registration. The IP find that in general, NI had a robust system of civil registration during the period 1922–95. This system had, however, some systemic weaknesses around the registration of births, making it possible for the births of some adopted children to be falsely registered. The IP consider that the enforcement provisions relating to the supplying of false information to the Registrar General could have been much stronger. The IP consider false registration a serious human rights issue and recommend that it be further investigated by the public inquiry. The IP further suggest that consideration be given by the Executive to amending the law so that, in future, giving false information in the context of the registration of a birth is treated as a more serious criminal offence.

The IP consider that access to civil registration information could be improved by removing distinctions between adopted people in access to birth information by reference to their date of adoption. The IP note that this differential treatment will be abolished when the Adoption of Children Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 is commenced, and accordingly the IP recommend to the Executive that this occur as soon as possible. The IP further recommend that the practice of issuing short-form birth certificates to adopted people be reviewed.

Modern data protection rules provide legal mechanisms of access to much personal data held by public authorities and private organisations. In the case of adoption records, these are supplemented in NI by rules that are broad enough to provide adopted people, birth mothers and members of their families with access to adoption files, and the important information they contain. However, the experience of many victims-survivors in seeking to access information held by public authorities and private controllers of institutional records has been very negative. The effectiveness of the available mechanisms of access to records as measures by which the state complies with its obligation to respect the private lives of victims-survivors must therefore be doubted.

It follows that strong measures are urgently necessary to address this unacceptable situation. In the short term, the IP recommend that more resources be made available to the HSCNI Trusts to process requests for access to records within the three-month timeframe specified in the UK GDPR. In the longer term, the IP recommend that the necessary legislative measures be adopted to designate all institutional records as public records, and that they be collected together in a single archive to ensure the safety and security of the records while at the same time ensuring that access to them can be guaranteed in accordance with law.

The IP are concerned that adopted people, or those who spent their childhood in foster placements or institutions, may be disadvantaged by rules on access to medical records of deceased people. The IP recommend that the Executive explore the creation of a mechanism for access by adopted people to medical records of deceased parents so as to balance their right to information about their identity, including their family health history, against their parents' right to privacy and confidentiality of their medical records.

1.12 Burials

When people die, respectful disposal of their remains is a natural part of the grieving process for the loved ones they have left behind. Decisions about funeral rites and burial engage the right to respect for private and family life, as does access to information about how they died and where they are buried.

The IP have been able to locate death certificates for the vast majority of those whose death is recorded in the institutional records. The missing death certificates can probably be explained by spelling variations or errors in entering names of the deceased. The public inquiry may consider inspecting the physical registers – something the IP could not do – to identify the missing registrations for the sake of completeness.

The IP did not find reliable evidence of irregular or unlawful burials at the sites of any of the institutions. The IP's investigation suggests that, if their bodies were not claimed by their families, women and babies who died while 'resident' in these institutions were lawfully and decently buried in ordinary burial grounds nearby to those operating the institutions or by the hospitals in which they died.

It has not been possible to identify precisely where every person who has died while 'resident' in the institutions was buried because in many private burial grounds, comprehensive burial records were not maintained and there was and is no requirement that all burials be registered. The IP recommend that the registration rules for public burial grounds be extended to private burial grounds, so that all burials in NI will be officially registered. The IP further recommend that measures be considered by the Executive to preserve the records of private burial grounds as public records so that future access may be guaranteed.

2.0 Harms and impacts

2.1 Introduction

Almost every person who gave testimony documented harm, and the lifelong impact of that harm, as a result of their experiences of the institutions and their pathways and practices. This included:

- birth mothers on harm done to them, their children or their wider family
- children, now adults, on harm as a consequence of their mothers being placed in institutions and/or them having been fostered, adopted or both
- other family members who also shared their experiences of harms.

The IP also heard from individuals connected to institutions who talked of harmful practices. The scope and extent of harms and the detail and frequency with which they

occurred make it profoundly difficult to summarise them here and to do justice to the intensity and lifelong impact that they had on those who gave testimony. The chapter on Harms and Impacts addresses the following key areas in which harms were consistently discussed by participants:

- harms relating to pathways into institutions
- institutional harms
- harms relating to labour and birth
- harms relating to family separation (fostering, adoption and consent), including harms caused to children, now adults
- harms relating to searching for birth family and accessing personal and institutional records.

The chapter also assesses the steps that those who shared testimony wish to see taken in order to ensure accountability for the harms caused, and to allow for memorialisation and remembrance for those impacted. The following sections summarise the key findings from the testimonies shared with the IP.

2.2 Harms relating to pathways into institutions

For the majority of girls and women, the pathway into an institution (a mother and baby institution) was pregnancy while unmarried. For a smaller number, but still totalling in the thousands, pregnancy was not part of the pathway into one of the St Mary's institutions or Thorndale Industrial Home.

An unrelenting moralistic approach was taken with the pregnant woman or girl. Societal and religious beliefs together reinforced the same judgemental message: she was immoral, sinful, and had brought great shame on herself, her family and her community.

Many girls and women spoke of their own reaction to their pregnancy. They also spoke about the responses of family, friends and wider society. Facing societal scorn, religious rebuke and familial shame, many girls and women hid or were made to hide their pregnancies under what one birth mother called 'the veil of secrecy'. The pregnant woman or girl had little or no agency in what happened to her or her child. Some families fabricated elaborate stories to explain away their daughters' absence to neighbours and friends, and even to other family members, during their confinement in the institutions.

Our analysis shows that men were not subjected to the same societal and religious chastisement and moral judgement as the girls and women who became pregnant. Even those men who had raped young girls and women, which included fathers and brothers through incest, were largely allowed to remain with their families and carry on their lives with no such limitation. In at least some cases, this was despite institutional

staff, social workers and others being fully aware of the circumstances of the pregnancy. This disparity reflects the gendered nature of the harms done to birth mothers and the gendered ideologies that enabled those that inflicted harms to do so with impunity. One child, now adult, explained these as follows.



...the realities of silence, stigma, and abandonment – the mechanisms of control and gendered harm upheld by church and state that robbed [women] of agency over [their] own life and the lives of [their] children.

Important points arising from testimonies relating to pathways into the institutions include:

- Around half of the birth mothers who gave testimony reported being in only one institution; a third spent time in two institutions, and a sixth spent time in three different institutions.
- Cross-border movement of birth mothers was also reported, most frequently from Rol to NI.
- Most women cited pressure from others as a motivating factor in being placed in an institution. Most frequently cited was pressure from parents, often alongside pressure from members of the clergy or members of a religious order. Next most frequently cited was pressure from medical professionals, then wider family members. Social workers also featured in a number of testimonies as the source of pressure to opt for adoption. Others referenced wider societal pressure as a motivating factor.
- Shame and stigma of pregnancy while unmarried were key themes throughout all testimonies. This was amplified in the institutions that had a religious ethos, whether Catholic or Protestant, where birth mothers found their pregnancy associated with sinfulness or moral lapse. Thus, the impact of being pregnant and having to tell family was almost always a negative, fearful experience and the impact of the undeserved shame and stigma endured throughout their lives.
- A lack of support was a significant theme in shaping pathways into institutions; women describe feeling 'let down', 'powerless' and 'limited'.

2.3 Institutional harms

Being in an institution was harmful in and of itself, given the shame and stigma attached to such institutions. Additionally, the institutions caused harm in a number of ways, one of which was through the institutional regime, which was for the most part restrictive, laborious and punitive. This was compounded by the fact that the girls and women held there were vulnerable, isolated and lacked appropriate support.

Other harms reported in testimonies were categorised under the following key themes, many of which constitute a breach of participants' human rights (see the chapter on Serious Human Rights Issues).

2.3.1 Loss of privacy

Participants spoke of a loss of privacy in maintaining personal hygiene, including two who recalled being monitored while they showered. Lack of privacy also resulted from the design and layout of the cubicle-style sleeping accommodation in many institutions. Girls and women felt 'degraded' by some of these experiences. As noted below, loss of privacy also extended to restrictions on communication while the girls and women were in the institutions.

2.3.2 Denial of and restrictions on liberty

Some girls and women reported locked doors and windows, and chaperoned visits to medical appointments. One woman even reported being locked in a cupboard as punishment. More generally, many testimonies described a 'stifling' environment in which they were conditioned to comply with the demands of the staff. Some women reported a desire to leave but were unable to do so. Some felt constrained to stay, partly because they had nowhere else to go, but partly from fear of repercussions if they did leave.

2.3.3 Restricted communications

Girls and women reported institutional rules and regulations that limited their capacity to communicate with each other and with those outside the institutions, including their own families, leaving them unsupported and vulnerable. When talking with other girls and women within the institutions, some topics were off-limits, including personal details about each other. Others reported monitored communications for those who were able to receive and send mail or receive telephone calls. Institutional staff imposed restrictions on visits. The impact of restricted communication and denial of liberty was increased isolation, loneliness, helplessness and fear.

2.3.4 Food

Some girls and women spoke of food being used punitively, for example, food being withheld as a result of breaching institutional regulations or being made to eat separately and after all the others. More generally, while the food provided within the institutions was generally considered adequate, several participants recalled restricted portions and two birth mothers referred to negative consequences arising from the institutional requirement to fast before attending Mass first thing in the morning in Catholic-run institutions.

2.3.5 Religious observances

Attendance at and participation in religious services and prayers was required each day (or in some cases, each week) for most girls and women in institutions with a strong religious ethos. Women reported having 'no choice' in attending and many report being publicly humiliated on the way to, and during, church services. At a church used by one of the mother and baby institutions clerics degraded the girls and women, presenting them in negative terms as a moral lesson to the congregation not to transgress. The girls and women reported other degrading treatment including humiliation, discrimination and punitive practices – such as segregation in the church from the general congregation through seating plans and separate entrances – predicated on religious atonement for the 'sin' of being pregnant outside of marriage.

2.3.6 Chores

Birth mothers spoke extensively about carrying out 'chores' during the time they spent in institutions, many of which were excessive and used as punishment, either for being pregnant or for challenging the regime. Many women reported scrubbing floors and stairways on 'hands and knees' and cleaning 'high' windows, well into the latter stages of pregnancy, one even after her waters broke. Many women reported that fear compelled them to co-operate; for example, one birth mother told us: 'I was just so frightened, I just did what I was told and I tried my best...just do what I was told you know, because I couldn't, I wasn't allowed to get out, you know I was there because I shamed my family'.

2.3.7 Financial harms

Women report having little or no autonomy over their own incomes. Social welfare benefits paid to the women were required to be given to the staff in some of the mother and baby institutions. Some women reported being given a small 'allowance' from their own welfare payments. One participant reported that when a friend's parents arrived at the mother and baby institution to take her home with them, the woman in charge refused to return her benefit book. Girls and women were not paid for the labour they provided in the institutions.

2.3.8 Medical harms

These included excessive sedation during labour and birth on the one hand and a lack of pain relief on the other. Participants reported that drugs were administered without their consent or without their understanding of the purpose and effects of the drugs. Upon admission to one institution, pregnant girls and women were given 'drinks' and told to drink them twice a day – they report that these drinks adversely impacted their memory at the time.

2.3.9 Sanitation and hygiene

One woman reported being washed with Jeyes Fluid, a powerful corrosive outdoor cleaning solution, which she recalls as a traumatic experience; she was told of other women being subjected to the same treatment. One woman had been scrubbed with a brush by institutional staff so roughly that her family thought she had been self-harming.

2.3.10 The impact of silence

Many women report that their pregnancies were not spoken about even while they were in the institution. One result of this was that they were often unprepared for the birth and its aftermath, both physically and emotionally. Many relate such silences to the ongoing stigma and shame attached to their pregnancies, continuing the harms they had suffered prior to their admission to the institutions. Furthermore, the impact of such silences continued long after the girls and women left the institutions. One birth mother refers to this silence as ‘an ache I can’t describe...I spent many years smiling, pretending I was fine but inside I was in agony’.

2.3.11 Emotional harms

Emotional harms featured extensively in testimonies and include ‘humiliation’, ‘shame’ and ‘fear’. While emotional harm was conveyed in the majority of testimonies, 43 birth mothers explicitly referenced degrading and debasing treatment a total of 61 times. That accounts for 53% of birth mothers who shared their testimony.

Many birth mothers shared how institutional staff consistently made them feel worthless by treating them as if they should be atoning for the ‘sin’ of becoming pregnant. Birth mothers also reported what amounted to institutional ‘gaslighting’ (manipulating a person into doubting themselves or their reality) where institutional staff made them believe that the punitive practices and regime were justifiable punishment for their ‘sin’. Many birth mothers reported feeling like they deserved such punishment. Some girls and women feared that their babies would be forcibly removed and some explained that they were made to witness ‘handovers’ – where the birth mother carried her own baby to waiting adoptive parents. This was described by one as ‘punishment’. This deeply cruel example of emotional abuse was a manifestation of institutional power and control that caused deep lasting harm.

Emotional abuse manifested in some cases where girls and women were stripped of their identities by assigning them false names upon admission, which they were to be called throughout their time in the institution. When one woman refused to answer to her assigned name, she was referred to thereafter as ‘Girl’.

Women spoke often about the unrelenting impact of emotional harms that continues to the present day, affecting not just the girls and women themselves but the children, now adults, from whom they were separated, and their wider family circle. One birth mother

reported feeling ‘for the rest of your life that you were dirty’ and ‘like a second-class citizen’. The harm inflicted upon birth mothers carried down through generations. Many birth mothers; children, now adults; and family members of birth mothers talked of the intergenerational impact of family separation and how it affected their wider relationships. In cases where pregnancy was the result of rape, girls and women were treated with the disgrace that should have been applied to the perpetrator while the girls and women should have been supported as victims-survivors.

2.3.12 Harms against the person: Sexual harms

The IP heard testimony from birth mothers who had been raped, became pregnant as a result, and who were then admitted into an institution. Some children, now adults, also reported the impact of their discovery that they were conceived through rape. For those birth mothers, there is little evidence of professional obligation to support and safeguard and to identify the circumstances of their pregnancies in order to protect other girls and women from the perpetrator of sexual violence. Testimonies show that when a girl or woman felt able to disclose rape or incest, they were disbelieved for disclosing the crime. At a time when these girls and women would have been suffering what we now know to be complex trauma, they were let down and abandoned by the very system that was designed to protect them. Essentially, this victimised them twice, and gender-based violence and the patriarchal structures that perpetuated it went unchallenged.

Several women reported sexual harms perpetrated at Marianville between 1967 and 1989, during what they were told would be gynaecological ‘internal examinations’. Most of these women named the same institutional staff member as the perpetrator. The remaining women did not know her name but were able to describe her in detail.

In several institutional settings, additional sexual harms manifested in inappropriate comments and questioning by institutional staff and visiting clergy asking girls and women to disclose details of their personal sexual history. Groping by a male cleric was also reported by one participant.

We also heard from children, now adults, who experienced child sexual abuse when placed in children’s institutions as well as from others who experienced sexual abuse in an adoptive family home or during a foster placement.

2.3.13 Harms against the person: Physical harms

In connection with various institutions, birth mothers related a number of instances of physical punishment such as slapping, pushing, pulling hair or, as described by one participant, a ‘clip round the side of the head’. She said: ‘it was for talking or doing something minor that you shouldn’t have been doing, it wasn’t necessarily that you were being cheeky or rude, you just forgot it was silent time’. These were reported as regular occurrences or routine punishments, including for failing to carry out chores to the satisfaction of institutional staff. One woman reported being hit with ‘a kettle lead’. Another, speaking about the same institution, reported being pushed down the stairs by a staff member.

2.3.14 Harms relating to labour and birth

Harms relating to labour and birth included mistreatment, discrimination, isolation and dignity violations. In total, 59% of women who shared testimony described mistreatment and inappropriate care during the births of their babies. It was reported by 16% that hospital staff were unkind or cruel. This manifested in spiteful comments, judgemental behaviours, and prolonged isolation and segregation. Around 10% of women reported inappropriate drug administration and obstetric procedures. One woman reported being 'left for three days' bleeding before going into labour and other women reported that medical staff exhibited cruel disregard for women about to give birth or who had just given birth. One woman reported that a named doctor 'just grabbed me by the legs... slid me down the bed...and stitched me up', saying, 'I don't think he even said hello...he didn't even take off his hat.' One woman, who gave birth in a private nursing home, was left alone in a room with a stick and told to bang on the floor when she went into labour. Other women reported breast binding. Women reported being treated with contempt in hospital, which compounded and reinforced the harms experienced prior to their admission to hospital. Girls and women reported being separated from other mothers who were not from one of the institutions. The impact of these harms was enduring trauma, extreme fear and loneliness, shame in their lives, loss of self-worth, night tremors, stigma, anxiety and panic.

2.3.15 Harms relating to family separation (fostering, adoption and consent), including harms caused to children, now adults

2.3.15.1 *Family separation*

Testimony shared with the IP shows that institutions played a central role in the separation of families and facilitating adoptions through their operational networks. Participants reported that medical staff prevented many women from seeing their babies after they were born and they remained separated – some were prevented from going into the hospital nursery to see their babies. 22% of birth mothers reported not being allowed to see or touch their babies after giving birth. One woman told us: 'I didn't get to nurse him. Nothing, nothing tactile. And the nurse...said "Take the baby out of the room, the baby's for adoption."

Adoption was considered by many birth mothers as 'a foregone conclusion' of being in an institution. Birth mothers overwhelmingly reported being pressured to place their babies for adoption, and many birth mothers reported that they were given no choice.

2.3.15.2 *Consent*

Our analysis suggests that questions need to be asked by the public inquiry about the process and validity of consent for adoption and the circumstances in which it was obtained. Testimonies indicate that some birth mothers had their babies removed without free, full and informed consent. Some describe an adoption process in contravention of the statutory six-week protected period during which adoption consent cannot be sought

nor acquired. At least six birth mothers and additionally, some children (now adults), other family members and social workers make specific reference to adoptions being arranged before the six-week period had elapsed. Sometimes this was while the birth mother was still pregnant. Pressure to adopt came from parents, clergy, institutional staff, GPs and extended family members. Describing the institutions, women reported sustained pressure and ‘coercion’ to place their babies for adoption. One woman reported that there was a two-hour window where prospective adoptive parents would view babies in the institutional nursery. She said: ‘we were warned never to go near the nursery in those two hours’.

One social worker, Social Worker A, was repeatedly named as instrumental in facilitating adoptions and as placing pressure on the birth mothers involved. Social Worker A is said to have caused immense harms. Testimony from two retired social workers contains similar details about Social Worker A and her practices. Our analysis shows that facilitating adoptions prior to and within days of a baby’s birth was not uncommon. A member of the clergy who gave testimony recalled a baby who was ‘born on a Saturday; a social worker came on a Monday and took her away in a blanket. That was literally it. And she was brought [to a baby institution in RoI]’.

Of those birth mothers who signed consent forms after six weeks, very few appear to have given consent with a full understanding of what it meant, and almost all women who signed consent forms did so without appropriate support. As Social Worker 3 told us, ‘there wasn’t counselling involved, there wasn’t real support. So, in their eyes and experience they had no option at all. So, it was sort of a forced consent even though legally it wouldn’t have been seen like that.’ Three women reported being taken to inappropriate locations, such as retail outlets, and told to sign consent forms weeks after their babies had been taken from them. One woman reported being taken to a pub, without anyone to support her, in a part of her city that was unknown and frightening to her with two men she did not know. One was a Justice of the Peace who would witness her signature. One woman explained that she was ‘made to sign’ the forms, and another was ‘so frightened’ that she had signed the forms and ‘run away’.

Children, now adults, and other family members gave testimony about uncovering the dubious nature of consent when they secured access to records. Some reported that the signature and the language used on some consent documentation did not match their birth mother’s writing, nor was it in the style of the language ordinarily used by their birth mother.

2.3.15.3 Cross-border movement

Family separation was compounded by the geographical distance put between birth mothers and babies in cases where children were moved across the border, or mothers from RoI returned there without their child. A number of birth mothers and children, now adults, make specific references to cross-border movement for the purposes of adoption. One person refers to this process as ‘trafficking’, saying that the ‘guarded silence thereafter supports the view of a massive cover up’.

Some children, now adults, shared that they had two or more birth certificates as a result of cross-border movements. One participant noted two baptism certificates, one with his adoptive parents named as 'biological' parents. Two children, now adults, each have three birth certificates. Participants remain understandably confused about their identities because of these practices.

2.3.15.4 Emotional harms caused to children, now adults

Adopted children, now adults, also suffered emotional harms. 59% of testimonies given by children, now adults, explicitly document emotional harm. These harms range from humiliation, rejection, 'gaslighting', to threats to 'send [them] back' to institutions, and denying them their family history in searches for records. Harms also include unaccounted-for periods in their lives, particularly as babies, where there are no records of their existence or placement, which caused and continues to cause trauma.

The following important issues are discussed in detail in the Harms and Impacts chapter:

- Learning about adoption. 45% of those who discussed being told about their adoption recall being told about it by their adoptive family. Many children, now adults, reported feeling shock and confusion when they learnt about their adoption, with many unanswered questions. Many children, now adults, told us of names they were called growing up, such as 'bastard', and others talked about the persistent threat of being returned to an institution as they navigated their teens. Many report having good family experiences with their adoptive families, yet this was no protection against the shock at having the 'rug [pulled] from under your feet' upon finding out that 'you weren't the same'.
- Mental health impacts. The impact of being adopted and learning of that adoption, and of early separation from their mothers, manifested for a significant number of children, now adults, in ongoing adverse mental health. The impacts include depression, anxiety, panic attacks, fear, isolation, low self-esteem, rejection, loss of identity, abandonment, feelings of profound grief and loss, negative impacts on forming relationships, attachment and bonding issues, bedwetting, addiction, and feelings of shame or being shamed by others. A small number of testimonies spoke about children, now adults, who died by suicide, while others self-harmed and attempted suicide as a direct result of learning of their adoption and the experiences around that. Most of the children, now adults, who gave testimony are dealing with lifelong emotional harm due to what happened to them and to their birth mothers.
- Racial discrimination. Children, now adults, reported being racially abused and discriminated against on the basis of their racial identity, with one participant sharing their official records, in which minority ethnic and racial heritage was described as a 'disability'. Other children, now adults, were regarded as impossible to adopt due to their skin colour.

2.3.15.5 Abuse within the adoptive family

Some children, now adults, related experiences of mistreatment or abuse within the adoptive family, which included sexual abuse; physical abuse; verbal abuse; coercive and controlling behaviour; rejection; threats to 'send back' children to institutions; denials of information that would help children, now adults, learn of their birth family history; and what one child, now adult, described as 'gaslighting'. Many children, now adults, endured derogatory comments, resulting in what one participant called 'profound issues with low self-esteem'; controlling behaviour, including controlling financial income; punitive actions; and poverty and neglect.

It is deeply concerning that neglect and cruelty was such a common theme in testimonies for children, now adults, and this raises questions about the involvement – specifically protective measures and safeguards, or lack thereof – of the state. Many children, now adults, reported neglect and cruelty and a lack or absence of vetting in their adoptive family environment that went unchecked by the state. Some children, now adults, recounted experiences with mentally unstable or emotionally harmful behaviours by adoptive parents or living with adoptive parents with addictions. One child, now adult, referred to the boarding out of children as an unregulated 'financial transaction'.

2.3.15.6 Harms relating to searching for birth family and accessing personal and institutional records

For several children, now adults, the decision to search for and reconnect with their birth families was a difficult one, not least due to the potential impact on their adoptive families. Consequently, many put the decision off until their adoptive parents had died, to spare them any hurt. Delaying the search meant lost time with their birth families and this decision adversely impacted participants and their own children, too. Searching for information about birth families necessitated a lengthy and often fruitless process for many.

Participants spoke extensively about the importance of records in providing an understanding of their experiences and information on their family backgrounds. Difficulties in accessing records arose regardless of the record type or the creating agency, with individuals describing issues regarding efforts to locate many record types including church records, medical information, and adoption and care files. Participants frequently experienced delays in gaining access, problems with locating records due to misfiling or other factors, claims that records had been destroyed, evasion or avoidance on the part of those with control of the records, or straightforward refusal to provide access. For many participants, the process of seeking access to records proved, and continues to prove, to be a complex and gruelling experience and is an ongoing human rights violation. For birth mothers, the experience was also traumatic and it often took years to 'fit together [the] jigsaw'. Participants talked about being 'interrogated' by social workers and adoption agency staff responsible for assisting their search. Many participants explained their frustration with the process: one was told 'they would see what they could do', yet felt that after waiting years they were offered 'no answers at all'.

Those who gave testimony also spoke about issues with the records they had succeeded in accessing, such as inaccuracies, gaps, false information and redactions. A common theme was that participants were given truncated, subjective versions of records summarised by a social worker, thus denying that individual knowledge of their personal identity and history. Participants noted that it was particularly difficult to access information about deceased relatives, with most being denied access. Participants have been left angry and frustrated, hopeless and disempowered. Many feel dismissed and discriminated against by the relevant agencies.

The search for information and the challenges faced has caused trauma to many participants. This was exacerbated by a lack of preparation and support. For example, participants were given information often without sufficient emotional support, while others were forced to undertake extensive searches of their own in order to piece together information about their own lives, identities and family background. Often, the content of records was deeply upsetting. For example, some birth mothers discovered from their records that they (and their baby) had been tested for syphilis, which they had not consented to.

Several participants told the IP that records contained discrepancies or that they were 'lied' to about the circumstances of adoption. The impacts of searches for records and information pertaining to birth families caused and continue to cause widespread and enduring harms, many of which amount to human rights violations (see the chapter on Serious Human Rights Issues) inflicted upon those seeking access to information about their own personal lives and family backgrounds, to which they are rightfully entitled.

2.4 Acknowledgement, remembering and memorialisation

Participants who gave testimony were asked about how they wanted the experiences of those affected by the institutions and their pathways and practices to be acknowledged and remembered. Our analysis shows that most participants who responded to this issue wanted to ensure that whatever form memorialisation takes, its primary purpose should be to ensure that their pain 'should never [be] allow[ed] to be forgotten'.

There were mixed views on the possibility of a physical memorial or monument, but most participants who gave their opinion about this issue spoke of their desire for acknowledgement, apology and accountability from churches, the state, religious congregations, individual members of the clergy, adoption societies and society more generally.

There were calls for greater scrutiny regarding the processes for adopting children and the vetting of adoptive parents, along with greater transparency from those who control records. Participants also spoke of their expectations around emotional support for those who have been harmed, financial redress, justice and having their voices heard.

For many participants, a key expectation is simply that those who caused harm should acknowledge what had been done to birth mothers; to their children, now adults; and to others impacted by the institutions and their pathways and practices. As one birth mother succinctly stated, 'just for someone to acknowledge the pain would be good'.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Deirdre Mahon, Maeve O'Rourke and Phil Scraton, *Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses in Northern Ireland: Truth, Acknowledgement and Accountability* (Truth Recovery Design Panel, 2021).
- ² Guidance on participatory record-keeping policies and their implementation can be found via the MIRRA Project (Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access) at University College London, accessed 30 April 2026, <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/mirra/about/>.
- ³ Archives and Records Association, 'The records of adopted and care-experienced people – Developing guidance for record-keepers and care professionals', accessed 30 April 2026, <https://www.archives.org.uk/care-and-adoption-records>.
- ⁴ Information Commissioner's Office, 'Better Records Together', <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/campaigns/better-records-together/>.
- ⁵ *Report of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry* (Executive Office, 2017), Chapter 21, Module 12, Column 153, accessed 30 April 2026, <https://wayback.archive-it.org/11112/20240227143002/https://www.hiainquiry.org/historical-institutional-abuse-inquiry-report-chapters>.

- “ When I found my adoption notes and saw that it had said “Cried a lot” I used to think oh, well maybe that’s why I wasn’t kept because I cried a lot, I was one of these “bad babies”, trouble, difficult, whatever. But now I know that’s not why, it’s just I was saying, “Come get me, come get me, come get me. I’m here, I’m here, I’m here”.
- “ I just want to meet her and explain to her that it wasn’t my choice that she was adopted.
- “ she was sent to one part of the Marianvale to do something in the laundry or something, and when she came back I was gone.
- “ she went down into that office, and she says the girl came to take me off her and I started to cry and the girl says, tell her, “They know they’re going, they all start to cry when we’re taking them away”. Really cruel people like.
- “ Because knowing myself and knowing when people worked out you had been adopted, you understand me, they had a stigma towards you because of that.
- “ And nobody wanted you. Your parents didn’t want you, society didn’t want you. They gave you a safe space to have your child and maybe start to learn how to look after them. And somewhere that was loving. That didn’t say that you’re a really bad woman.

“ I felt like I had been silenced, and my rights as a mother were stripped from me from the very beginning. The same was true for [Child’s father’s name], he was stripped of his rights as a father and he was not allowed any voice in what was happening.

“ I suppose at the end of the day what I really wanted was the letter, you know the letter of, that you think is there, explaining why it happened.

“ She was made a slaver, made to clean...She was never the same again mentally... She was made to clean floors and things. I know that.

“ And because when you’re adopted you have a different birth certificate, you don’t have your plain certificate, you have your pink one right. And I always thought oh my God I’m really different, I’m really, I don’t want anyone seeing that, right.

“ And it was just like, the overriding feelings were shame and punishment and the shame doesn’t leave you.

“ As I said, I’ve come with a bundle of love. They are 40 years of letters and cards that I would have written to my son on the night of his birthday. Nobody knew about my letters. I hid them in a piano.



Truth Recovery Independent Panel
Seeking the Truth