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**Language,  
Terminology and  
Representation**

considering Ireland's  
Institutions historically  
known as 'Mother and Baby  
Homes', 'County Homes'  
and related Institutions

Professor Caroline McGregor,  
Dr Carmel Devaney and  
Dr Sarah-Anne Buckley

UNESCO Child and Family  
Research Centre, Ollscoil na  
Gaillimhe | University of Galway

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An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth

The authors of this report are Professor Caroline McGregor, Dr Carmel Devaney, & Dr Sarah-Anne Buckley, UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, University of Galway, February 2023.

The Research Project Team included Caroline McGregor, Principal Investigator, Carmel Devaney, Co-Principal Investigator, Sarah Anne Buckley, Co-Principal Investigator, Pat Dolan, Team Member and Reviewer, Triona Waters, Postdoctoral Researcher (February – June 2021), and Mary Cunningham, Research Assistant (September- November 2021).

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**For further information, please contact:**

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre,  
University of Galway, Galway, Ireland

**Telephone:** +353 91 495 398

**Email:** [cfrc@universityofgalway.ie](mailto:cfrc@universityofgalway.ie)

**Web:** <https://www.universityofgalway.ie/cfrc/>

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The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC) is part of the Institute for Lifecourse and Society at the University of Galway. It was founded in 2007, through support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, Ireland and the Health Services Executive (HSE), with a base in the School of Political Science and Sociology, the mission of the Centre is to help create the conditions for excellent policies, services and practices that improve the lives of children, youth and families through research, education and service development. The UCFRC has an extensive network of relationships and research collaborations internationally and is widely recognised for its core expertise in the areas of Family Support, Child Protection and Welfare, Alternative Care, and Youth Development.

**Contact Details:**

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre,  
Institute for Lifecourse and Society,  
University of Galway, Ireland.

**Telephone:** +353 91 495 398

**Email:** [cfrc@universityofgalway.ie](mailto:cfrc@universityofgalway.ie)

**Web:** <https://www.universityofgalway.ie/cfrc/>

**Twitter:** [@UNESCO\\_CFRC](https://twitter.com/UNESCO_CFRC)

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Funding Statement</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodology</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.1 Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.2 Report Structure</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.3 Research design and methodology</b>	<b>7</b>
1.3.1 Steering Group	8
1.3.2 Literature review and content analysis	8
1.3.3 Consultations with people with direct lived experience	9
1.3.4 Data analysis	11
<b>1.4 Theoretical and conceptual ideas informing the study</b>	<b>13</b>
1.4.1 Stigmatising language and discrimination	13
1.4.2 Representation, personal narratives, trauma studies and lived experience	14
<b>1.5 Ethical considerations</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.6 Limitations</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.7 Summary</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review and Content Analysis</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.2 Preface</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.3 Methodology</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.4 'Age of Inquiry': The MBHCOI and related national and international inquiries into 'historical' child and gender-based abuse</b>	<b>20</b>
2.4.1 Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada	22
<b>2.5 Review of the literature</b>	<b>24</b>
2.5.1 History of institutions, childhood and gender in Ireland	24
2.5.2 The Stigmatisation of 'unmarried mothers' and 'illegitimate children'	26
2.5.3 Lived experience and personal testimony	27
2.5.4 Transitional justice	29
2.5.5 Epistemic injustice	30

<b>2.6 History of the present and historical justice</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>2.7 Language and terminology within the Final Report of the MBHCOI</b>	<b>32</b>
2.7.1 Home	33
2.7.2 Mother	33
2.7.3 Adoption	34
2.7.4 Race and disability	35
<b>2.8 Summary</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Experiences and Views of People with Direct Lived Experience</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>3.2 Preface</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>3.3 Participants</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>3.4 The importance of language and terminology</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>3.5 Language and terminology relating to ‘mothers’ and ‘children’</b>	<b>44</b>
3.5.1 Mother	44
3.5.2 Birth mother	47
3.5.3 Child/Children	52
<b>3.6 Places and processes relating to mothers and children</b>	<b>58</b>
3.6.1 Home/mother and baby home/county home/institution	58
3.6.2 Adoption/adopted	61
<b>3.7 Use of terms survivor and/or victim</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>3.8 Language, terminology and representation by those with power to influence</b>	<b>71</b>
3.8.1 The Catholic Church	71
3.8.2 Government departments	72
3.8.3 Language, terminology and representation used by professionals and state agents	74
3.8.4 Family and society – language, terminology and representation	76
3.8.5 Use of language and terminology by media	77
<b>3.9 Summary</b>	<b>78</b>

<b>Chapter 4: Findings from the Consultations on ‘What Should Be Done’</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>4.2 Use simple, clear and respectful terminology</b>	<b>81</b>
4.2.1 Using simple, clear language	81
4.2.2 Using terms differently or use different terms	83
<b>4.3 Educate and raise awareness about language and terminology</b>	<b>85</b>
4.3.1 The importance of education and awareness in informing present and future generations	86
4.3.2 Educate and raise awareness of government ministers, policy makers, the media and others in positions of authority	87
<b>4.4 Communicate and report with focus on ‘truth telling’</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>4.5 Ensure inclusive and collaborative representation of the views and experiences of those directly affected</b>	<b>91</b>
4.5.1 Opportunities to talk and tell one’s truth	92
4.5.2 Listening	93
4.5.3 Accountability and respect leading to action	94
4.5.4 Greater empathy toward people’s experiences	94
4.5.5 Appreciation of complexity and avoidance of generalisation	95
<b>4.6 Summary</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>5.2 Overview of Findings</b>	<b>102</b>
5.2.1 Learning from people with direct experience about the impact of stigmatising language	104
5.2.2 How language is used to represent and misrepresent	108
5.2.3 Learning from people with direct experience about what should be done	109
<b>5.3 A practical toolkit, guidance and suggestions for eliminating hurtful and stigmatising historical and current labels</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>5.4 Limitations of Research and methodological learning</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>5.5 Conclusion</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>118</b>
Excerpt from Collaborative Forum Report (2018, published 2022) – preferred phrases (pp. 57 – 63).	118
Preferred phrases to be used by social workers; TUSLA; Adoption Authority of Ireland; policy makers; legislators; DCYA; commentators.	121

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### Steering Group Membership

#### *Members of Collaborative Forum of Former Residents of Mother and Baby Homes and related Institutions*

Rosemary Adaser, Bernie Harold, Alice McEvoy, and Adrian (Ado) McKenna

#### *DCEDIY Mother and Baby Homes Investigation Unit*

Wendy Doyle (up to March 2022), Karen Martin, and Mimi Morrin-O'Rourke (from March 2022)

#### *DECDIY Research and Evaluation Unit*

Grainne Collins, Lorcan O' Broin (up to October 2021)

#### *UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, University of Galway*

Caroline McGregor, Sarah-Anne Buckley (up to August 2021), Carmel Devaney (from August 2021)

#### *External Advisor*

James Gallen, Dublin City University.

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# 01

## Introduction *and* Methodology



“

We are all different people  
with different stories

”

# 1.1 Introduction

This report is based on a research study commissioned as a direct response to recommendations made in the *First Report of the Collaborative Forum of Former Residents of Mother and Baby Homes and related Institutions* (hereafter the Collaborative Forum Report) and has also formed part of the Government's response to the Final Report of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation (hereafter the MBHCOI). It relates specifically to the Collaborative Forum recommendations regarding Terminology and (Mis)representation. Regarding Terminology. It contributes to Recommendation 1.11 to 'conduct research into the misuse of language across the relevant institutions so as to arrive at an accurate and era specific glossary of terms'.<sup>1</sup> It also contributes to Recommendation 1.13 (regarding personal accounts from living mothers) and Recommendation 1.14 (personal narratives of children who spent time in the various institutions). Regarding (mis)representation, it makes a contribution to the broader call within the Collaborative Forum Report for a more extensive and 'forensic' examination of 'the contemporaneous influences that determined State policy and public attitudes towards this vulnerable cohort of Irish citizens'.<sup>2</sup> There are also recommendations surrounding the need for significant investment in research, scholarship and actions.<sup>3</sup>

The project was funded through the COALESCE Irish Research Council Funding scheme and supported by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) [previously the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, (DCYA)]. As set out in the call for the research, it was envisaged that the research study would '*complement the work of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Inquiry*'. The call stated that 'within this context, the purpose of this research study is to build on the Collaborative Forum's recommendations by developing, testing and disseminating context-sensitive methods, principles and tools for a shared terminology and language, from a transitional justice perspective.

Such a perspective must balance the absolute need to eliminate the use of hurtful, derogatory and stigmatising historical and current labels, and promote restorative terms/linguistic framing, within current political, policy and public discourse; to acknowledge the impacts of historical terms/framing on the lived experiences of those who spent time in the relevant institutions; while also recognising that these historical and current labels are the underpinnings through which any forward-looking state service provision may be defined.' The first report of the Collaborative Forum of Former Residents of Mother and Baby Homes and related Institutions has recently been published following a lengthy delay.<sup>4</sup>

While this research call and the Collaborative Forum recommendations preceded the publication of the Final Report of the MBHCOI on 12 January 2021, the Commission report did not make any further general recommendations relating to the impact of stigmatising language and terminology on people directly affected by Ireland's institutional history. Its only recommendation relating to language concerned '*The Language of Adoption*'. The Report noted a call for a change of the word '*adoption*' to '*forced adoption*' but they did not agree with.

1. First Report of the Collaborative Forum of Former Residents of Mother and Baby Homes and related Institutions, 2018, published 2022, p.10.

2. Ibid., p.70.

3. Ibid., pp.71-72.

4. Conall Ó Fátharta, "Failure to Publish Survivors Report Criticised", <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30961585.html>

The Final Report did, through the use of quotation marks, treat a small number of terms differently. These included: *'legitimate'*, *'illegitimate'*, *'mentally defective'*, *'lunatics'* and *'mental hospitals'*. Language is referred to directly in a small number of other instances, but there is no methodological section on stigmatising language or terminology. In Chapter 9 on *'Attitudes'* there are references to *'indirect language'*, and in one instance, a statement that the language of the time *'suggests a condescending sympathy'*, but other than these references the language *'of the time'* is repeated and reused.

This project, conducted by the UNESCO Child and Family Research (UCFRC) team at the University of Galway, aims to provide guidance for stakeholders, including the media, social work, government, academia, education, religious orders, and others engaged with people directly affected by this history on language and terminology that is not appropriate or that should be addressed in a sensitive, collaborative and conscious manner. Language is political, and 'beyond their denotative meaning, words carry emotional implications and associations that can lead to unintentional or deliberate discrimination'.<sup>5</sup> The research is also concerned with representation and misrepresentation, which has been interpreted in two ways – how the issues listed above are framed by media, government, religious orders, professionals and members of society and families; and how those directly affected have represented their lived experience.

The project seeks to promote the elimination of stigmatising historical labels, which are still present in many instances. While such elimination will require a far wider range of social and historical justice measures, this study offers the opportunity to focus on the complex issue of language and how it has been used as a tool to reinforce stigma and discrimination both in the past and present. As explained in more detail below, our approach to the project as a research team has been to work collaboratively toward producing a report that would address five research questions as set out below:

1. How can a critical understanding of the use of language in relation to the lived experiences and treatment of mothers and those who were children in Mother and Baby institutions and related institutions in Ireland inform public discourse, media discourse and the provision of welfare or other services which are central to the lives of survivors/those directly affected today?
2. What can be learnt from international responses to historical child abuse and what role does transitional justice, historical accountability, historical justice play in informing present and future actions?
3. What can be learnt from analysis of relevant data sources with regard to the use of language and the framing of lived experiences of certain groups of mothers and those who were children?
4. How can this analysis inform the development of appropriate tools and approaches that will guide the use of language for the public sector, media and general public?
5. What are the barriers to conducting this research and what methodological learning can we derive from this for future studies?

5. Atayde, A., Hauc, S.C., Bessette, L., Danckers, H., and Saitz, R. (2021) "Changing the narrative: a call to end stigmatizing terminology related to substance use disorders", *Addiction Research & Theory*, 29:5, pp.359-362, DOI: 10.1080/16066359.2021.1875215

## 1.2 Report Structure

**This chapter provides an overview of the research project, associated research design, methodology and report structure.**

Chapter 2 is academic in nature and constitutes the following:

- a summary review of the national and international context regarding inquiries into *'historical'* child and gender-based abuse;
- a brief literature review a;
- a content analysis of language, terminology and representation in the Final Report and interim reports of the MBHCOI.

Chapter 3 presents the findings from the narrative-inducing interviews and the written submissions from people directly affected by the institutions. Chapter 4 presents further findings from the project consultations relating to what can be done in the present and future regarding use of language and terminology. Chapter 5 addresses the overall research questions with a view to delivering an overview and guidance, based on the learning from this project, on the development of appropriate tools and approaches. This is intended as a contribution to the development of guidance on the use of language for the public sector, media and the general public.

## 1.3 Research design and methodology

**This section provides an overview of the research design and methodological considerations for this project. The two main methods used include:**

1. A critical literature review and content analysis of the materials relating to the MBHCOI;
2. Consultations with people with direct lived experience of the institutions using an open approach.

Section 1.3 and 1.4 provide an overview and commentary on each of these methods. Like all methods of research, the approaches we took were underpinned by a particular theoretical and conceptual approach that informed our thinking, discussions, and analysis. This is outlined in Section 1.4. Following this, the ethical considerations for this project are discussed. The conclusion introduces the remainder of the project and provides some overarching comments to frame a reading of what is to follow.

### 1.3.1 Steering Group

This study was a collaborative project overseen by a Steering Group including four members of the Collaborative Forum of Former Residents of Mother and Baby Homes and related Institutions, two representatives from the DCEDIY Mother and Baby Homes investigation unit, two members from the DCEDIY Research and Evaluation Unit along with two of the members of the University of Galway research team. The Steering Group played a central oversight, support and advisory role in the overall planning and implementation of the project. This included finalisation of the focus and methodology for the research, facilitation of access to potential participants through networks and contact lists, advice and support in relation to the changing context of the research project over its timeframe and dealing with issues arising in relation to social media abuse.

**Regarding this context, there were relevant issues including:**

The implications of public health restrictions in relation to Covid 19 the delay of the Final Report MBHCOI, the response to the Final Report, and public and political issues arising in relation to related areas such as the Redress Scheme and the Information and Tracing Bill. In addition, the particular challenge that the Collaborative Forum Report was not published until after the research was completed and just before it was prepared for publication negatively affected the project and the work of the Steering Group. We intended to build on the work of this report in our study, specifically using the glossary that was developed by the Collaborative Forum.

This was not possible for research design because it was not published until after our research was complete. We welcome the fact however that the glossary and recommendations relating to Terminology and (Mis)Representation (in particular) have become available to inform our recommendations and proposed actions. The Steering Group met regularly during key phases of the project planning and design phase. The group worked together to address the challenges that arose throughout the period of the research. The research process itself was led and managed by the UCFRC team with regard to carrying out and writing up the findings and producing the final report. The team were solely responsible for this part of the research. The Steering group reviewed and advised on the final report. The publication process was also the responsibility of the UCFRC team.

### 1.3.2 Literature review and content analysis

This chapter involved an analysis of national and international literature from a wide range of disciplines and approaches, and a content analysis of the published materials from the MBHCOI. Two members of the project team conducted the review and content analysis. While only a limited number of references could be cited in this report – a general overview of the key trends in the literature is included – particularly the history of childhood, gender and institutions, the development of Irish social history, personal testimony and lived experience.

The content analysis was both general and targeted, with key terms being consulted to examine the frequency of their use, how they were used, and the context in which they were used. The content analysis of the materials from the MBHCOI inform all sections of the chapter. ‘Representation’ was addressed especially through the lens of the submissions and treatment of the Confidential Committee. Literature on transitional justice, human rights law, historical justice, history of the present, oral history, gender studies, the language of adoption, stigmatising language and discrimination, linguistics, race studies, disability studies and trauma studies guided the approach which informed the conceptual and theoretical ideas which underpins the framework of the project.

### 1.3.3 Consultations with people with direct lived experience

This research study undertook one-to-one and group interviews with people who had direct experience of the institutions. The original aim was to have four public consultations at different points of time during the study to seek and discuss feedback on the documentary and literature analyses. However, the consultations evolved over the course of the project to become a much larger and detailed component within the project. Therefore, the approach was revised to include several individual consultations and one group consultation. Written consultations were also invited and accepted.

#### **Several factors influenced this change of focus in the consultations which included:**

- Delays in the publication of the MBHCOI Final Report that affected the timing and scheduling of the project;
- Delay in the publication of the Collaborative Forum report prevented use of the glossary within this and related content to inform the research design which was changed to an open narrative approach;
- Ongoing and changing Covid-19 public health safety measures limited the scope for public gatherings and required a rethink about how best to conduct mostly online consultations;
- As the project progressed, we became more aware that for meaningful participation, it was more appropriate to organise smaller-scale consultations;
- In line with the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the study, analysis of the MBHCOI Final Report considered along with our own reflection and learning, it became evident to us that greater attention should be given to the consultations as a central source of learning for this project;
- When we issued the calls for participation in the project, most expressions of interest were for individual rather than group consultations.

#### 1.3.3.1 Recruitment and sampling

An open invite was extended to all who had experience of involvement in the institutions. It was decided within the Steering Group that an inclusive approach to sampling and recruitment would be used. This included a focus on institutions outside of the 18 addressed by the MBHCOI. Many of these other institutions had been included in Chapter 2 of the MBHCOI Final Report.

#### **The open invitation had several components:**

- A virtual panel discussion was held by University of Galway (formerly NUI Galway) to provide information on the project and to extend an invitation to those with experience of Mother and Baby Homes, County Homes and related Institutions to participate in the research;
- A dedicated telephone number and email address were established for the project's lifetime;
- An invitation was issued via email with an accompanying poster containing all the necessary information through the DCEDIY mailing list and other relevant networks and contacts from Steering Group Members;
- An information page with details of the project and how to participate was included on the UCFRC website and shared on social media platforms.

Once potential participants made contact with the project a dedicated researcher discussed their queries, provided them with the necessary information and explored the possibilities of their participation in the consultations. Once they had agreed to participate the necessary arrangements were made for a virtual or face-to-face individual interview, participation in a group interview or a written submission.

### 1.3.3.2 Data collection: An unstructured narrative-inducing approach

As this research project was interested in hearing the individual and personal views and accounts of the participants, a qualitative approach to data collection was deemed most appropriate. An unstructured narrative approach to individual and group interviews was chosen to ensure both depth and breadth in the perspectives of the participants<sup>6</sup>. The characteristic of the interview style is that the interviewee's primary response is determined by a single question (asking for a narrative) with the interviewee encouraged to continue until s/he has nothing more to say. The interviewer then asks for more information on the topics relevant to the research question which were raised in the initial response. In this research, two specific follow-up questions were used where relevant.

The interviewer follows the order in which they were raised and uses the words of the interviewee in respect of those topics. This process is continued until the interviewer has elicited all available information on the topics raised by the interviewee. The option of returning to the interviewee for clarification or follow-up at a later stage, if necessary, is also emphasised.<sup>7</sup> Essentially, this gives structure to the unstructured interview. Therefore, the interview style adopted by the researchers is characterised by 'minimal interviewer intervention', with the key skill required being 'to listen'.<sup>8</sup> The researcher also supports the participants in this process, reassuring them they were supplying valuable data, showing appreciation, and understanding, and asking for examples or clarification.

**The proposed interview question was shared and discussed in advance of the research study with the members of the Steering Group. The interview used an open-ended narrative-inducing question:**

- *Can you please tell us about the words, language, or references to your personal situation that you have found offensive or that you think should no longer be used? Please start wherever you wish and take your time.*

**Additional questions were asked as a follow-up and guided the consultations:**

- *What are more acceptable words relating to your experiences that can inform practitioners, the media, government, and educators?*
- *Please also tell us what you would like to see happen differently in the future and what you think this project can achieve?*
- *What else do you want to highlight regarding language, terminology, and representation that you think is important?*

In total, there were 43 participants, which included 26 one-to-one interviews and eight people who participated in a group interview. Nine written submissions were also included for analysis. Two members of the research team collected all the data. Individual interviews took between 30 mins and 2.5 hours (approx.) while the group interview lasted 2.5 hours (approx.).

6. Fontana, A. and Frey, J.H., 2000. The interview: From structured questions to negotiated text. *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2(6), pp.645-672.

7. Ibid, p. 119-120

8. Wengraf, T., 2001. *Qualitative research interviewing: Biographic narrative and semi-structured methods*. Sage, London., p.112

### 1.3.4 Data analysis

All audio consultations were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants were offered an option to review their transcripts to ensure they were happy with the content and wished to proceed. Transcripts were sent via password-protected email or registered post to everyone who wished to review their transcripts. Following the return of transcripts from participants with confirmation they could be used in the research, we commenced the process of thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's framework<sup>9</sup>. This is a systematic approach to analysing and interpreting data in a coherent way.

Two members of the research team analysed all data and discussed it in detail at every stage of the process to ensure we were not missing anything or mis-interpreting the findings. We selected main themes and subthemes and then developed, reviewed, reframed, and renamed them throughout the analysis process. As shown in Chapter 3 and 4 we have relied heavily on quotes from our consultees so that, as far as possible, the data 'speaks for itself' and readers can see what was said as well as our description and interpretation of this.

The process of selecting the main themes and subthemes that finally are reported here is a very complex one, with many steps of analysis. To begin, all transcripts were coded. We developed a 'code book' for each transcript first to capture the unique contribution of each participant. Because we used open-ended questions, we encouraged participants to identify the language, terminology and representation unique to their experience and expertise. This meant that each codebook produced a unique set of data. Some participants focused very much on specific language and terminology while others focused more on representation.

It was important to read and re-read the transcripts carefully to ensure that all of the perspectives were captured. We did not code individual stories or personal data/testimony even though participants shared this with us to give context. However, these stories were extremely important to give context and depth to the discussion. It was crucial to reflect on the stories in order to understand and appreciate the significance of language, terminology and representation. The next step was to cross-reference the code books and identify initial themes, based on the main language and terminology that was highlighted. The next phase involved grouping the core themes language, terminology and representation as appropriate.

9. Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2022. Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology*, 9(1), p.3.



### 1.3.4.1 Reflexivity and the research process

Attention was required throughout the consultations to the issue of reflexivity. The concept of reflexivity is part of the debate on qualitative research emphasising the importance of self-awareness, cultural awareness and ownership of one's perspective.<sup>10</sup> It forms part of our quality assurance processes in research and is especially important when researching a sensitive subject. '*Reflexivity*' means that when analysing, researchers are constantly thinking about what they are reading and writing and asking critical questions about how the data is being written up and reported. Neutrality in all research strategies is highlighted by Patton (2002) as necessary for credibility in a research study.

He describes neutrality:

*'the investigator does not set out to prove a particular perspective or manipulate the data to arrive at predisposed truths... [but] enters the research arena with no axe to grind, no theory to prove (to test but not to prove) and no predetermined results to support' (p. 51).*

But when listening to, analysing and representing often highly emotive, upsetting and sometimes shocking themes, this is not always easy. In order to achieve neutrality, reflexive strategies were employed by the researchers. Braun and Clarke (2022) advise three types of reflexivity are important:

*Personal reflexivity* – this involves being aware of how the researchers' own values, experiences and knowledge affects the analysis. The researchers doing the consultations were from UCFRC and have both practical and academic experience in working with children, mothers, fathers and families. We needed to balance respect for the autonomy and expertise of those sharing their stories with concern about people's wellbeing when speaking about harmful and offensive language that triggered traumatic and painful memories. This critical awareness was essential not just in relation to the consultations themselves but in terms of how people were contacted and communicated with before and after this.

*Functional reflexivity* – this involves being aware of how the method affects the research. In this instance, the open questions used to collect data meant that all data produced came directly from the participants. We only prompted on language, terminology or representation that the respondents started a conversation about. This was extremely important in this study. People were assured that they were not being asked to discuss anything except what they chose to, and respect for testimony and personal experience was a huge responsibility of the researchers to maintain and be attentive to throughout the process.

*Disciplinary reflexivity* – this relates to how the academic discipline and approach shapes the research. Our research was carried out by applied social scientists with both academic and practical experience in related fields. This research also comes from within the UCFRC, which places emphasis on the impact of research and engagement with the public and communities. Our ethics derive from both research and professional ethics, and from this perspective, the disciplinary emphasis in this research is the centrality of respectful and empathic engagement, commitment to '*do no harm*', critical awareness of power differences in knowledge production, and the privileging of knowledge coming directly from people with direct experience. The overall theoretical and conceptual frame of the research, discussed below, influenced the critical analysis, reflection and thinking throughout the process.

10. Patton, M.Q., 2002. Qualitative research & evaluation methods. Sage: California. Robson, C., 2002. Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers. Wiley-Blackwell.

## 1.4 Theoretical and conceptual ideas informing the study

The research was underpinned by complementary conceptual perspectives, as set out in the following section, that informed our ongoing discussion and analysis.

### 1.4.1 Stigmatising language and discrimination

*People will stigmatise those individuals whose characteristics and actions are seen as threatening or hindering the effective functioning of their groups<sup>11</sup>*

The stigmatising impact of language has received extensive attention across several disciplines and fields, much influenced by the work of Erving Goffman. In his classic 1963 study he argues that stigma operates through people in communities learning to identify discrediting ‘marks’ and reacting in a discriminatory manner.

A person marked with a stigma which reduces the person ‘*in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one*’.<sup>12</sup> While assigning stigma is what people do to other people, it is also an element in creating and preserving social order. As a result, stigmatisation often results in laws or attitudes that socially isolate ‘*marked*’ groups into geographical locations and remove their rights and others’ obligations to them. Language is one way in which this order is maintained, and stigmatising language has become the focus of many studies, particularly surrounding violence, deviance, healthcare, race, ethnicity and disability. It is particularly influenced by gender and social class, and in the case of this report, certain groups of women and their children were the focus of discriminatory practices articulated and enforced in part through the use of stigmatizing language.

In her 2007 article ‘*Communicating stigma*’, Rachel Smith argues that stigma communication includes four categories of content cues

*‘(a) a mark for categorisation in a stigmatised group, (b) descriptions of the stigmatised group as a separate group entity, (c) responsibility for placement in the stigmatised group and resulting group threat, and (d) cues to danger the group and its members face and reminders for “unmarked” members to protect themselves and to support collective efforts to eliminate the threat’<sup>13</sup>*

All of these cues can be observed when we look at the treatment of particular groups of women and then children within the institutions in Ireland. Whether that mark was a pregnancy as a single woman, being a child born to a single parent, or placement in an institution for poverty or other factors – the stigma attached to this group can be viewed in the historic and often contemporary language.

11. Goffman, E., *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identities*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall (1963).

12. *Ibid.*, p.3.

13. Smith, R., ‘Language of the Lost: An Explication of Stigma Communication’, *Communication Theory*, 17:4, pp.462-485.

## 1.4.2 Representation, personal narratives, trauma studies and lived experience

*Beyond telling one's story, recognition is about being believed...<sup>14</sup>*

The centrality of testimony from victims and survivors is a defining feature of mechanisms for dealing with the past – be that inquiries, prosecutions, redress processes (which can include individual hearings, provision of testimony to museums, access to archives with personal information, etc.) and official apologies.

We have particularly seen this in institutional abuse inquiries in recent years in international contexts such as Canada and Australia. The focus on individual narratives serves two primary purposes – to bear witness to people's suffering and acknowledge the abuse they experienced, and to learn lessons from past events to better understand the dynamics of institutional abuse to improve policy and practice in the future.

In the case of the MBHCOI in Ireland, the treatment of these testimonies or personal narratives has been criticised by those directly affected, the media, academics and the wider public, and in this project, analysis of the testimonies has been included as they fall under the remit of representation. As shown by projects inspired by the Fortunoff collection and the Australian Former Child Migrant Project (UK), testimonies give voice to historical research, and while recorded experiences must of course be interrogated, first and foremost, they must be fully included.<sup>15</sup>

This research is not specifically about testimony, but in consulting with us around language, terminology and representation, it was through their testimonies that people expressed their views and impacted greatly on our understanding and learning, as we have sought to communicate. Miranda Fricker has examined how an emphasis on testimony also brings forth awareness of testimonial injustice, or how '*knowledge*' expressed through words and language is constructed in an unequal way, where those who have least power, and usually most expertise through their direct experience, are not given the opportunity to inform this '*knowledge*'.<sup>16</sup> Highlighting this knowledge injustice and power imbalance is central to this project. Another underpinning commitment is giving as much space, attention, and consideration as possible to the lived experience of those directly affected by the institutions, and we feel our responsibility in the project and our reporting of it here.

14. Skold, J. (2016) 'The truth about abuse?: A comparative approach to inquiry narratives on historical institutional child abuse', *History of Education* (45), 4, pp.492–509.

15. "Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project", <https://www.nla.gov.au/oral-history/forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants-oral-history-project>

16. Fricker, M. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford University Press: Oxford (2007).

## 1.5 Ethical considerations

All researchers must consider the ethical issues which may arise during their study. In this study, one of the main issues related to potential distress caused to participants in the consultations by engaging in the discussion of language, terminology, and representation. Re-traumatisation was a concern. We were, and remain, very conscious of the potential for our study to cause distress, especially when talking about experiences triggered traumatic memories and feelings. This needed to be balanced with the avoidance of paternalism or assumptions of vulnerability, as mentioned above. Full ethical approval was granted for this study by the University of Galway Research Ethics Committee.

### **Several ethical considerations were included in the research design and implementation.**

- Counselling support services were available and were offered to participants if they wished to avail of them.
- The location for face-to-face consultations was private, comfortable, and accessible, with refreshments provided.
- Due to Covid-19, provision was made for both online and socially distanced in-person consultations depending on the preferences of consultees and public health advice at particular times.
- All personal information and experiences were treated with sensitivity and care.
- All information was treated confidentially and stored and reported anonymously.
- To this end no identifiable information was recorded; all information was stored securely using password-protected files, transcripts were returned to participants using password-protected files or through registered post, and all identifying information was removed in the process of analysis and report writing.

## 1.6 Limitations

As with any research study there are a number of limitations to this project. The research involves a relatively small sample given the estimated numbers affected by these issues. Prior reports, in particular the Collaborative Forum Report (including glossaries), which were very relevant to this research, could not inform this work until at the final stage because publication was delayed until November 2022. It had been expected that the report of the Collaborative Forum would be available to draw from and build on as part of the earlier stages of the project. Specifically, it was intended to use the glossary developed by the Collaborative Forum to inform our consultations.

This glossary is available in Appendix 1. As a result of the report not being available to us, the research design had to be amended in September – October 2021 to an open narrative approach. While the publication of the report in advance of the final stage of this project was welcomed and valuable to contextualise our work and give the opportunity to offer recommendations that can build on those of the Collaborative Forum, earlier critical engagement with the report's content and recommendations would have been more logical and beneficial with regard to building on their work given that this project was put in place in response to recommendations of the Forum.

It would also have given greater recognition of the work of the Forum in highlighting the importance of terminology, language and representation and directly influencing the funding of research to examine this particular issue. Another limitation was that members of the Collaborative Forum were part of the Steering group which gave support and advice throughout the research process but were not directly involved in conducting the research study itself. As detailed in recommendations in Chapter 5, we recommend that any future research involves a more extensive participatory approach to include those with direct experience in all aspects of the research process.

It must also be noted that this was a point-in-time study with limited resources. Also, the project relates to one aspect of very complex and critical issues relating to the mother and baby institutions, county homes and related institutions. It was affected at various points by controversy about the Final Report of the Commission and lack of action on issues including burials, access to records and information and meeting the needs of people directly affected in the present.

## 1.7 Summary

This project gives insight into the power of words and language in the present day and the need to recognise and address the use of stigmatising language. While language, terminology and representation are only one of several major issues needing urgent attention regarding the treatment of Ireland's institutions – past and present – as reflected especially in the consultation findings of this study, *'getting it right'* in the present is one crucial step toward historical justice.

# 02

## Literature Review *and* Content Analysis

“

Changing how we use language and terminology and radically reviewing how past experiences have so often been misrepresented will not in itself achieve the justice so many people still need regarding their experiences in institutions run by state and church. However, such change represents one of many steps needed to achieve historical justice

”

## 2.1 Introduction

**This chapter contains the following:**

- A review of the national and international context regarding inquiries into ‘historical’ child and gender-based abuse;
- A literature review;
- A content analysis of Language, Terminology and Representation in the Final Report and interim reports of the Commission to Investigate Mother and Baby Homes and Related Matters (MBHCOI).

## 2.2 Preface

**Three key research questions guided research for this chapter:**

1. What can be learned from international responses to ‘historical’ child and gender-based abuse and what role do transitional justice and historical justice play in informing present and future actions?
2. What does a review of the national and international literature do to inform present and future actions?
3. What can be learned from analysis of relevant data sources regarding the use of language and the framing of the lived experiences of certain groups of mothers and children?

## 2.3 Methodology

Methodologically, the chapter first involved analysis of national and international literature from a range of approaches and disciplines by two members of the project team. This included but was not limited to gender history, women’s history, feminist history, the history of childhood and child welfare, the history of institutions, the history of motherhood, the history of adoption, human rights law, transitional justice, historical justice, history of the present, social work, trauma studies, memory studies, epistemic injustice and linguistics. While all these materials cannot be referenced in this report, a general overview of the key trends is addressed.

All the consulted materials guided the process in which the research was conducted and evolved, be that in relation to the analysis, the methodology or the conceptual framework. Following this, a detailed content analysis was conducted of the published materials from the Final Report and interim reports of the Commission to Investigate Mother and Baby Homes and Related Matters using Adobe software. While other software programs (for example Curatur) were considered, the Adobe software enabled us to quantify and then qualify the use of terms and language. This analysis was both general and targeted, with key terms being noted for frequency of use, manner of use, and context in which they were used. This analysis of materials from the MBHCOI informs all sections of the chapter and was considered in other sections.

Representation was addressed especially through the lens of the submissions and the treatment of the testimonies given to the MBHCOI Confidential Committee. Again, this report illustrates just a small section of what was examined. Included in this section also is an analysis of the First Report of the Collaborative Forum of Former Residents of Mother and Baby Homes carried out at the end of the project following its publication in 2022.

Throughout the research, focus was placed on key messages and how the work could inform future actions.



## 2.4 ‘Age of Inquiry’: The MBHCOI and related national and international inquiries into ‘historical’ child and gender-based abuse

*The social importance of bearing witness to the suffering of victims and survivors, raising public awareness, educating the community, holding institutions and individuals to account, changing the historical record, and giving voice to individuals and groups who have been marginalised or silenced should not be under-estimated. The impact of these wider effects is not easily quantified. Yet they serve vitally important purposes in fostering societal and cultural change, which is necessary both for the acknowledgement of past abuse and to help prevent and better respond to abuse that occurs in the future.<sup>17</sup>*

In Ireland, the UK, Australia and Canada, as well as in parts of Northern, Western and Central Europe, there have been an increasing number of commissions of inquiry investigating ‘historical’ institutional child abuse and gender-based violence over the past twenty-five years, as the Age of Inquiry Project has demonstrated.<sup>18</sup> Jurisdictions that have initiated inquiries or redress schemes include Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland and Wales. While the language and terminology used in all Commission reports has varied, for the most part, language and terminology has not been a primary focus of commissions of inquiry, as will be addressed in this section. However, representation and acknowledgement of lived experience of those directly affected as well as the impact of intergenerational trauma has.

Inquiries must deal with the past and the present, and as experiences in a variety of countries has shown, there is a well-trodden path to the setting up of commissions, inquiries and investigations.

Certain details differentiate the approach of inquiries – the terms of reference of the inquiry, the institutions included and excluded, whether there will be public hearings, whether the inquiry will be survivor/victim-centred, what redress and restorative justice looks like, who is involved in the operation of the inquiry or investigation and the language and terminology used, as well as the ways in which individuals and groups are represented. In terms of approach, more recently in countries such as Canada and Australia, a transitional justice approach has been taken with a focus on reparations, restorative justice and openness.

In Ireland, several lengthy reports have been published including the most recent MBHCOI Final Report, 2020) which is 2,865 pages and was the result of five years of investigation. Published on 12 January 2021, it addressed the history and experience of 56,000 women and 57,000 children whom it estimates spent time in the 14 institutions and four county ‘homes’ under investigation.

Terms of reference are key to any commission, and the MBHCOI’s remit was to examine questions of entry, treatment, vaccination trials, mortality, burials, post-mortem practices and ‘exit pathways’ of single mothers and their children in the 14 institutions (228 institutions are listed in Chapter 2 of the Final Report; some were small and short-lived) and a ‘representative sample’ of county ‘homes’ (4 were included, there were 30 more).<sup>19</sup> Those who participated in this study could have been associated with any of the institutions mentioned in Chapter 2, or with other institutions about which less information is available.

17. Wright, K. (2017) ‘Remaking collective knowledge: An analysis of the complex and multiple effects of inquiries into historical institutional child abuse’, *Child Abuse and Neglect* (74), pp.10–22.

18. Age of Inquiry: A Global Map of Institutional Abuse Inquiries, <https://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/research/ageofinquiry/index.html>

19. Chapter Two, MBHCOI Final Report.

The Irish State's engagement with commissions of inquiry over the past 20 years follows on from a succession of documentaries which detailed institutional and clerical abuse and the failure of the Catholic Church and other churches to protect women and then children or to respond adequately when abuse occurred (Suffer Little Children 1994, Dear Daughter 1996, States of Fear 1999, Suing the Pope 2002, Cardinal Secrets 2002). In addition to activism and testimony, the media played a large role in exposing institutional child abuse, yet regarding stigmatising language, the media are also critical in perpetuating labelling terms, and we hope this project will lead to a change in this.

In reference to the industrial and reformatory schools, the first system of institutionalisation to be investigated, in 1999, a state apology was issued, a redress scheme set up and the Ryan Commission (previously the Laffoy Commission) established to examine physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect in Irish residential 'care' settings. Inquiries focusing specifically on clerical child sexual abuse in several dioceses followed, including Ferns (2003–2005), Dublin (2006–2009) and Cloyne (2009–2011). In recent years, research by Catherine Corless drew attention to conditions in the Tuam Mother and Baby Institution and the sector generally, prompting considerable media coverage, which focused especially on high mortality rates and thoughtless burial practices.<sup>20</sup> As previously mentioned, Ireland was not unique regarding the setting up of commissions and investigations, but most have not engaged or been driven by a transitional justice approach. While the Ryan Commission held public hearings, these were criticised as adversarial and overly legalistic in nature.

As Colin Smith and April Duff argue...

*'those familiar with the accounts of individuals being abused in industrial schools, incarcerated and exploited in Magdalene laundries, or separated from their mother or their child in a Mother and Baby Home cannot say that justice has yet been done to either victims or perpetrators'.<sup>21</sup>*

Speaking specifically about language and terminology, internationally the treatment has been diverse. In some jurisdictions language was addressed in relation to inclusivity – Aboriginal languages to be used for example in Australia. In the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, there are warnings surrounding strong language and graphic descriptions, as there are in many other similar reports.

For most Irish inquiries, language and terminology has not been addressed explicitly, although implicitly we can observe the use of survivor/victim-centred language and an emphasis on ensuring those directly affected are not retraumatised through reuse of stigmatising language. This can be particularly seen in relation to the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which will now be addressed. Language and terminology are also addressed in Australian inquiries and are likely to be addressed in the Final Report of the UK Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).<sup>22</sup>

20. See Buckley, S.A. (2019) "How Ireland Should Deal with the Issue of Historic Abuse Cases", RTE Brainstorm, <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2018/0903/991253-how-ireland-should-deal-with-the-issue-of-historic-abuse-cases/>.

21. Colin, Smith and April Duff 2020, "Access to Justice for Victims of Historic Institutional Abuse", Redress, p.117.

22. <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/>

## 2.4.1 Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

*...by truth, we mean not only the truth revealed in government and church residential school documents, but also the truth of lived experiences as told to us by Survivors and others in their statements to this Commission.<sup>23</sup>*

The mandate for this Commission was to reveal the ‘truth’ of the history of the Church-run residential schools and the legacy of the harm done to Aboriginal peoples. As will be addressed in the following section, the term ‘truth’ is only briefly mentioned (13 times) in the main body of the MBHCOI Final Report. The second mandate of the Canadian Commission was to guide the process of reconciliation, taking into account in particular the principles of transitional justice.<sup>24</sup>

While the context in Canada is different, there are similarities with the Irish context in terms of the breaking up of family, separation of mothers from their infants and forced adoptions. Indian residential schools in Canada were in operation for over 150 years with the last residential school closing in Canada in 1997. This federally operated system began in the 1880s and the purpose of the residential school system was to forcibly remove Indigenous children from their homes to assimilate, Christianise and ‘civilise’ them. The school system relied heavily on religious instruction and industrial or agricultural work routines. These schools became notorious for high rates of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, malnutrition, forced labour, disease and high death rates. The entirety of the school system grew from and operated within the broader systems of settler colonial genocide, which is acknowledged in the Commission’s report.

Cultural genocide was also highlighted, being defined as the destruction of structures and practices that allow a group to continue as a group and this includes disrupting families to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next. Residential schools did not stand alone in Canada and were accompanied by the introduction of the Indian Act, reserve system and reserve pass system, the outlawing of ceremonies, and overlapping waves of colonial control that included the forced displacement and relocation of entire communities. To add to this, Indigenous children grew up without their languages or cultures and were separated from their parents and families for extended periods of time, which led to generations of intergenerational trauma that continues today.

The generational effect on Aboriginal people and culture is acknowledged and again can be compared with the effects of adoption and lack of knowledge of one’s past and origins. It is acknowledged in the report that this trauma is rooted in imposed social and legal injustices in the form of racist, colonial and genocidal policies. These injustices are documented extensively in the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. These reports further document the consequences of these injustices including geographical isolation, lack of opportunities, poverty, brokenness and poor health outcomes.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission received over 6,750 statements from survivors/victims of residential schools, members of their families, and other individuals who wished to share their knowledge of the residential school system and its legacy. The language and terminology contained in the report could be described as survivor/victim centred. For example, the language and terminology around the arrival of children at the schools included terms such as ‘traumatised’, ‘trauma’ and ‘separated’. Conversely, there are 40 references to trauma in the Final Report of the MBHCOI.

Most of these refer to childbirth and adoption and there are a number of examples from the Confidential Committee referenced in chapters. Yet it is still a very small number of references given the gravity of the experience and the numbers directly affected by the institutions.

23. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>

24. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-truth-justice-reparation-and-non-recurrence/international-standards>

In the Social History section of the Canadian report there are references to themes like integration, assimilation, arranged marriage, conditions in the institutions, burial arrangements, abuse, agreements, resistance of families and apologies. Integration is addressed once by the MBHCOI in the section on boarding-out.

The observation is an interesting one and one that perhaps should be under the remit of the Commission –

*‘a comprehensive account of the outcomes for children of ‘unmarried’ mothers, who were not raised by their family, would require the integration of the histories of the children in industrial schools... of boarded out children, of those placed at nurse and of those who were adopted’.*

While there are many instances in which abuse is mentioned or discussed in the MBHCOI Final Report, with references to *‘psychological abuse’*, *‘severe trauma’*, *‘emotional abuse’*, *‘racial abuse’* and *‘physical abuse’*, the Executive Summary states that ‘there is no evidence of the sort of gross abuse that occurred in the industrial schools’.<sup>25</sup>

The Canadian report also deals with the legacy of the Commission. *‘Separation’* is used to describe the policy of removing children from their families, with children being *‘torn from their parents’* and brothers and sisters being *‘kept apart’*. In one reference, the MBHCOI Final Report states ‘a central theme in the literature globally is that many mothers did not believe that they freely chose to relinquish their children’.<sup>26</sup> Yet in the following section, the Commission argues that in the Irish case consent was often obtained but that mothers ‘were so traumatised that, years later, they had no recollection of the sequence of events, including the provision of formal consent. While understood now, it was not known then that denial is a common feature in crisis pregnancy where memories can be blurred or obliterated by the associated trauma.’ This continued denial of forced adoption has received widespread criticism. While the situations between Ireland and Canada do have many differences, in the Canadian report *‘cultural genocide’* is the term used to describe the effects of government policy and the policy of *‘assimilation’*. Aboriginal languages and cultures were denigrated and suppressed. Child neglect was institutionalised, as was child labour.

The report refers to *‘the destructive legacies of colonisation’* and the role of history in the reconciliation process was acknowledged –

*‘History plays an important role in reconciliation; to build for the future, Canadians must look to, and learn from, the past.’<sup>27</sup>*

Truth is discussed and truth telling, and justice is a theme that is threaded throughout. The future is addressed, with the Commission stating that schools in Canada must teach history in ways that foster *‘mutual respect, empathy and engagement’*.

#### **For us, there are many key messages from the Commission:**

- A focus on victim/survivor-centred language.
- A prioritising of testimony and lived experience.
- An acknowledgement of the intergenerational trauma which individuals and families experienced, the need for reparation and for the legacy of this trauma to be addressed by all of society.
- An acknowledgement of power, of those who knew, of the need for transitional justice measures.
- A focus on education and learning, to be led by those directly affected.

25. Executive Summary MBHCOI, p.11.

26. MBHCOI Final Report, p.59.

27. Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>

## 2.5 Review of the literature

Examining the literature referenced in the bibliography of the Final Report of the MBHCOI, we can see an emphasis on the social history of modern Ireland, including references to women's history, gender history, histories of child welfare and childhood, the history of poverty and the history of institutions. We can also see the use of stigmatising language and terms especially in academic publications, most prominently the use of the term 'unmarried mother/s' and as was recognised in the First Report of the Collaborative Forum, '*the criminalisation and pathologisation of unmarried mothers*'.<sup>28</sup> What we cannot see is the representation of those with direct experience being acknowledged nor the role of the Irish State and religious bodies in their negative treatment.

This review will briefly discuss the above, as well as other theories and approaches that could benefit scholarship for the future and offer learning for the present approach to stigmatising language, and its use by academics, policymakers, and the media.

The slow growth of the history of childhood, motherhood, child welfare and institutions, as well as extremely limited access to extant archives, meant these and many other histories had not been explored comprehensively, and the history of Ireland's mother and baby institutions represented part of a much broader, larger and more significant piece of our national story than had been acknowledged previously. As was recently discussed at a 1-day event on '*Teaching Ireland's Dark History*', we will not have a comprehensive history of modern Ireland without the inclusion of the history of Ireland's institutions.

As the MBHCOI was an impetus for this report as well the First Report of the Collaborative Forum both will be referred to. Methodologically, the approach to the Final Report of the MBHCOI was primarily a historical one, with little reference to scholarly work on human rights law, transitional justice, historical justice, women's studies, trauma studies, oral history, race studies, the history of adoption and adoption trauma, disability studies, gender studies, linguistics, cultural memory, memory studies, theories of power or critical theory. Similarly, while there is brief reference to international comparisons (in the Executive Summary), no detailed methodological analysis of comparative reports or commissions is present, nor is there any detailed note on the language and terminology used, or potential issues in retraumatising survivors/victims through reuse of stigmatising or labelling language. While the Confidential Committee section does contain an array of different and more acceptable language, the chosen language for the main body of the report varied greatly and often relied on era-specific terms. State archives and the archives of the religious orders were the primary focus, and language from the past was often reused without consciousness of the present. The following section will address six key areas that influenced this report and that can be of further use in dealing with the question of language, terminology and representation.

### 2.5.1 History of institutions, childhood and gender in Ireland

In recent years, scholarship on institutions in Ireland has increased significantly. A few general points can be made about the existing literature. In most institutions, women/girls were overrepresented, primarily due to religious, state and societal fears surrounding their sexuality or 'the criminalisation and pathologisation of unmarried motherhood'. Social class was also a key factor, with many women entering institutions due to poverty. Based on the lived experiences of those who were detained in these institutions and from much of the literature we can say these were cruel, punitive, and repressive institutions where women and children were imprisoned in many instances. Social class, race, ethnicity, and gender affected both the individuals who were sent and their treatment both in the institution and afterwards.

28. First Report of the Collaborative Forum, p.52.

One of the overarching features of the development of what became a quasi-carceral system was the prevalence of proselytism, or conversion to another faith, but neither the Catholic Church nor the Church of Ireland are without blame in regard to the mistreatment. From the first foundling hospital in Dublin in the eighteenth century to the development of the industrial and reformatory school system, the foundation was laid for Ireland's *'Mother and Baby Homes'* by the beginning of the twentieth century. From Joseph Robins' seminal study in 1989 *The Lost Children* to studies on the poor law and more recently on Ireland's industrial and reformatory school systems, as well as Ireland's Magdalene asylums, the history of institutions has received increasing attention. Pioneering studies such as Frances Finnegan's *Do Penance or Perish* and Jane Barnes' study of the industrial school system remain critical, but neither of these studies had access to the range and quantity of records that state commissions have had.

Women's history, gender history and feminist history have had an enormous impact on the growth of social history in Ireland over the past 50 years. Irish women's history had begun to gain traction from the late 1970s thanks to the work of pioneers like Margaret Mac Curtain, Mary Cullen, Rosemary Cullen-Owens and Arlen Press, but gained further positive momentum with the foundation of the Women's History Association of Ireland in 1989.<sup>29</sup> Examining the topic of institutionalisation through the lens of gender reveals much about the experience of women and children, but also the treatment of poverty and the role of the State and religious bodies in developing what James Smith has termed an *'architecture of containment'* in the twentieth century. By the early twentieth century, we were a nation intent on building institutions and placing large numbers of our citizens in them. That much is clear from studies like Ian O'Donnell and Eoin O'Sullivan's *Coercive Confinement in Ireland: Patients, Prisoners and Penitents* or the CLANN Project which has consistently argued for a truth telling and transitional justice approach to the institutions. We were not alone in this, but we had one of the highest rates of institutionalisation per capita in the world in the mid-twentieth century, a claim few would wish for. The physical structure of these establishments has also begun to be interrogated, and, as Laura McAtackney has argued, many existing structures are currently threatened with destruction, and deserve further attention what would become mother and baby institutions were often also previously workhouses.

The ways in which these buildings are remembered and contextualised often demonstrates the stigma attached to those who were placed in them. For historians and students, a key feature of future research must include comparative, transnational and critical approaches to how institutions operated in different settings, and how gender, class, ethnicity, race, and religion were factors in placement in and the need for these institutions. Without these perspectives, we continue to run the risk of exceptionalism, as the sectarianism that characterised the development of Irish institutions holds much in common with the experience of other colonial and postcolonial nations, where gender and class equally played critical roles. Similarly, while the Final Report of the MBHCOI has a number of uses for future research, it should not be taken as the final word, but interrogated, its sources revisited when access is given, and the lived experience of those who were directly affected treated with respect.

Heteronormativity, the positioning of the family in the Irish Constitution and the overtly masculine nature of Irish nationalism, coupled with the conservatism of Catholic social teaching, have had a very deep impact on how history was written from 1922 until the late 1970s. What women's history and later gender and feminist history have offered is a critique of existing power structures – both in the past and in the present. They also reiterated the importance of so-called ordinary women, and the patriarchal structure of Irish society.

The history of the family and the history of childhood and child welfare has also been central to the scholarship. In 2014, Harry Hendrick argued, in the first edited volume on Irish childhood, for the inclusion of 'age' as a category of analysis in studies of childhood and youth.

29. Bibliography of Irish Women's and Gender History, <https://womenshistoryassociation.com/the-bibliography-of-irish-womens-history>

In the Irish context, the history of childhood and youth was late to develop but is now a growing field and the recent addition of a History of Irish Childhood Bibliography has signalled its growth, as has the work of historians engaged in the Museum of Irish Childhood Project.<sup>30</sup> The treatment of child welfare and particularly children in institutions has been particularly important, with one of the first accounts being published in 1980, Joseph Robins' *The Lost Children: A Study of Charity Children in Ireland, 1700–1900*. In this text, Robins argued that by the early eighteenth century, the abandonment of children, particularly those deemed '*illegitimate*', was a matter of visible public concern which led to the foundation of Ireland's first foundling hospital. In many ways, the institution set a precedent for institutional care of orphaned, '*abandoned*' and '*illegitimate*' children. The rate of institutional infant mortality was 75%, a figure that shockingly we would see again in the twentieth century.

## 2.5.2 The Stigmatisation of 'unmarried mothers' and 'illegitimate children'

Over the past thirty years due to the testimony and activism of those directly affected as well as through media attention, academics and policymakers have examined the experience of 'unmarried mothers' and drawn attention to the criminalisation of particular mothers. This has included the use of era-specific language such as 'unmarried mother', 'fallen women', 'out of wedlock', 'first offenders', 'repeat offenders', 'at risk'. Undoubtedly, the terminology and language used to describe 'single mothers' and those criminalised needs to be addressed. Influential public figures such as Fr Richard Devane have been quoted often without proper context and care for the hurtful and stigmatising language used and the trauma it still inflicts.

In recent decades, many mothers with direct experience of the institutions and forced adoption have expressed the hurt which the term '*birth mother*' has caused. As with other terms, it has a historical basis, emanating from the United States initially with the first known use of the term '*birth mother*' being attributed to Pearl S. Buck in 1956. In the June issue of *Women's Home Companion*, Buck wrote a piece called '*We Can Free the Children*' in which she asked, '*What chance has the child born out of wedlock to find a wholesome family and community life if his mother keeps him?*' While the term was initially used by Buck, the use of '*positive adoption language*' (PAL) endorsing the term '*birth mother*' as the correct way to address a mother who has lost her child to adoption is attributed to Minneapolis social worker Marietta Spencer of the Children's Home Society of Minnesota. While terms such as '*birth mother*' and '*natural mother*' are still used, some view these as reductionist and stigmatising labels that can cause enormous hurt. As the essay 'Respect for Mothers' acknowledged:

*The term "Birth Mother" is hurtful, insulting and inaccurate. It reduces the connection with our children to the few hours of their birth. And those hours are the least questioned about when we reunite with our children! The term "Biological Mother" is even worse – our children were not conceived in petri dishes in hospital laboratories!"<sup>31</sup>*

In the First Report of the Collaborative Forum a glossary of terminology regarding preferred phrases describing people was provided<sup>32</sup>. Use of the term '*natural mother*' was proposed instead of '*birth mother*'. 'Family of Origin' was proposed instead of 'birth family' and '*unaccompanied child*' instead of '*baby*'. 'Adopted Adult' was proposed to replace '*adoptee*' or '*adopted child*'. A number of other terms are reviewed in the Forum Report, and alternative suggestions made to help to address the stigma associated with terminology as discussed above and to follow in more detail.

30. <https://museumofchildhood.ie/>; <https://irishchildhood.wordpress.com/bibliography/>

31. 'Respect for Mothers', First Report of the Collaborative Forum, pp.98-101.

32. (2018, published in 2022, pp. 59-61),

Terms such as *'relinquishment'* and *'placing'* in reference to closed adoption circumstances have been criticised *'for their failure to accurately represent the experiences of mothers who felt coerced into the decision'* with literature in this area growing in the social sciences and psychology particularly.<sup>33</sup>

The treatment of adults who were adopted and the language surrounding that has also been criticised by advocacy groups and individuals. Aitheantas, the Adoptee Identity Rights group formed in 2018 'to advocate for legislative reform and equality for Irish Adoptees' published a report (in July 2021) which set out the details of research conducted with adoptees and their families, hosted on the Uplift platform. The report looked specifically at terminology and social stigma, asking respondents directly for the term they preferred to be described as. This study was focused only on views of adopted adults. The survey had a total of 468 participants, most of whom were adoptees. Other participants were children or family members of adoptees. While it stated that the majority of respondents (285 out of 468) chose the term *'birth mother'*, the findings also showed that terminology was divisive – in this instance between *'birth mother'* and *'natural mother'*.

The choice of *'mother'* in the recent legislation on information and tracing could perhaps lead the way, in contrast to adjectives that could cause offence to different individuals and groups. While McNamara, Egan and McNeela, referred to earlier, highlight that their study was a small one (six interviewees) – the emotional impact on mothers who lost their children to adoption is so visceral it must be considered by future scholars as a term not to be used. Similarly, while the language surrounding adoption has changed significantly in recent decades, the terminology used to describe the experiences of mothers who have lost a child through adoption should be influenced by those directly affected. As Origins Canada have documented, the effects of adoption trauma on the mental health of mothers have been known since the late 1960s.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in the Australian context the National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices reveals the hurt and trauma experience by many women and adults who were adopted.

Mothers were not the only group criminalised and stigmatised. The stigma associated with being a 'non-marital' child was also great. As many scholars have discussed, the term *'illegitimate'* had very real consequences in relation to inheritance, future career, and life prospects as well as the social stigma attached to it. In 1987, after many years of campaigning the Status of Children Act finally removed the term from legislation, but it continues to be used in certain official documentation and by academics.<sup>35</sup> The treatment of adopted adults and the use of the term *'child'*, *'infant'*, *'children'* to describe them remains an issue in discourse today.

### 2.5.3 Lived experience and personal testimony

As Gordon Lynch has argued about the UK Child Migration Scheme, 'historical understanding is... best promoted through ongoing cycles of investigation and multiple analyses and interpretations.'<sup>36</sup> Lynch points to what many historians know all too well – what survives in the archive is only one body of material and the need to fully integrate and thread the testimony of survivors or those directly affected through any analysis is critical. Arguably, the Final Report of the MBHCOI contains a wealth of information on Ireland's institutions from the extant archives, much of which was outside of the reach of academics, survivors and researchers over the past seven years as records were being consulted by the Commission.

33. McNamara, Egan and McNeela, "My scar is called adoption", p. 1. See also MO Wiley, AL Baden, 2005, 'Birth parents in adoption: Research, practice and counseling psychology', *The Counseling Psychologist* 33(1), 13–50.

34. See Origins Canada [https://www.originscanada.org/adoption-trauma-2/trauma\\_to\\_surrendering\\_mothers/effects-of-adoption-on-mental-health-of-the-mother-what-professionals-knew-and-didnt-tell-us/](https://www.originscanada.org/adoption-trauma-2/trauma_to_surrendering_mothers/effects-of-adoption-on-mental-health-of-the-mother-what-professionals-knew-and-didnt-tell-us/)

35. <https://onefamily.ie/status-of-illegitimacy-was-abolished/>

36. Gordon Lynch, Redress.



The inventory of archival materials will be invaluable to future research, yet the privileging of *'official sources'* debatably gives weight to what has been preserved and less to the lived experiences of survivors.<sup>37</sup> This is why testimonies are so key and why the interpretation of societal and familial blame has become the key narrative of the report and not the experience of survivors and their families. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Confidential Committee was established to gather oral testimonies from survivors. It demonstrates extensive evidence of both emotional and physical abuse, but its report (based on 549 interviews) does not appear to have been relied upon by the Commissioners, who wrote in the Executive Summary for example that *'there is very little evidence of physical abuse'*.<sup>38</sup>

The following was possibly the most worrying aspect of the Commission's view of the testimonies (as cited in p. 12 of the Confidential Committee Report):

*'the Commission does have concerns about the contamination of some evidence. A number of witnesses gave evidence that was clearly incorrect. This contamination probably occurred because of meetings with other residents and inaccurate media coverage.'*

The Confidential Committee report was grouped into several themes including circumstances surrounding the pregnancy and admission, fostering or boarding-out, conditions in the institutions and the *'adoption experience'*. Each of these will be addressed in the following section.

As Ciara Breathnach has argued

*'written records of the powerful trump the spoken words of survivors. This is lip service to oral history, yet other forms of oral testimony, such as the institutions' reporting of uncertified deaths, are unchallenged.'*<sup>39</sup>

The terms of reference for the Confidential Committee stated it should

*'produce a report of a general nature on the experiences of the single women and children which the Commission may, to the extent it considers appropriate, rely upon to inform the investigations set out in Article 1'*

Three hundred and four of those who gave evidence to the Confidential Committee were mothers who had been in an institution, and 228 were adults who had been babies/infants/children when in the institution.

Seventeen were involved in other ways. The testimonies contain many accounts of abuse, rape and incest; lack of sex education; and a patriarchal and class-based system which provided few options to women, particularly those without sufficient means. What is clear reading the report is that the evidence delivered to the Committee *'did not inform'* the main body of the report in a manner that would and could have delivered a broader *'historical truth'*. Yes, there are references in individual chapters, but they are brief and inconsistent, and the language and terminology used by survivors – the language of trauma, abuse and denial of rights – is not repeated.

Those directly affected have also been involved in academic contributions and publications. For example, in a roundtable discussion in Boston College (in November 2018) at the international conference *Toward Transitional Justice: Recognition, Truth-Telling and Institutional Abuse in Ireland*, discussants Mary Harney, Mari Steed, Caitríona Palmer, Terri Harrison, Rosemary Adaser, Conrad Bryan, Susan Lohan and Connie Roberts spoke about their experiences of Ireland's institutional network and the importance of testimony, of inter-institutional connections, of access to records, and of how important process is.

37. See Crowe, C., 'The Commission and the survivors', Summer 2021, Dublin Review of Books.

38. Executive Summary, Final Report MBHCOI, p.

39. Breathnach, C., 'A Dark, Difficult, And Shameful Chapter', History Workshop, 21 Jan 2021.

They spoke of the diversity of those affected –

*‘how ‘we have different stories, different truths, but it all needs to be told’.*<sup>40</sup>

Discussions in memory studies, trauma studies and oral history have brought new conversations regarding trauma-informed research, collective memory and the ethical treatment of oral histories.

Testimony and oral history also have an important impact on practitioners today, as McGregor, Devaney and Moran have argued.<sup>41</sup> One of their studies concerns Irish children in long-term care. They interviewed children, young people, parents and foster carers for this study, with these testimonies asserting that power and power relations featured significantly. The findings in turn recognised the importance of using testimony research for the purpose of improving current child welfare services and similar policy.

## 2.5.4 Transitional justice

*All victims and survivors should be treated in a courteous, dignified, respectful, sensitive, tailored, professional and non-discriminatory way. They should be treated without discrimination of any kind based on any ground such as race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, disability, age, gender, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, residence status or health.*

In Éire-Ireland's 2020 Spring/Summer Special Edition, *Toward Transitional Justice in Ireland: Addressing Legacies of Harm*, guest editors Katherine O'Donnell, Maeve O'Rourke and Jim Smith argued

*‘state-led efforts to address this legacy of abuse have been inadequate, and as a result the harms experienced are not “historical” but continuing’ (p. 10).*

In the same volume, James Gallen argues that Ireland's approach to commissions of inquiry has been *‘bureaucratic’* and

*‘designed to retain state control of information, resources, and reputation across the areas of investigation, accountability, and redress’ (p. 67).*

40. ‘Testimony’, in *Redress*, p.14.

41. See McGregor, C., Devaney, C., Moran, L. (2021) ‘A Critical Overview of the Significance of Power and Power Relations in Practice with Children in Foster Care: Evidence from an Irish Study’ in *Child Care in Practice*, Vol.27, No.1, pp.4-18. See also Burke, H. ‘Foundation Stones of Irish Social Policy, 1831-1951’ in Gabriel Kiely (ed) *Irish Social Policy in Context*, pp.11-32.

In the recent volume *Redress*, a number of chapters deal particularly with the question of deficits in *'contemporary state practice'*. Historians, social scientists and human rights scholars have been and are a key part of what Katie Wright has coined the *'Age of Inquiry'* and the methodology they have employed has benefitted many reports.

However, as Johanna Skold (2015, p. 498) argues in relation to previous commissions of inquiry in Ireland, Denmark and Sweden,

*'lived childhood must be narrated through memory... and, more importantly, the memories of care-leavers and the archival records of the institutions or care providers seldom tell the same story'*.

This is why representation in terms of the personal narratives of those directly affected is critical. Methodologically, engagement with survivors' testimony, including from a transitional justice perspective, has reaffirmed *'survivors' truth'*. Archives – access to them, their contents, and how we interpret them – are critical to a 'truth telling' approach to historical abuse. While transitional justice approaches are not a panacea to achieve justice, they have proven the most successful approach in countries such as Canada and Australia and in circumstances of conflict and trauma in other contexts and geo-political circumstances.

### 2.5.5 Epistemic injustice

Justice as a concept is central to how national and international states have responded to institutional abuse. Drawing on Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice, we see two varieties that are relevant to the question of representation, testimony and language. Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice is a *'direct discrimination'* against those speaking or trying to speak when the words of others are privileged. This can be seen in the treatment of testimonies from those directly affected who went to the Confidential Committee of the MBHCOI. Their words were at times paraphrased through rewriting by those who listened, and in other instances, not referenced in the main body of the report. A future learning would certainly be to allow these testimonies to be heard if that is what those directly affected wish.

Fricker's second form of epistemic injustice, hermeneutical injustice, is perhaps more difficult to apply as scholars differ in their views as to how marginalised groups create their own spaces to express their experiences. However, looking at the Irish State, it has been uncooperative and paternalistic in the treatment of the lived experiences of those directly affected. As Mairead Enright and Sinéad Ring have examined, this is particularly the case when we look at shame and justice, not only in the case of the MBHCOI, but also in relation to the McAleese Report into Ireland's Magdalene asylums.

Yet examining shame and justice<sup>42</sup>... *'require the ashamed state... to denote a break in quite, the ashamed state... to engage to engage in a risky exposure to victim-survivors' testimony and to the possibility that doing so may transform the state and its law'*.

42. Enright and Ring (2020) *State Legal Responses to Historical Institutional Abuse: Shame, Sovereignty and Epistemic Injustice* p. 26

## 2.6 History of the present and historical justice

**This work was informed by a 'history of the present' approach. It addresses the following:**

1. Memories and experiences of past use of language and terminology and its impact;
2. Lived experience in the present where such language, and its representation, continues to offend and hurt people;
3. Expert views, based on experience, about what needs to change for the present and the future.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the impact of this is emphasised in an example where a person speaks about the term '*PFI*' (pregnant from Ireland) and heard it used in relation to herself for many years without ever being told, and thus not knowing, what it referred to. The history of the present also reminds us to avoid looking for simple, linear narratives – one story to cover everything. People's experiences have been varied and diverse, and within that, some positive aspects to the care and support provided in the past are recognised. But in recognising this diversity of experience, it also must be recognised that some discourses are in the majority and most powerful.

This requires critical and overt consideration of power and power relations.

For this project, it especially means an emphasis on:

- Exposing the power of stigmatising language as expressed by those in authority and in society.
- Considering gender and power relations and their impact on certain women and their children of the time.
- Critically exposing the connections between language and power.
- Demonstrating the power of testimony.
- Connecting the focus on historical methods regarding testimony and lived experience with present-day emphasis and expectations of operating from partnership and citizenship-oriented approaches.
- Acknowledging the power inequality in relation to academia where this report is authored and led by academic researchers. Further work such as this should not only be inclusive of people with direct experience but led by such experts.
- Acknowledging the power inequality in the Steering Group for this project. Representatives from the university and government department had access to significant institutional support when needed throughout the project whereas Collaborative Forum members, while having some support within this context, did not have similar powerful institutions behind them to support their participation.
- Recognising our responsibility to represent those affected and report their testimony accurately.

This emphasis also requires an underpinning commitment to historical justice. This includes recognition of the 'expertise by experience' of those directly affected and of the power imbalance regarding who has defined and reinforced language and terminology up to now. It includes a call for radical change now and into the future in how the experiences of those in institutions have been represented or misrepresented directly or indirectly through the words, language and terms used in relation to themselves, their families and/or their lived experience. It also comes from a position of privileging lived experience and respect for those who came forward to consult on behalf of themselves and others.

## 2.7 Language and terminology within the Final Report of the MBHCOI

The following section represents a content analysis of some key terms and language in the MBHCOI Final Report. These terms were chosen independently and were not guided by the consultation process, but they will be analysed in conjunction with the consultations in Chapter 5. First, it is worth noting the terms which the Commission did choose to differentiate.

The term *'illegitimate'* is used 230 times in the Social History section and almost 300 times elsewhere. It is one of the few terms that is contained in inverted commas to demonstrate that the Commission viewed it as being unacceptable. It is also used in the Dutch and Scottish reports, so this is not a uniquely Irish phenomenon, and it has until recently been used in most academic publications. Other terms that did receive more careful attention include *'legitimate'*, *'mentally defective'*, *'lunatics'* and *'mental hospitals'*, yet the word *'truth'* is mentioned only 13 times in the main body of the report and *'survivor'* only eight times, while the term *'no evidence'* is recorded 102 times. *'Victim'* is mentioned fewer than 20 times.

As discussed in Chapter 1, language is referred to directly in a small number of instances in the Final Report, but there is no methodological section on stigmatising or era-specific language. Under Chapter 9 on *'attitudes'* there are references to *'indirect language'*, *'the language used suggests a condescending sympathy'*, and critically, a discussion of the Kilkenny social work conference in 1970 which we believe is important due to its acknowledgement of the importance of *'non-discriminatory language'*:

*The agenda for the Kilkenny conference was largely based on the Council of Europe's resolution on Social Protection of Unmarried Mothers and their Children, which was published in May 1970. It set out a series of recommendations with respect to medical and social care, employment and housing facilities. Among other things, member states were asked to stimulate a greater comprehension in society of the problems faced by unmarried mothers and their children and to bring about 'the use of non-discriminatory terminology with regard to the mother and children in question'. The non-discriminatory language is evident in the title of the Kilkenny conference – 'unmarried parents'; however, the report of the conference proceedings used 'unmarried mother' in the title.*

In including this reference, the Commission demonstrated that as early as 1970, there were calls to deal with discriminatory language. It is therefore surprising that they chose to reuse stigmatising, contentious and labelling terms. While it is acknowledged that in many instances academics, the media and policymakers have similarly reused this language, given what is contained in the testimonies given to the Confidential Committee, the language of trauma and of truth should have had a greater place. It is certainly a learning for future work, for those with the authority to create such reports, to engage in a reflective process led by those directly affected.

The following section will deal with a small number of terms that the research group felt warranted specific investigation, and learnings that can be made.

## 2.7.1 Home

The first term chosen was ‘home’ or ‘homes’, a term which many survivors/victims/advocates or people directly affected have highlighted as being traumatising and inappropriate due to their lived experiences in the institutions. The terms are recorded 8,974 times in the entire report. Many instances list or name individual institutions, while others refer to family situations. The term ‘institution’ was regularly used also, being listed 1,006 times, but home was the dominant choice. The term ‘resident’ has also received criticism from groups – being recorded in both noun and verb form, for example, ‘the Pelletstown residents’/‘children resident there’ appear 410 times.

The main use of the term is in the sections on individual institutions. There are also 32 uses of ‘*residential*’ with the context generally referring to a move in the 1970s and 1980s away from larger institutions and particularly industrial schools. The Confidential Committee referred to all those who came to them as ‘*former residents*’, whether women or former children, regardless of the form of address they used for themselves in their testimony. Learning to be taken from international contexts could be to substitute ‘*institution*’ for ‘*home*’, but also to ensure that appropriate and acceptable terms are used, and individuals directly affected are respected.

## 2.7.2 Mother

The term ‘mother’ appears 4,608 times in the report – often referring to individual institutions or ‘Mother and Baby Homes’. ‘Birth mother’ is mentioned under 100 times in the Final Report, primarily in the section on social history and chapters on individual institutions, as well as in the chapter on adoption. ‘Natural mother’ is used four times – in quotes on the Catholic Church’s position on adoption, and in one individual quote from a person involved in an adoption, and there are 105 mentions of adoptive mother/mothers. In the recent legislation on information and tracing, it was decided that the term ‘mother’ would be used to represent all. This was arguably an important decision, given the contentious nature of the other terms developed and adopted since the 1950s (‘birth mother’, ‘natural mother’, ‘first mother’). While the literature is contentious, there is substantial literature to suggest that mother is a more inclusive option.

The term ‘*father*’ is listed 908 times in the document, and ‘*birth father*’ is used 17 times. ‘*Adoptive father*’ is used 15 times, but ‘*natural father*’ is not. As previously discussed, the term ‘*unmarried mother*’ has been the norm in academic and other publications and is used almost 200 times in the Final Report of the MBHCOI. One learning from this project is that this term is no longer used, as the attachment of motherhood to marriage is no longer appropriate or acceptable and in so many respects never was.

## 2.7.3 Adoption

Adoption and the question of illegal adoptions or forced adoptions has certainly been one of the most controversial aspects of the Commission's report.<sup>43</sup> Reading the Confidential Committee report, some of the rephrasing showed a lack of understanding around the potency of terms – particularly the use of *'gave up for adoption'*. The only section in the report relating directly to language is under the section on adoption.

### 2.7.3.1 The language of adoption

*Some former residents and lobby groups have suggested that 'adoption' should be renamed 'forced adoption'. The Commission does not agree. The Commission found very little evidence that children were forcibly taken from their mothers; it accepts that the mothers did not have much choice but that is not the same as 'forced' adoption. Mothers did have time after the initial placement for adoption to reassess the situation.*

*The Commission has not come across the sort of practices in relation to adoption that were outlined in the Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices 2012. The principle [sic] reason why adoption became so popular after it was formally introduced in 1953 was lack of family and community support for mothers who wished to keep their child. Its availability also meant that women did not have to stay as long in the institutions (MBHCOI, p. 9-10).*

In the human rights chapter, there are 14 references to *'adoption'* relating to legislation protecting identity and ensuring rights to identity.

The following terms were examined in the content analysis of the final report – *'adoption', 'adoption placement', 'placed for adoption', 'abandoned', 'given up for adoption', 'deserted and abandoned', 'put up for adoption', 'holding for adoption'*.

There are 2,414 references to these terms in total, but certainly the most problematic and traumatic in relation to stigmatising language refer to mother – specifically the terms birth mother, natural mother and adoptive mother.

43. See work by Conall Ó Fátharta <https://conallofatharta.wordpress.com>

## 2.7.4 Race and disability

The analysis showed that evidence of ill-treatment on racial grounds deserved more expert handling in the report. The racism experienced by ‘mixed-race Irish’ and Mincéir/ Irish Traveller mothers and former children is compressed into a simplistic narrative that all ‘unmarried mothers’ and their children experienced discrimination, and that there was at most some ‘casual, unthinking racism’. This is in contrast with much evidence to the Confidential Committee: for example, a ‘mixed-race’ woman’s son was taken from her in 1983 and put in ‘an annex’ of a home set aside for children with ‘abnormalities where a nun called him ‘filthy’ and ‘Little Black Man’.

Previous reports have also highlighted the use of derogatory language. In the Collaborative Forum report for example, a mixed-race child is quoted –

*“I thought ‘Nigger’ and ‘Bastard’ were my names they were shouted at me so often” (2018, published in 2022, 106).*

Greater attention should have been given to race and ethnicity. It is almost as if the Commission report and the literature are unaware that Ireland had an indigenous group (Mincéir/Irish Traveller) or a diversity of individuals with different racial heritage. Much more research and scholarship need to be devoted to this topic – but first those with lived experience need to be consulted more extensively.

Discrimination against children with disabilities is quietly ignored as the report states that no advocacy group came forward; however, key studies on the history of disability were not consulted. Similarly, the extensive abuse recounted in the Ryan Report and scholarship since then was not given adequate treatment.

The treatment of disability and lack of engagement with disability studies is apparent in the report and in the language used. Individuals designated as

*‘having a disability’ are separated into three groupings: ‘intellectual disability’, ‘people with mental illness’ and ‘physical disability’.*

The terminologies applied to the institutions they were placed in receive no clarification or discussion of historical or contemporary language. It is a large gap in the report and one that must be addressed in subsequent literature.



## 2.8 Summary

Language and terminology were not addressed specifically by the Commission.

While a small number of terms are addressed more sensitively (in this instance using inverted commas to mark them out), there is no note on language or discussion of stigmatising language.

The language and terminology used in the report is historical and for the most part not cognisant of contemporary developments.

The representation and testimony of individuals in the Confidential Committee report is not reflected in the Executive Summary or conclusions drawn by the Commission. It did not influence the language and terminology in the main report – particularly regarding the language of trauma, truth, abuse and lived experience.

In Ireland, the Collaborative Forum completed its report before the Commission (Dec 2018) and had one specific subgroup focused on Identity/Information, Terminology and Representation though this report was not published until Nov 2022. Internationally, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission represents an example of survivor/victim-centred language, as well as a transitional justice approach.

One learning from this analysis is that the term '*unmarried mother*' is no longer used, as the attachment of motherhood to marriage is no longer the norm in international literature. As with the recent legislation on information and tracing, it is recommended the term '*mother*' be used instead of '*birth mother*' or '*natural mother*', reflecting on the experiences of all involved. Language surrounding disability, race and ethnicity deserved a much fuller treatment in the report and consultation with scholarly work in these fields.

# 03

Experiences *and* Views of People  
*with* Direct Lived Experience

“

Words are like weapons, and  
it is very hard to shake off the  
nasty things being said to you

”

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the participant perspective on language and terminology relating to mothers and children (Section 3.5), places and processes (Section 3.6), use of the terms survivor and/or victim, (Section 3.7), and language, terminology, and representation by those with power to influence (Section 3.8). It also provides a profile of participants involved in the research (Section 3.3). The chapter starts with a word on the research process itself (Section 3.2) and discusses the importance of language in Section 3.4.

## 3.2 Preface

*There should be compassion shown going on in terminology and in the reports themselves. This is what was said, and this happened and what shouldn't have been said. What should have been said probably is this is an awful thing that has happened, I hope you will be able to put it behind you, you will never forget, but maybe you will learn to live with it*

The aim of this research approach is to learn from people with direct experience and expertise to challenge and expose the impact of disrespectful, stigmatising and offensive use of language and promote more respectful use of language and terminology. We have paid careful attention in this report to our own use of respectful language and representation. However, we are aware that given the sensitivity of many matters discussed, and the variety of perspectives and experiences, some readers may still disagree with some words and terms used.

We intend no offence in anything that follows and will remain committed following the publication of the report to ongoing dialogue and learning to continue to address this important issue.

As academics, we also commit to taking greater care in our own writing, and raising awareness with other writers, about the way terminology of the past is presented and used in the present. We are very aware that reading this report, or aspects of it, is likely to cause distress for some people with direct experience of institutions similar to that discussed here. We ask readers to exercise care and empathy in their reading of this chapter especially and to commit to a respect for the truth shared by our participants. While we expect some people to find the content upsetting, and some to wish to deny or challenge it, we emphasise the urgent need for all of us in Irish society, especially those in positions of power through their roles in government, the Church and social professions/organisations, to face up to and actively seek to respond to the learning from this report in a way that works toward much-needed historical justice.

The purpose of the consultations was to learn from experts by experience about language, terminology and representation. As discussed in the acknowledgements, we want to sincerely thank all who consulted with us for their time, not just at the consultations themselves but in the preparation and discussion before and the follow-up afterwards. To aid our learning to inform this report, the people we consulted with often shared very intimate information about themselves, their experiences and their families. In so doing, they provided us with in-depth insight into and understanding of the complex interplay of language, terminology and representation as reflected in this report. We acknowledge the participants' openness in sharing their stories and want to assure them that these stories have all been taken into account in a very in-depth way to inform this report.

This chapter was challenging to write as each consultation provided an account of lived experience worthy of detailed reporting in its own right. However, it was beyond the purpose of this report to report such lived experiences in detail. Because our main task is to summarise, from listening to and analysing direct experiences and stories, the main learning to inform the work, the emphasis in these findings is specifically on words: language, terminology and representation. We also had many findings from the consultations, literature review and analysis that are outside the scope of the issues of language, terminology and representation specifically, and it is beyond the scope of this report to address these issues except by way of summary in Chapter 5. Where reference is made to specific experiences to give context and depth of meaning, information, including names and places, is protected for confidentiality reasons.

The main reason people consulted with us was to help to inform understanding and improve the use of language and terminology. There is no doubt from our perspective about the truth of the experiences and expertise shared from the perspectives of those we consulted with. As participants acknowledged, on many issues there are diverse and sometimes competing viewpoints that need to be respected. For readers who have direct experience through their own or their family's life histories, we want to say from the outset of this chapter that we have endeavoured to report the truths we heard as accurately as possible with the intention of not doing further harm or causing upset. However, we are aware that given the level of offence some words and terminology have caused, we cannot prevent this. We have sought to follow the approach described by some of our participants discussing the impact of language and terminology from previous or current reports:

*So, the main thing is that when we are describing any of these places or any of these events that we turn around and we stop, and we think what does this sound like to the average person? How does this make somebody feel? No matter what you do you can't get over what happened to you in life, and everybody has things that happen, as I said to you. But you can be careful with the way you label things that are going into reports*

We ask that those reading this report be mindful of its impact, empathic to those directly affected, and appreciative of the diversity of viewpoints reflected. We also ask readers who may be or have been in government present or past, or who are members of a relevant powerful group such as the Church, media or professions, to avoid a defensive stance if criticisms are directed in a way you may not agree with or wish to acknowledge. There is a great need expressed for those with most power, such as government, church, media, academics and professionals, to take particular note of the findings. We consider ourselves part of the community who need to learn from this study and review and revise our own use of language in the past (e.g., in academic publications) as well as how we use language in the present and future.

All of us as members of Irish society need to engage with these lived experiences in a way that does not deny or minimise. Changing how we use language and terminology and radically reviewing how past experiences have so often been misrepresented will not in itself achieve the justice so many people still need regarding their experiences in institutions run by state and church, together or in parallel. However, such change represents one of many steps needed to achieve historical justice.

A sense of being a second-class citizen was frequently raised in discussions relating to mothers and children, and the need to reframe our language and references to the word's citizen and citizenship in line with a historical justice approach recommended. As one person noted:

*It is a very simple word but... the word citizen just isn't there and to me that would cut through an awful lot because then that sort of makes you real in the eyes of a lot of different departments...this idea of being a full, normal, everyday citizen like everyone else*

To conclude this section, the words of one participant capture the importance of this work as she describes her own and her mother's experience:

*And I know it is not about putting anything right because it can't be put right and there can't be justice for that either, but when there are still ongoing harms, that is the real issue, the harm needs to stop, and I don't think it has*

### 3.3 Participants

A total of 26 one-to-one interviews and one group interview with eight participants were conducted. Nine written submissions were also included for analysis. Participants included women who had direct experiences of institutions and their children, and adults who had been adopted as babies or children.

Overall, the participants had significant expertise from their own direct experience and their life histories. All of them were experts by experience. Some people had been actively engaged in sharing their stories to help inform policies and/or help others who have been directly affected by the institutions for many years. Some people were active in current and past policy developments, engagement with government departments and committees, and involvement in advocacy and support groups. Some were experts themselves in areas such as language and terminology, history, political involvement, university lecturing and media, and some were self-educated.

*I have never spoken to people about what happened to me because there is a judgement around it, it makes you different from anyone else and it makes you be seen as different*

For others engagement has been more recent, in light of greater publicity relating to the Mother and Baby Home Commission, which led to them reflecting on, talking about and/or telling others including their own families about their experiences.

Some people consulted about their own experiences while others participated on behalf of others also such as their parents or their children. Some people spoke about having come through their experience and seeing it as part of their past, while for others it was very much their present. For some, it was their first time speaking about their experiences.

### 3.4 The importance of language and terminology

All participants emphasised the importance of language, terminology and representation and discussed how impactful it can be and has been in their lives. All were keen to share their views with the research team and had prepared for the interview in advance. Several shared their views on the importance of language, terminology and representation. They noted how language is important and can be so impactful with or without intent on behalf of the person speaking:

*Sometimes it is more so the throw-away remarks that people say as a passing something rather than having a conversation or discussion or debate... not always meant in any way as being negative, 99% of people who said it didn't say it in any particular derogatory terminology or inference, but it just came across*

Relating to representation participants also made the point that words themselves do not necessarily create meaning or impact; rather it is the broader context in which they are delivered and how they are delivered that can make an impression or attach significance.

Another participant described how words can be powerful and impactful, and how this impact can be long-lasting:

A number of participants discussed how language and the use of language changes over time, providing examples of terms and words that were once used freely but are no longer used in today's society:

*Language doesn't bother me, it's the context, delivery and person who conveys it that make it a positive or negative experience*

*Words are like weapons, and it is very hard to shake off the nasty things being said to you*

*I mean years ago it was said to you, you have made your bed, go lie in it. Whether you were a victim of rape, whether you were a victim of incest, you were still told you have made your bed, go lie in it. There is a lot of people out there that are struggling from things that happened to them and words that were said to them years ago*

*Language is constantly transitioning so the fact that we are using mixed-race to describe someone like me now, younger generations, they might prefer different terms in the future and whatever. So, as I say language is always in transition and as I said the main thing is we don't lose the language we used in the past*

*Looking at how the world has changed and how accepting it is, you know, not to be called illegitimate or an unmarried mother and that sort of thing is tremendous. And hopefully it will be always that respect for women and that women will be acknowledged in the role of mothering... the role is so important*

However, accepting this point that language is of its time, several participants also highlighted the importance of not forgetting or whitewashing the language used in the past:

*I think that we have to be aware of history and how language was used. So, when I see things like coloured and illegitimate and things like that, all things that relate to me, they are words, they are of their time. I understand that people will be offended by certain words, people want to change language now and stuff like that but at the same time not to move away from how people like me, people from the Traveller community, women generally at that time, etc. how everybody was referred to. That we don't lose that language and we don't lose that history*

While there was a welcome for the many positive changes in terms of the language used in today's society, the importance of remembering that those with past experiences still carry the negative effects was emphasised:

*Like I can see how well we have moved forward and how the help that single girls get now and there is no shame in it now. I think isn't that wonderful. And yet I still feel the shame, but they don't, and they can walk, and they can say this is my baby*

Aligned with this the importance of education and creation of awareness for younger people and future generations was discussed:

*And for the language of the past to be forgotten. I want future generations when I am long gone to know how we were referred to and to know how that felt. And even though at the time it might have been okay to call me coloured, now when I look back, I think, really, is that the best you could do?*

The descriptive nature of language was also discussed as very important by a number of participants highlighting how rich expressive language and terms are required to ensure that full and accurate accounts of participants' experiences were explained and recorded:

*Language is not used necessarily to offend but to explain what happened to you specifically as a way of graphically describing what happened to me so as to distinguish it from something else*

In this instance, the participant emphasised the need to use the word rape to explain what happened to them as opposed to using a more general term such as abuse to describe the attack on them. To use the specific word rape was emphasised as important, as it was an accurate description and record of what had happened.



However, participants also emphasised the difficulties associated with the use of such descriptive and loaded language and terminology:

*I had an internal struggle with myself to use the word that I was raped rather than abused, as distinguished from say a slap on the head or pulling my hair or kick me in the ass, in that sense. Because what happened to me was something more than that*

Reflecting on use of language in the present, participants provided many examples of interactions with officials in various settings who did not appear to have an awareness of the importance of language or indeed have the correct language for use when referring to specific issues associated with their experiences. Examples of the use of inappropriate or inaccurate language were provided in relation to medical histories; adoption papers; and applications for birth certificates, marriage certificates, passports, etc.

## 3.5 Language and terminology relating to ‘mothers’ and ‘children’

‘Mother’ was the word discussed most often in the consultations, with the majority of respondents providing perspectives on the word ‘mother’ and related terms. Within this, the most common starting point was the term ‘birth mother’, but as discussed in detail below, there were mixed views about its use and its connection to a number of associated terms including ‘adoptive mother’. Language in relation to ‘children’ most frequently discussed by participants related to the use of terms such as ‘illegitimate’ and ‘bastard’.

Other terms including ‘adoptee/adopted’, ‘baby’ and ‘*unaccompanied child*’ are also discussed with regularity by participants. Participants were unanimous that the terms ‘*illegitimate*’, ‘*bastard*’ and ‘*unmarried mother*’ had negative associations and were inappropriate at all times and in all contexts. For most other terms, however, there was a more mixed response and a range of suggestions about the impact of their use and how terminology could be improved in the present day; this is detailed later and informs Chapter 4.

At an overall level the majority of participants emphasised an individual’s right to make their own choice about language and terms when talking about or describing their own experiences. They highlighted each person’s right regarding their own identity and identification. As noted earlier many people referred to the significance of the context within which language and terms are used and how this can impact on the perceived or intended meaning.

### 3.5.1 Mother

The majority of people discussed the word ‘mother’ and associated words. Motherhood in the context of lived experience of institutions is complex and contested. The word ‘mother’ is complex and sometimes contentious. Many opinions were expressed, and a wide range of words were used in relation to ‘mother’ showing a depth of concern about use of this and related terminology.

This is particularly the case in relation to the term ‘*birth mother*’, as discussed below. Within the discussion, words including ‘*adoptive mother*’, ‘*unmarried mother*’, ‘*expectant mother*’ and ‘*natural mother*’ are also discussed. The term ‘*birth father*’ is also noted by its absence rather than its presence. As reflected below, these perspectives were diverse, and the words were often inter-related.

This diversity of perspective was sometimes because of the person's own position (e.g., as a mother or a person who was adopted, institutionalised or boarded out) but more often based on individual lived experience.

Several participants discussed the experience of becoming and being a mother and how they were treated at this time, and the impact of being denied their motherhood. All the experiences reported were negative with a range of reasons attributed to this. Largely this was seen to be a result of their single status and the judgement associated with this. Participants highlighted the level of stigma and shame associated with their pregnancy:

Participants also highlighted the lack of choice afforded to pregnant mothers at this time and how they had no say in terms of what happened to them or their babies:

*But you see they didn't see us as real humans, they didn't see us as expectant mums... we just weren't seen. We were never described as real people. We were just clustered together and were known just as either unmarried mothers or birth mothers*

*Yes, we were deemed to be dirty, worthless and we carried the shame, we felt it, the shame was terrible. And all we wanted to do was hide, hide somewhere I still feel awful shame. I know I shouldn't feel the shame but because of how people made me feel, and even when I would go back to my hometown, I would always feel that there is somebody there that would judge me for what happened. Even to this day I still feel that. And that is how words and how people make you feel*

*My mother is still alive, she is 102, and at this point in time she breaks down crying still..., she would say, do you remember that horrible place? And you were made feel you were dirt, you and your dirt. And that is what made her feel the shame for all those years*

*I was an 18-year-old... innocent, frightened, terrified. They had full control. I always say I lost me when they abducted me from England and put me on a plane and I was received in... I describe it now as landing in the bowels of hell. And that is when I became invisible. Many of us became invisible. But nobody came to check upon us or nobody cared enough to see what was happening to us and our babies and the children*

*When I was in the home for unmarried mothers, before I had my baby, the nun in charge asked me to call to her office and she said, what do you intend to do with your baby? I said, I am keeping the baby. And she said, would it not be better for you to give the baby up for adoption? And I said, no I am keeping the baby. And she said, you are a very, very selfish girl. So that always stayed with me, I was selfish for wanting to keep the baby... Imagine being called selfish because you wanted to keep your own baby, shocking*

Being denied their motherhood was discussed by several participants who had had this experience:

*The fact that I was denied my motherhood and denied the right, deemed unfit by my society to mother my own son does not give you the right to ever think I am anything less than his mother. You never hear sentences in anything expecting mums, new mums, mummies or individual Irish citizens because long before we became new mums, we were still humans (P5)*

*I thought I am his mother, you know, I may not have parented him, you are the people that he knows and depends on, and I understand all that, but I am his mother, and I will always be his mother. I will be his mother until the day I die*

Many participants noted the inappropriateness of the use of the term '*unmarried mother*' and welcomed the fact that it is no longer in mainstream use:

*There should be no differential, whether they were an unmarried mother which to me is just, unmarried, what does that mean? You know what I mean. I am not married but I am single, I don't have to be married to have a child, I could be single. So why would you say I am unmarried and put a tag? Tags shouldn't be used unless they are important*

The related terminology '*single mother*' was also discussed with reference to the stigma that was associated with receiving what was referred to as the '*single mother's allowance*'. From the perspective of a person who was adopted as a child, this terminology was belittling.

While acknowledging it was better than unmarried mother, they described the feelings of inferiority associated with it:

*I particularly found that single mother phrase particularly challenging and kind of understanding and it is a phrase I never use... I know it is probably less offensive in some ways today, but it is a phrase that is still quite pejorative in a sense in terms of what people are trying to say. It is one that I particularly notice when I hear it*

Keeping within the context of use of the term '*unmarried mother*', the connected term '*fallen women*' was also highlighted, with the long-lasting negative connotations associated with the term emphasised:

*And the way people spoke a long time ago about unmarried mothers and this thing where it said they were fallen women, as if they had done something terribly wrong. Even though they had done nothing wrong, or it wasn't their fault, they were just part of what happened*

*But it was the use of language was the big thing when my mother would repeat back, she was a fallen woman, she was told during her labour you have to pay for your sins, we don't want to give you pain relief. Sinful, shame, it was just... Yeah, she breaks down crying all the time*

The persistence of negative attitudes over time was also highlighted by a person who had her baby in the late 1970s when the ‘*unmarried mother’s allowance*’ was available, noting that even though the term ‘*lone parent*’ is used today, the negative terminology ‘*unmarried mother*’ persisted.

In this instance, reference (by a work colleague) to mothers as ‘*scroungers*’, was experienced just 10–15 years ago:

*Those unmarried mothers are scroungers, he said. And I said..., I used to be an unmarried mother and I had the allowance. So, he just kept quiet then, he didn’t say anymore. But it is upsetting*

However, instances were referred to where the term is still in use, in particular in government reports:

*And then finally somebody burst into the room and all these copies of this report was put down all along the table, great excitement in the air, this is a brilliant report. And as I pulled it towards me, I looked at the big headlines of the report, and I pushed it away. And I said, how sad is it that they even haven’t got the decency to call us a mother. No, it was unmarried mothers. Again, what has marriage got to do with motherhood? Nothing... So, I was saddened at the language throughout that report, that they couldn’t even get it right. And they saw no harm in it*

A number of other words were used related to the term ‘*unmarried mother*’ including ‘*sinner*’, ‘*spinster*’ and ‘*out of wedlock*’. Participants highlighted their dissatisfaction with these terms. Other offensive terms were described including ‘*slut*’, ‘*prostitute*’, ‘*English pig*’ and ‘*immoral*’.

### 3.5.2 Birth mother

The specific term ‘birth mother’ was discussed by the majority of participants, with strong and diverging views expressed on its use. Several people discussed how they disagreed with the term ‘birth mother’ and found it offensive. Many and varied reasons were associated with this view; some participants felt it denigrated the role of the mother who had given birth, others felt it was insulting to adoptive mothers. Others agreed with its use and thought it accurately described the circumstances of the child’s birth.

Given the depth and breadth of views on this term in particular, a number of quotes are included to illustrate the wide-ranging viewpoints:

*I don’t like the term birth mother as it implies your only value, and your only use was during the birth. It is an offensive term, and it holds women back. It is like it surrounds them in a cloak, of, I don’t know, you are this awful person who has done this awful thing... the term birth mother... completely annihilates you and destroys you, erases you from your child’s life*

Others favoured the use of the word *'mother'* as a stand-alone term and felt this was adequate and appropriate to describe their role:

*I am neither a birth mother nor a natural mother,  
I just a mother, the same I am for my other girl...  
I just know mother is mother, and that is it  
No need for birth or first mother.  
Mother is more than adequate*

Participants also noted the impact of the terms in their descriptions of their child(ren) and role as a mother, describing the term *'birth mother'* as hurtful, insulting and inaccurate:

*I call him my son. I don't call him my birth son because he has always existed even though it has been very difficult. He has existed but it was like I wasn't allowed to parent him, but I am his mother. I wasn't permitted to, I was just permitted to give birth to him, and again, that is why I think that birth mother thing upsets me so much  
It reduces the connection with our children to the few hours of their birth. And those hours are the least questioned about when we reunite with our children!  
The term 'Biological Mother' is even worse – our children were not conceived in Petri dishes in hospital laboratories*

Others did not find the word *'birth mother'* particularly offensive but thought it negates the significance of the permanent biological connection associated with motherhood and introduces challenges, distinctions, and hierarchies.

Making connections with the use of term *'adoptive mother'*, the absence of acknowledgement and discussion about *'birth mother'* was highlighted, bringing in another related term: *'real mother'*:

*And then everyone skirting around the issue and not talking about it and completely pretending this other person who is the real mother doesn't exist, we just don't talk about them*

Others described how the term *'birth mother'* distanced the mother for the benefit of the *'adoptive mother'*:

*You cannot have two mothers so therefore you had to distance the mother so that the adoptive mother would only be addressed as the mother*

While it was very clear that for many the term *'birth mother'* is oppressive and objectionable others were supportive of the use of the term for different reasons. The need and right to use the term *'birth mother'* was expressed as follows with an emphasis on recognition of *'birth mother'*:

*And I know, I have been listening about how people are saying about birth mother and mother. I think that is... a nice way of putting it, because I feel the mother who gave birth should always be known as the birth mother. But of course, the mother who reared the little baby, she has done something very special by rearing and it is lovely to know her as the mother as well as the father*

*The birth mother is the mother that carries that baby, that is how I feel anyway, and I think taking that identity away to suit the narrative of a lot of other women that don't want to have them down as birth mothers, because they are, they gave birth to these little babies*

*...I feel that mothers should be more acknowledged that they are the birth mothers that gave birth to these babies. Some mothers gave their babies up by choice, others didn't have that choice*

The decision not to use '*birth mother*' in the recently passed legislation was also discussed. Participants felt that both birth mothers and the term '*birth mother*' are being removed:

*...birth mother has now been erased from any narrative. And yet I know personally there are mothers who regard themselves as a birth mother and actually take comfort in knowing that they gave birth to a child who was able to bring joy to another family. So, I think that we have to allow for women and for those affected to use the terms that they wish to use rather than completely denouncing or saying that doesn't apply to me*

As already mentioned, for some, '*natural mother*' was a term of choice instead of '*birth mother*', though they also acknowledged the different views in relation to this:

*I mean I don't see anything wrong with natural mother... I know social work decided they don't like that term as if adoptive parents are not natural but actually, they are not really a natural thing*

*I would prefer to be called a natural mother or first mother, yeah, those are the alternatives I would use my feeling is that you are not treated the same way as if you were a natural mother. You have no right to speak to them on their birthday or on Christmas*

But for others, for example this mother whose child was adopted, use of this term somehow denoted the adoptive mother as '*unnatural*':

*If I am a natural mother, the woman who was privileged to get my son, was she an unnatural mother*

Others were supportive of the term to differentiate motherhood from adoptive motherhood specifically:

The overall challenges involved in deciding on an appropriate term and the use of any or all of these terms were described by many participants highlighting the complexity and depth of feelings involved. A number of direct quotes are included to illustrate these divergent and strongly held viewpoints:

*When I am talking about my mother, seeing that I have two, I feel it is necessary to differentiate. I have an adoptive mother and I have a birth mother. And in some cases, because of the way that the system is, there are many mothers. So, there would have been foster mothers, there would have been adoption mothers, there would have been birth mothers, they would have been stepmothers. So, we have to differentiate*

*I never use first mother because I think first mother insinuates primacy or dominant mother. I don't have a dominant mother. So, I only use natural, birth, bio. As a child, I used the word real, real mother was my birth mother. But again, that insinuates that my adoptive mother wasn't real. There is context complexity within the whole lot but basically, I would use birth mother, bio mother, natural mother. And when I am in a bad mood and I want to call her my incubator, I will because that is basically what she did*

*For the first six months of my life nobody kissed me good night, nobody held me with love, nobody rocked me to sleep, nobody loved me, nobody. And that is the truth, nobody loved me. I might have had a birth mother who gave birth to me and would have had her own kind of love for me, I don't doubt that at all. But once I was handed over to the state, that was the end of that and really, she handed me over to complete... strangers with no real forethought... as to what would become of me*

*I understand that they are carrying the pain but really that is something that almost at that moment of handover that they abdicated their right to choose the language that we should refer to ourselves as. That maybe sounds quite callous, it is not meant to, I wholly understand that many of the women, an overwhelming majority of these women, were victims of the state, of the Church, of collusion, of all sorts of horrible things that existed in Ireland, and I don't mean in any way to demean them. But equally I don't want them to demean my reading of my world and my reading of my world is that I have one mother and I have this other family who are relatives who would show up on a DNA chart*

Others highlighted and reinforced the importance of respecting diverse perspectives based on individual experiences reminding us again that we cannot generalise or make assumptions about anyone's experience:

*While many happy adoptees are glad to call their adoptee mother, 'mother': many who were subjected to abuse by adoptive parents would be horrified at such a term. This is a contentious term that needs to be left up to the individual to address how they would like it to be used in their own case*

Given that many of the themes are integrated, discussions about terminology and representation relating to mothers are continued throughout the chapter. Finally, for now, two words noted for their lack of use are discussed: '*expectant mother*' and '*birth father*'. The absence of use the term '*birth father*' was highlighted in some discussions with participants discussing the issue of how fathers were represented.

The lack of harsh treatment, compared to the mothers was highlighted:

*I do think it is very, very important for the men to be included and to be given a term, you know, because it is all women who have taken the hit  
There were no words for the male equivalent of any of this, I always found that irksome as well*

The need to take consideration of the diversity of views and experiences of fathers was also discussed, with a small number of participants describing a positive experience with their babies' fathers:

*So, I think a lot of the language is very interesting and when you are talking about the fathers, we never say birth father, I have never heard that term being used, not that I can recall anyway. We will say the birth mother and the father. And I think that actually for many men probably does a disservice to them as well because I think many of the men, while many of them would have been feckless individuals, a lot of them probably were men who also were victims of circumstance*

*He was excluded and he fought to actually find where I was because my mother wouldn't tell him where I was, the guards at the time wouldn't tell him where I was, so he actually fought to find where I was. Because we couldn't live together until I was 18, because that was one of the court orders... he used to come up every day of the week to see me. Now in saying that there was one nun there that was actually lovely, and she got so fed up of him ringing the bell one day she actually said to him, would you ever go in, you know where she is*



### 3.5.3 Child/Children

The majority of people also discussed the terms ‘child’, ‘children’ and related terms. Many and varied opinions were expressed on these related terms again showing the depth and breadth of perspective and feeling in relation to these often-contentious terms.

With reference to child/children, the following words were discussed: ‘*illegitimate child/illegitimacy*’, ‘*bastard*’, ‘*adoptive child/adoptee*’, ‘*baby*’, ‘*unaccompanied child*’. Several people talked about the terms ‘*illegitimate child*’, ‘*illegitimate*’ and ‘*illegitimacy*’.

Even though the word ‘*illegitimate*’ was abolished under the Status of Children Act 1987, the word continues to have impact and effect as shown in the findings below and expressed here:

*I hate illegitimate. Because you hear the word illegitimate and to me that feels like not worthy, has no substance... And you saw on the original report, there was an article that said illegitimate children lessen the morals in society so therefore they must be illegally adopted*

For example, participants noted that while technically the term was gone there was a sense that it was still present and often connected to the offensive term ‘*bastard*’.

*The other one was illegitimate... it is still there, and it is still used... but in reality it should never be there because a child born, whether they are born to a single parent or to a couple, has a mother and a father, they may not always be together or whatever, but they are not illegitimate. They actually have parents*

Participants also noted that ‘*illegitimate*’ is currently used on official documentation people receive from Tusla – Child and Family Agency on adoption information, with ‘status’ recorded as ‘*illegitimate*’:

*When I read through the little form then which I did get from Tusla which was very disappointing, there wasn't a huge amount of information on it, but the big thing that really hit me when status, it said legitimate or illegitimate. So straight away illegitimate is on my details. So again, when I started to think about it I was saying how horrible to be carrying, when I have to show any forms or anything this comes up, illegitimate*

While ‘*illegitimate*’ and ‘*bastard*’ were often referred to together, overall, people referred to the extreme offensiveness of the word ‘*bastard*’ even more so than ‘*illegitimate*’, highlighting how derogatory, mean, aggressive and hurtful this word was and still is:

*Sometimes you would rather a slap in the face than to be called a bastard... I suppose that particular word would have been said to me on many occasions because my mother was unmarried and as I grew up, I didn't know what that word meant but when I did find out what it meant it was a very hurtful word*

Others also discussed the connection and associations between the two offensive terms and described their use as interchangeable:

*I supposed the very notion of illegitimate children and the term bastard, they were all common at the time*

*Well one word I am really glad isn't being used any more is illegitimate. So, when I was growing up I went to..., and my sister reminded me of a time when I came home from school, and someone had written bastard on the front of my copybook. And I naively didn't understand what it meant, as in the traditional meaning of the term, I genuinely didn't know what it meant*

Many other experiences of being described as a '*bastard*' were shared, with participants recounting instances where they were referred to using this term and also made to feel different by peers, classmates and teachers:

*This was the first time that I had ever heard the word said to me when he [the teacher] asked, 'does that mean that you are a bastard because you are illegitimate?' I can literally remember exactly where I was standing when he said it, I can remember exactly, and I didn't know what illegitimate meant either*

*Everybody pointed the finger, teachers, nuns, priests, the whole lot of them... they made you feel different and like as if there was something the matter with you in comparison*

Linked to this, people who had been adopted discussed feeling different and/or being made to feel different from others in their family, school and neighbourhood:

*In school we would have been called bastard and you would have been thought of as less because you were adopted*

*I remember the family across the road, they all knew I was adopted because my mother had told Mrs... who had told the family. And whenever I was arguing with..., who was my best friend, he would say, you are adopted anyway. It was always seen as the default insult*

*It was all about kind of, equality is probably too strong a phrase, but it is creating differences where no differences really should exist. It doesn't really matter to any extent where we come from, our background, it is more about the individual, who you are today, your principles and values*

Moving onto terminology relating to children who were involved in adoption (discussed in greater detail in Section 3.6) people discussed references they had heard during their childhood to being an *'adopted child'* or *'adoptee'*.

Participants also expressed their frustration that they continue to be referred to as adopted children or adoptees although they are now adults:

*The media or our political representatives referred to us as adopted children or the adopted child. It is used again and again, and it is my bugbear, that, and tracking down. Because I am no more a child than the next person who is over the age of 18 and yet I am interminably referred to as a child. I am under the Department of Children, and the Minister I am under is the Minister for Children*

There were mixed views on the use of the term *'adoptee'*. For some this was acceptable as it accurately described their status. However, for others, there was a more negative association or secretiveness aligned with the words 'adopted' or *'adoptee'*. These views are expressed below:

*It is a noun. I was adopted. I am adopted. I am the person it happened to; I am the subject of the adoption. An adopted person is fine, adopted adult is fine, but to say that we have a problem with calling ourselves adoptees is positive language used against us so therefore negative*  
*When I was younger, when I was growing up, I remember the first occasion somebody said it to me, oh you were adopted. I was mortified, how did they find out? Who told them? I was nearly afraid to go out onto the street then for days afterwards because people would be looking at me*  
*I didn't really experience any prejudice or anything, but people seem to whisper, when somebody is adopted, they will whisper to somebody else, oh she is adopted, or he is adopted as if it is like very unusual*

For some this secretiveness was not necessarily associated with the specific terms used, but rather a sense that adoption itself was something secretive that was not to be freely spoken about:

*It was very much, a slightly derogatory term and I know it wasn't largely intended by people but in some ways, I was a dirty little secret that needed to be kept but now I can just talk freely, and everybody knows somebody in some sense, everybody has heard of somebody, or everyone is aware of somebody that is adopted*

Participants also talked about a regular reminder during their childhood that they were somehow lucky to have been adopted and that they should both remember this and feel eternally grateful for it. Again, both emotions were discussed and referred to interchangeably.

*I have heard so many times, weren't your mum and dad great adopting you, aren't you so lucky. And that is another one that riles me, because I have been very lucky, I was very lucky that my adoptive parents did adopt me... it creates an inherent need to please and to constantly seek acceptance because you are undeserving from the very moment you were born. On top of that you should feel very, very grateful that you weren't left to end up in a slurry pit in Tuam or whatever other paths might have been opened to us. But they were saying that in front of a forum of other natural mothers... she was saying she was lucky not to have been brought up by her natural mother. I thought it was offensive... insensitive... and to say that you are so lucky because of the family that got you is offensive to us. But... nobody acknowledges that*

This requirement to feel grateful and a sense of being grateful were discussed from the perspective of both the adopted child/children and the adopted parents. Adopted children were made to feel grateful they had been chosen for adoption.

Adoptive parents also felt and/or were made to feel grateful that they had been given a baby or child by the religious order and as such were to be grateful for this:

*Grateful, that was the word that was used a lot, you should be grateful that I adopted you or that you got a home because you weren't really wanted. There were just so many babies there and you were lucky that you were taken instead of somebody else*

Other general findings about attitudes to and experiences of '*adopted persons*' and the processes of adoption are discussed below (Section 3.6). Participants also discussed the use of the term '*baby*' when talking about words associated with child/children.

Again, there were mixed views expressed by participants, related to both children who were in institutions and those who were adopted. For some people it was fine to be referred to as a '*baby*':

*I don't mind using the word baby, that is perfectly acceptable to me. I think everyone should be allowed to use the word baby. It shouldn't be a case of saying the child, or gosh knows what else they say, the minor. But it is okay to say baby, I was a baby when it happened to me, I was an infant, I was a child, I was an unaccompanied minor*

But for other participants the use of this term was problematic. Aligned with views on the terminology '*Mother and Baby Home*', which is highlighted separately below, the reference to babies was considered not to reflect the reality of the age of children in the institutions or the fact that those referred to are now fully grown adults:

*Would you not refer to them as a Mother and Baby Home. Children were kept there up to the age of eight because they were paid up to the age of eight and then they were transferred to industrial schools. So therefore, every time you use that, you are excluding the lives of many, they were not babies*

*And mothers and babies seem fine but even as I said in the initial part of it, I am 6' 1" and 51, you know what I mean, I am not a baby anymore. There is a part of that that kind of takes a bit of the power out of it and puts the differential back on the poor baby*

This person went on to acknowledge that they see some change in the way the media refers to people affected by their experience in the institutions and the importance of recognising that:

*We are still here, and we are alive, and we are part of society and that and we are doing everyday things and we are not the little baby that was hidden away somewhere*

Other participants raised the terminology '*unaccompanied children*' as problematic describing how the children were not voluntarily left unaccompanied at any point. Further, many children for significant portions of time were with their mothers.

Participants also explained the deep hurt to mothers caused by use of such a term, which implies there was choice in mothers' decisions in this regard, when in the main there was no choice afforded to them:

*And the unaccompanied children just makes my heart sink. They were with their mothers at the start, the mothers who were pregnant with them, they were obviously with their mothers as they were inside their mother before they were born... after they were born, they were still there with their mother, most of them, in some of the homes, not where I was because it was much later and there were no babies in XX, your baby was removed from you in the hospital. But we were a family, you were a family, if a mother gives birth to a child that is a family actually*

*Unaccompanied children. Actually, the hurt that causes, the thought, the distress, the thought that your child is there on its own when it is a tiny wee toddler, or a baby is just horrendous. It is really upsetting; it is really distressing, and it is offensive because it is so misleading and implies so much more. Why are these children unaccompanied? Where are their mothers? Their mothers were there in the next room in a lot of cases, they weren't allowed to go home... None of them wanted to abandon their children and leave them unaccompanied anywhere. The use of that language is just so incredibly offensive*

Death and child death were also discussed by participants, in particular how it was rarely mentioned while participants were in the institutions:

*The most brutal of all that is never talked about in the institutions and that is death. And we were surrounded by death, but it was never called death, it was called passed on, in heaven, when a child died from whatever, from brutality or whatever they died from. And when they say death, they never really talk, it is a word that they avoid, again like abuse and it is like, oh he is gone to heaven, or she is gone to heaven. Gone where?*

And finally for this section, the impact of reading in the MBHCOI Final Report '*they didn't try to save*' children from death was discussed. One person talked about their child who had died shortly after birth, quoting from the report:

*In the years before 1960 Mother and Baby Homes did not save the lives of the illegitimate children. In fact, they appeared to have significantly reduced their prospect of survival:*

*I read this and this really genuinely upset me and it is in that report... I mean it would be a dreadful thing to think that everything possible wasn't done for that child that has caused me such pain. I can't find his grave, I can't find those things, you know what I mean*

Child deaths in the Tuam Institution were also discussed with specific reference to the use of the term '*septic tank*', which for some is a specific and accurate description and needs to be named as such, without sanitising it or glorifying it as a regular burial site:

*The words that annoy me... is the septic tank. It is hard to believe there is a septic tank with 800 children... It is referred to, even by survivors, as a burial site, the nuns like to say it is a burial site... Oh sister they are in a septic tank*

## 3.6 Places and processes relating to mothers and children

In this section, we focus on the places and processes that relate to mothers and their children. Based on the consultations, two main areas are discussed. Firstly, this section reports on the views expressed by participants in relation to the institution they or their family member lived in or had experience of. This therefore includes institutions commonly known as Mother and Baby Homes, Industrial Schools and County Homes. The terminology and related representation regarding the processes and practices associated with adoption are then discussed.

### 3.6.1 Home/mother and baby home/county home/institution

Almost all respondents spoke about some dimension of the words ‘home’ or ‘mother and baby home’, ‘county home’ and/or ‘institution’. For many participants, the word ‘home’ was unacceptable.

Many participants who were mothers who had lived in the institutions expressed their view that the ‘Mother and Baby Home’ did not reflect any of the traditional values or experiences associated with a typical home or commonly held views of ‘home’:

*You didn’t have freedom of choice either to come and go or to eat what you wanted to eat or eat at a time that you wanted to eat. So that is not a home so why would you call it a home? It might have been a home for the nuns, that is fine, but I don’t think [it was] a home*

*It wasn’t a home... I do know that it was not a place that you would call home where you could sit up at the table if you want and you could do what you liked*

*To me a home can be happy, it can be sad, it can be any of those things. But you are not regimented to get up at 8:00 and have your breakfast, have your lunch at 12:30, have your tea at 5:00 and you have to work then in the laundry, or you have to work in the kitchen*

*I don’t like the term homes because really they were holding sites, you know, in my records in one of the notes it says, at four months, it basically says from one of the directors, we have to get rid of him he has been here for too long*

The lack of care participants experienced while in the institutions was highlighted as another reason not to refer to the institutions as homes.

Referring to her time in the ‘Mother and Baby Home’ and the level of care received one woman recollected the lack of medical support for her after giving birth:

*I was three days in labour, straight to the ambulance, half the afterbirth left in me, bleeding for five months, this is all in a so-called home, you know, this is a home*

Participants referred to the fact that commentators, the media and the public in general would interchangeably use *'Mother and Baby Home'* and 'Mother and Baby Institution'.

A number of participants felt this term accurately reflected their views and experiences; however, for others this was not the correct term to use:

*We should be insisting on the word institution or institutional as an absolute basis for describing the nature of these things*

*It was all regimental, so to me it was an institution, it wasn't a home*

People also talked about the stigma associated with being in the *'Mother and Baby Home'*:

*There is stigma attached to them. And mother and baby really is one of the most annoying ones, Mother and Baby Homes. Or county homes, they are all very Dickensian and horrible*

Participants highlighted the harsh treatment they received in the *'Mother and Baby Home'* by nuns, with a sense that they were treated more akin to inmates in a prison:

*'You are like a prisoner in your own home, but it wasn't our home'.*

Similar comments included:

*The nuns should be called prison wardens; they shouldn't be called nuns at all because they were very harsh on us. As soon as we made a mistake they used to hit us. If we didn't make a mistake they hit us for not making a mistake. You didn't win with them at all, it was just beatings, that is all I got all the time. I still remember getting beaten one day because I threw a lot of those, you know those lollipop sticks, up in the air and made a mess of the place and I got a hiding for it. The punishment was unbelievable*

*The nuns that were running these institutions were prison wardens because they carried on as if they were prison wardens. There was no love, no reaching out to us, feeding us properly, looking after us, they just rejected us as soon as they saw our faces*

A number of participants described the *'Mother and Baby Homes'* as 'prisons' or 'slave shops', with a strong sense that mothers, babies and children had no choice in their placement there and that they were there against their will.



They also suggested that the mothers, babies and children were treated as criminals being punished for a crime:

*So simply the name of Mother and Baby Homes, industrial schools, Magdalene Laundries, all these names, because they weren't laundries, they were slave shops*

Challenging the term domestic labour and calling it 'slavery', one participant argued:

*There has to be some sort of reparations paid for the slavery that went on in Ireland particularly in the institutions*

He talks about his own mother, who was a domestic worker:

*My mother was a domestic, but she was killed in these places. Beaten to death and dumped out with 400 women and gracefully dumped into a mass grave with many others. And then buried as if she is just a piece of shit at the end of something. That is the reality of it, and this is the language that people need to hear*

Many referred to abuse and maltreatment they and/or others experienced. Further discrimination and harsh treatment was highlighted in relation to children from Traveller backgrounds, children from a different racial background, or children with intellectual or physical disabilities:

*We were children sharing the same pain, the same yard, the same everything else. He was my brother in that sense and I never understood that. And that brother gave me a beating for that... I learned discrimination there. I didn't realise it until years later. By him saying that to me, that brother to a boy, and also there were two coloured people in the school, and it was the same story. It was ludicrous. We were all children there; we were taught our hates without understanding why*

*There was a group of children that every institution has hid... I opened the door and I saw 20 or 30 children screaming, shouting and they were called the Mongol children. The word used was the Mongol children. I was stunned, I had never seen deformity in the sense that I had seen it. Well, I ran from there frightened to death... And then of course there were children my own age later on that would mix in with us in the industrial schools and I know they were this and of course their life was terrible. Their ill-treatment was appalling*

For other respondents their main issue with the term 'Mother and Baby Home' specifically was use of the word 'baby'. This did not accurately reflect the reality for many who lived there. Participants explained how although they may have entered the 'home' as a baby, many continued to live there until they were infants and young children (up to eight years of age) and as such were not babies, as mentioned earlier. Another word associated with Mother and Baby Home was 'resident', which was a term used in the MBHCOI Final Report.

For some participants, their issue with ‘resident’ was related to the sense that the ‘*Mother and Baby Home*’ was a prison and not a home, as discussed above.

Therefore, the term ‘resident’ did not reflect the lack of freedom and control they had over their situation:

*They would say, in the Commission report you were a resident. You were in your barney a resident, you were a detainee, you know what I mean... resident means, like I am resident here, this is my home. So incarcerated might be a bit strong but you didn't go there to live a happy-clappy life for the length of time you were there. So, a resident, I don't think so. Detainee, yes, if you like, because you couldn't leave without signing in and signing out, you signed out and signed in*

Other participants highlighted the lack of choice again afforded to mothers and children living in the institutions:

*Resident sounds like you are maybe in a hotel or something and as if you had a choice to reside there whereas actually all of our choices were taken away from us*

*Because if you are talking about a resident you are talking essentially about an acceptance. It is about something that is routine, it is almost a legal transaction, it is almost like booking into a hotel. These women and children had no choice in this*

### 3.6.2 Adoption/adopted

Many and varied points were made by participants on language, terminology and representation in relation to the process of adoption. Four dominant themes were discussed by participants: forced adoption, illegal adoption, child trafficking, and the process of being ‘chosen’ for adoption.

Participants highlighted the need to use the correct terminology in describing their experience of adoption and the lack of choice that mothers had in relation to keeping their children, with adoption the only option given to them. Participants described this as forced or enforced adoption:

*And I would say they were enforced and that you had to sign away your rights. There are words that you can use that you can go around it without, you know, because I think there are too many connotations with adoption and adoptees and adopted person whereas if you have enforced placement. I know it is the same thing, and that is in reality what it was... the truth of it is that it was an enforced placement of the child and you had to sign away your rights. Like putting a child up for adoption doesn't say you have to sign away your rights*

Participants emphasised that the experience was child trafficking and not adoption as is normally understood and accepted:

*Human trafficking is never used but it was a constant flow of human trafficking. Abduction, kidnapping, they are not words you will find and yet it happened. A lot of people use illegal adoptions while it really transpired was an illegal registration of a child. No adoption transpired; no adoption took place so therefore it is an illegal registration of a child*

*Well, I use the word trafficked actually because I think that is a more appropriate name for what happened my mother anyway, I am just speaking from my own personal experience and my own mother's journey*

*Is adoption child trafficking? It is if it is illegal and it was illegal because the Church said adoption, well we might not be right with the law, but our intentions were good, they were adoptions. In actual fact they weren't, they were trafficking of babies. Babies were born, taken away from the mother, the mother was told the baby had died and then the baby was sold into the United States*

Participants also highlighted how there was a financial exchange between the Church and the adoptive parents:

*Now adopted is the word I am fighting with here; you can hear what I am saying. I am calling it child trafficking, illegal child trafficking, and many of those children were sold as sex slaves. Because many of those children were horrendously abused and went to wrong families, it was about money, they were sold for thousands at the time. If you take Tuam up there in Galway near you, 1,000 babies were sold out of there, were sold, that is not adoption*

*I do know is I know about four people who were adopted by what we call normal working-class people. But they had ties to the Church. Most babies that were adopted, they weren't sold cheaply, the nuns didn't sell them cheaply, they were sold for a good lot of money*

*But all the adoptions, the majority of them, almost 90% of them were illegal, even for the Catholic Church, they used to use nuns sent over with babies, they were picked up, I have written about it, I know the houses they went off to in the States, they were called holding houses. And then they were parcelled up and sold. So you see, you can put any word you like on that and many of the children, yes some of the children, went to great families and they were fine, but many of them were dumped later on or a natural child was born, they were marginalised like a dog and just put aside and thrown elsewhere. And that is the reality of what went on here*

Participants also discussed the inappropriate use of the term ‘*inaccurate adoption registration*’ instead of false or illegal:

*They use the expression inaccurate adoption registration. Good Lord, inaccurate? I mean which civil servant came up with that one? By any description the adoption registration for the 1,000s of children that are involved in this was not inaccurate it was false or it was illegal*

A number of participants also highlighted the lack of regulation and standards in the adoption process with a number of babies and children being placed in inappropriate or abusive adoptive homes.

*And many of these families were unsuitable. Many priests adopted boys in the United States for their domestic help and their sexual help*

*It is quite unfathomable to note the incredible amount of press and government announcements who disregard this neglected part of the adoption process and the people who were trapped in such situations*

*She [a social worker] signed whatever forms to say that I was well known to her. I met the girl five minutes beforehand, ten minutes beforehand, and we spoke for about ten minutes and then we walked around to... signed the papers, we walked out the door, she said goodbye and that is as much as I knew her*

Participants also discussed the process of being selected for adoption with children being assessed on their physical appearance as to whether they were suitable and/or wanted for adoption – often described as ‘*passed for adoption*’:

*I think the first one is passed, the child had to be passed. If you were talking about you pass something, if you passed an exam or you passed a car down the road, but in relation to a child, if a child had to go to be passed before they went for adoption, could they not have said to check that they were healthy or some such, you know what I mean. But passed is just... I don't like it, you know, it just brings up a wrong feeling*

Others talked about the processes they experienced as children in institutions with regard to being chosen for adoption, often referring to the fact that the most attractive children would be selected. One person depicted a particularly harsh scenario of rejection for adoption of children with a disability:

*In the orphanage we would be all lined up and there was a boy beside me and he had no arm. The nuns squeezed him between two of us and when the man came around, and the woman came around, to inspect us like dogs to select a child they were going to adopt he took a liking to the boy in between. We knew he had one arm; it didn't bother him. And when he took him out and he saw it, he shamed him and rejected him and almost pushed him to the floor. That sense of cruelty was something else*

*Chosen* for adoption was another word identified as offensive, Participants described the process of potential adoptive parents coming to the institution to select a child to adopt. Participants emphasised how physical characteristics, height, weight, hair and so on seemed to be the determining factors.

They also noted how if a child or children had any physical disability or issue with the appearance of any part of their body they would not be chosen:

*As far as I can tell, I was on the list for girls, my parents were on the list for wanting a girl, that was it. I wasn't chosen. I wasn't in a room full of babies and somebody physically came over and said I want this one. So, I take offence at the word chosen*

*The only ones that got on well in these institutions was if you were pretty looking you got adopted and they fussed over you because you were handsome, you were beautiful looking and you were nice looking*

Placement was also identified as a problematic term and viewed as putting a positive spin on a less-than-positive process:

*It is like adoptive parents would say that sometimes, social workers would say it too, kind of like happy language to say that we were placed. I wasn't placed. My mother walked out of the hospital; she didn't place me anywhere. I was abandoned. I was relinquished. I was given up for adoption. And it is okay to say that. I know some people aren't comfortable with that but that is my reality and that is how I feel about it. That is what happened. Okay I wasn't abandoned on the side of the street, she just walked out of the hospital, I remained in the hospital. That is still abandonment. She walked out of there, empty belly, empty handed. I remained behind. So, to say placed isn't actually accurate*

When people spoke about adoption experiences, they usually referred to issues relating to access to their information, covering a range of themes that reflect how adoption, and adopted persons, are represented or misrepresented in these processes.

Power differentials came into these discussions, how this left a person feeling they were 'back to being that little baby':

*I think that is one of the things that is underrepresented, the power differential in all these situations because you can kind of be brought back to being that little baby where you didn't have a say in anything. But anyway, you use what you have to help yourself along. But all this sort of stuff is back to is someone going to grant you something, we are going to help you out*

Participants also described having to tell their story over and over again:

*We will help the little fellow out, you know. And do you know what, I am not going to pay you with my story every time I have to go to a government department. I think that is the thing, the constant reiterating of having to tell someone all through the stuff*

As discussed further in Section 3.8, the misrepresentation of people's identities through the processes associated with adoption and placement was a matter of major concern in the present for a number of people, as one person asked:

*Who is writing the first of your baby's life or your time in hospital, who is writing this? Who is writing all your records? The nuns, not the nurses, not the doctors ...the nuns who put you through this hell, so they are going to tell the truth about what happened? They are going to sit there and say, oh yes, I threw a bottle of Dettol in the bath when she had 30 stitches and told her God died for your sins. I kept her there for three days until I saw blood and then I had to ring an ambulance in a hurry when everyone was panicking. And then they have the nerve to put normal birth. Sorry, there was never a normal birth that was sent to a hospital from... (institution) you know, unless you were near death was the only time you went in an ambulance*

### 3.7 Use of terms survivor and/or victim

The majority of participants discussed the use of the terms 'survivor' or 'victim', with mixed views expressed. Some preferred the term 'survivor' while others felt 'victim' was a more accurate description.

Participants also acknowledge individual choice to choose the preferred term. As in other sections a range of direct quotes from participants are included to indicate the depth and breadth of perspectives proffered.

A number of participants were of the view that they (and others) were survivors, that they had come through a significant ordeal and wanted this to be acknowledged:

*I had zero support, no therapy, nothing from my government except egregious terminology and procrastination is indicative of the strength that I have and therefore I survived*

*the mothers who were imprisoned in these homes, they are survivors*

*I think survivor would be my word of choice but if you were being realistic what you would call us is inmates because nobody was there by choice. But that wouldn't be very politically correct now would it*

*I am a survivor. I was in a baby home that had dubious staff, in that they had 15- and 16-year-old girls who were untrained looking after us, not medics, there was no doctor... So, there were vaccine trials, drugs trials, baby formula trials and probably even social trials done on us in these places. For me to have survived and not gone out in a coffin or been buried in the ground, I survived*

Others however were not in favour of the word survivor; some vehemently disliked it and did not want to use it; others were less passionate about its use but did not feel it represented them and their experiences:

*I think it is disgraceful that we are called survivors, we are what you call scapegoats, that is what we were. Scapegoats for society, scapegoats for religious teaching, scapegoats for every part of Irish society and even today we are scapegoats*

*I don't know is survivor the right word, to me that is what it was, a question of surviving the experience. And once it leaked out as well, back in the day, that you had had a child in one of those places good luck getting a date, you were sort of a pariah from then on. The other word, it relates to myself, I cannot stand survivor or victim*

*So yeah, don't call us survivors, we are more than that. It is very complicated, and I would even, if I could get away with it, call us the abandoned. That is what we were, are, you know*

*They put in victims, they put in survivors, even the name of the group I am a member of is Survivors, you know. Maybe I survived but you don't want to be a survivor*

*And survivors, it is an appropriate word, but it is very generic when it kind of comes to anything. These are mothers who went upstairs to change for dinner and come down and their babies were gone forever. Survivors of what? I think it needs to be more specific to actually bring it home to people*

*We should be called inmates; illegal inmates would be more suitable... we are called survivors, survivors of what? It was illegal incarceration, that is what we are survivors of*



As with other terms discussed participants felt that as everyone's experiences are different it is appropriate to allow people choose how they wish to be referred to:

*I am not a Mother and Baby Home survivor. I was in a Mother and Baby Home. There are many people however who are survivors, who literally did manage to get out literally by the skin of their teeth, many of whom were very, very scared by it. So, I am not going to take away their use of that word because I acknowledge for many people that was the case. I think survivors in, it depends on how we are defining victimhood*

*A lot of people would say they feel victims of a situation that happened and if it feels right it is right for them. If they feel they were a victim in a particular situation they should be allowed to be able to strongly say and give a voice to their experience*

*Survivor is an appropriate term for anyone how has been subjected to abuse, but only if they themselves wish to be called such*

*I would also use the word survivors, others maybe feel I am not a victim, I am a survivor and if it fits right and feels right then it is right. And I think that is really the way we should go; we should have that kind of fluid and flexibility in those words because then you are identifying exactly as the person is feeling. And really the person is the kernel of everything. So, to some the experience might be more for others, less for someone else, it is not even about that, it is about as you are speaking is the word right for how you are feeling?*

*So, I think we should be using everything with the greatest respect*

Some participants felt describing themselves as survivors was stigmatising in itself and meant they could not get away from or move on from their past:

*I think that in itself stigmatises you still. If you call yourself a survivor people are going to ask questions, why are you called a survivor*

Others however thought this was an accurate term and that there was a sense that those who had spent time in a Mother and Baby Home or any institution had indeed survived this very harsh and difficult experience:

*In my view the Department of Children are responsible for inventing and pushing the words and language which is offensive to the Survivors. I think it has stigmatised the Survivors and this is borne out by the fact they have very little public support. Remember the people who were incarcerated in the Mother and Baby Homes and who managed to survive are 'Survivors' nothing more and nothing less*

Participants also expressed their view that the terms '*survivors*' and '*victim*' are full of meaning:

*I still even find survivor and victim so loaded and they are so engrained. And I understand why people want to say survivor and that but they are so engrained in a sort of, I wouldn't even say patronising, but to me it is difficult to get a language around it, that we are just people. I think the normalisation of everyday people went through a bad experience, but you could be boxed off because along with something like victim or survivor comes they are not quite right*

Respondents also suggested that the appropriate terms were different depending on the time of their life you were referring to.

At certain times and for certain experiences they did feel like victims, or they did feel they had survived certain experiences, but these terms did not appropriately describe other parts of their experiences:

*I believe that for the first six months of my life I was a victim and then a couple came along and gave me a great opportunity. But I do acknowledge that I was a victim. But I am not a victim of adoption, I am a victim of the institutions that created that environment and that is very often...  
And therefore, I am not a survivor of adoption, I am not a survivor of Mother and Baby Homes. I am a survivor of those six months*

Some respondents did not necessarily like using the term victim as they felt it conveyed 'weakness, powerlessness':

*The stigmatising and annoying thing at the moment, the swapping back and forward between things like victim, survivor, that sort of framing of weakness in all of it. And again, it gets back to that almost like these poor other people who are of lesser power and God love them kind of thing, there is a patronising element. I know people are trying to say survivor instead of victim and all that sort of thing and to actually make it a bit more powerful than a resident, which is about as cold and unhelpful as possible*

*I have heard people discussing the issue on television and radio, referring to people like me as 'those poor women' or 'victims' and that really incenses me. Since the publication of the report of the MBHC, I have joined some fora where adopted persons and parents can post in privacy. Without divulging any secrets, I can say that most of the contributors (mostly women) are strong and resilient and certainly not deserving of pity or patronising attitudes*

Others described themselves or their family members as both a victim and a survivor:

*She was definitely a victim, most definitely a victim. But she was also a survivor*

*Victims of the state, victims of the Church. Victims of... If there was a word to use to combine because the state was as implicit as the Church, if there was a word to use to combine both of them because they are the ones combined that caused these atrocities. So, it would be like the victims of the Church/state alliance*

*So that is who we are, we are victims. The women didn't have a choice, the babies didn't have a choice. What do you call people who are put in homes and babies that are taken away with no choice? They are victims of, they are forgotten, they are abandoned. They are made feel worthless, like they can't contribute anything to society*

## 3.8 Language, terminology and representation by those with power to influence

As well as identifying the specific terminology discussed above, participants referred to certain language or terminology in written and spoken communications from those with power to influence. These included members of government, the churches, the MBHCOI, officers working in adoption agencies and other relevant professionals, family members, and general society. This language, as used in the past and as currently used, is considered in this final section.

At an overall level the changing nature of language over time was discussed; however, no very clear division was noted between the language of different periods. People talked about language and terminology from the 1940s and 1950s while others discussed experiences through the 1980s and 1990s and up to the present time. Many reflected on the intergenerational nature of the issues and discussed how language and terminology affected and continues to affect whole families across generations. Examples were provided of mothers and their adult children still suffering today as a result of their experiences. Described as a transgenerational trauma, the long-lasting impact of these experiences was repeatedly emphasised by many participants.

In their conversations, people identified many other issues of concern outside of the scope of the project, in the context of talking about language. A lot of anger and frustration was expressed by people including some representing/speaking on behalf of survivor groups.

A few people talked about especially difficult personal circumstances and the lifelong impact of the trauma experienced.

*She is really quite traumatised by all of her experiences really across decades, trying to trace and then speaking up on her side of what it felt like and the truth of what happened and the information we have managed to find and how, you know, her kind of truth from that and even providing that evidence*

### 3.8.1 The Catholic Church

The role of the Church in reinforcing stigmatising language was referred to above. At an overall level the power of the catholic church in reinforcing negative and stigmatising language comes through very strongly in participants' accounts of their experiences. The level of control and autonomy that the Church had was repeatedly highlighted.

Its role in shaming 'unmarried' pregnant women and their children was also emphasised, with a sense that the Church was listened to and believed over anyone else:

*They prevented anyone talking about the pain and the stuff that happened to them in these institutions, the rapes that went on because nobody was going to believe them because they had credibility in the first place. The Church had the monopoly on words that were used*

Participants also emphasised the role the Church played in sending mothers and their babies to the Mother and Baby Homes and how society followed their lead. They also noted how this was not questioned:

*I know families did but they did it on instruction from the Church going on to say it as clear it was the Church who had the power in the system (P7) what it fails to do is to identify the facilitators of that system, of this cruel and horrible system*

### 3.8.2 Government departments

Many people talked about the language and terminology used by relevant government departments over many decades (mostly relating to the DCEDIY and its previous iterations but also other departments).

Much anger, frustration, disappointment, and a feeling of being let down was expressed in these discussions:

*I have been desperately let down by the state in all of this*

Overall, participants expressed their view that government departments failed to take on board key messages and learning from consultation with various individuals and groups.

There was a view expressed that government departments put forward a viewpoint in language that is more suited to their particular agenda than the truth as expressed by those participating in the consultations:

*A language had been spun by the government in order to facilitate a particular narrative that they wanted to pursue*

Many participants talked about their involvement in consultative groups and fora where they advised government departments on the use of inappropriate and offensive language, and how such language and terms continued to be used.

Examples were given of current and past census forms, emails, letters and reports which consistently reinforce difference, inequality and negative stereotypes. As one participant explained:

*Even when they emailed me, and parts of the email [are] quite nice and welcoming, but they destroy it with their language*

Participants referred to the ongoing misrepresentation in successive governments' actions relating to the Commission, redress and the legislation, and related actions regarding the institutions. The feeling of being disrespected by various governments' lack of response and action including attention to language and terminology in the present was discussed in this context.

For example, people raised their dissatisfaction with regular use of the term '*robust*' by the government with regard to its planned response to the issues raised by survivors:

*This is wholly inappropriate. It conveys a message that the Department et al will be standing up for the Survivors. This has not and will not happen as we know*

This also connected to a sense of a lack of inclusion and representation perceived by participants:

*They go away and sit in these boardrooms and talk about us and come up with redress schemes which are highly problematic, they come up with a new bill. I am not being represented*

With reference to access to records, discussed earlier, one person criticised the use of terminology where:

*The government is still rephrasing and reusing all of those opportunities to deny rather than actually open[ing] the records*

Participants described a sense of being let down by government departments and a disbelief that anything would change now or in the future. Participants noted the content of the MBHCOI Report and the continued use in the Report of terms they had highlighted as offensive and inappropriate as an example of this:

*I don't believe the government departments were in any way interested. I think we were just an inconvenient problem that they just keep trying to find different ways to sweep under various rugs  
I think actually the reaction of the government after [the publication of the MBHC Report] was probably the most offensive aspect of what has happened*

Participants linked this unwillingness to listen to them and lack of inclusion to a sense of inequality and power difference. As described by participants:

*They don't understand simple folk like us, or they choose not to  
You are speaking over us, in fact it causes more problems... we are gone beyond patient at this stage, we want action, no more talk*

Redress was discussed by a number of participants with frustration expressed at the use of the term '*redress*' with a view that these experiences could not be repaired and therefore restitution was a more appropriate term.

Participants also expressed their concerns and frustration that redress was perceived to be about financial compensation only:

*People see the money end of it and just think, oh they are all going to fall in for a lot of money. That doesn't come into it*

Participants noted their main issue is not in relation to the financial aspect of the redress but rather how the process and conditions attached exclude large numbers of people involved in the institutions. In particular participants discussed their dissatisfaction with the timeframes set and the exclusion of babies under six months from the scheme.

*These artificial timelines belittle or demean those of us who didn't hit a particular threshold of time and are just ridiculous because the pain lasts a lifetime.  
They were saying six months and under didn't count. Didn't count? That made me rage because I said that is rejection at another level. The government rejected people in bad situations because they weren't aware of it. So, like it would have been all right to kick you around the floor because you couldn't talk for yourself, or nobody knew about it*

Participants also noted the inability of any financial compensation to make up for all that has been lost by those with experience of the institutions:

*People say sure you got compensation, sure anybody can get compensation, you can go and walk under a car and get hit, that is compensation. It is never going to give you back what was taken*

*I don't think it does justice to women particularly who will find out and have found out that their child's remains are in a septic tank*

Finally, participants talked about the delay in addressing issues such as access to records, which does not take into account the ages of many people affected:

*I feel that there will be an awful lot of people who unfortunately will carry the scars to their graves and their children will carry the scars because their children won't have that background to be able to tap onto anyway, so it is generational*

### 3.8.3 Language, terminology and representation used by professionals and state agents

Many examples were provided by participants in relation to their interaction and involvement with medical professionals, welfare officers, social workers and teachers. In the main these experiences were negative and caused further anger and upset for those involved.

Participants recalled experiences of being poorly treated both medically and ethically within maternity hospitals, with judgemental and insensitive attitudes from doctors and nurses described.

Others referred to similarly negative experiences from staff working in psychiatric hospitals. Distressing and upsetting involvement with social workers was also outlined:

*I remember the social worker driving me from my grandmother's house when I was pregnant, I was only 15, and all the way up to... she just kept saying to me, you are so disgusting. And I remember thinking, God, I couldn't even look at her. When I think of her, I just get the shivers, she told me I was disgusting, and nobody would ever want me ever again. I had brought shame on my family... I was actually called pitiful, poison... she used words describing me as disturbed, unstable*

The offensive, or lack of appropriate, language used by social welfare officers and officials dealing with aspects of adoption and birth paperwork (for example) was also discussed. Participants were of the view that most were not adequately knowledgeable about or trained in relation to their needs and issues and continued to use inappropriate or offensive language.

People also discussed their dissatisfaction and concern with regard to current practices when applying to Tusla – Child and Family Agency for information in relation to adoptions. Participants described the staff members there as also displaying power imbalances and unnecessary control over people's personal information:

*They are openly doing exactly what all those institutions did many years ago and you are supposedly government departments now for the citizens, working for the citizens and not for the previous institutions... it is back to that power thing of framing it as we are helping you and don't mess it up*

*Lack of understanding and depersonalisation experience when trying to get information:... And I was kind of vocal on well I only want one person to talk to, if I have to talk to anybody at all, if I can't just log in and download all my stuff, I want one person. I don't want to be sent from this person to that person to have to retell my stuff every bloody time.*

*You are an administrator, hand over the data. Because it is again you are not a person who gets to decide the validity of this, that, because I am a citizen, isn't in question. Do you see what I mean? So, gatekeeping and all that*

Almost all the participants highlighted the significant and ongoing challenges associated with trying to access their own records or records related to family members or to help family members to access records. A deep frustration was expressed by participants in terms of the many barriers they faced when trying to find accurate detailed information and records from government departments or state agencies:

*If they are taking that approach, how are they going to give you somebody else's, as they see it, medical information? Who would not want their own child, after being through hell on earth in a Mother and Baby Home and not wanting to separate yourselves, why would you not want them to have medical records or a birth certificate? The fact that they take that tone is horrific too, you know, and that is why it feels [like] that continuation of that enforced paternalistic, we know what is best for you and you are no different to everybody else*

*Everything about us really has to be written properly because that is the only time really that we know that there is great respect. That is the only time that we know that they get it because when we see it written down, they will say yeah, they get it, they know now what we are saying and that is a great mark of respect for the lot of inconsistencies and where they got it wrong. We have to see it corrected right; we have to read it right*



The particular challenges when family members have passed away or regarding adopted relations was emphasised by participants:

*I think just a full and complete access to records so that nobody else has to go through this kind of thing would be some kind of acknowledgement of the trauma that has been caused. If there were just no obstacles, nothing in the way, just complete access to everything that is yours, it is about you. And like I say her mum has passed on now, she has got no living relatives, there is no reason why she can't have everything and then at least she would know the full truth*

*In my adopted family I have one other brother and he was also adopted, he died when I was young, so what I find maybe from one of your earlier questions, in some way, like it was his birthday last week but what I can't find out, because he was adopted, I cannot find anything about him because I don't have a direct blood relationship to him*

### 3.8.4 Family and society – language, terminology and representation

Participants regularly highlighted the challenging societal attitudes that were present at the time of their experience with the institutions and emphasised how they reinforced the negative stereotypes in relation to them and their circumstances. It was also noted that these assumptions, attitudes and stereotypes traversed society, the church, family life and the wider institutions of health and education.

Overall, the complexity of the relationship between individual and/or family behaviours and attitudes, and wider societal and cultural forces, was emphasised, with one person explaining it as follows:

*Unfortunately, it was an oppressive state that we lived in and that was down to the control of the people, it was down to, not just the church, it was the whole mechanics of our country and all of us, well all of our parents, well the majority of them went along with it because you couldn't not go along with it*

As mentioned earlier, participants noted how influences on language and terminology, and the impact, are generational, transgenerational and intergenerational, with words, meanings and views lasting over many decades. Participants also discussed the re-traumatisation experienced by continued use of language and ongoing battles for access to information and knowledge about one's own or one's family's past:

A desire to shape and inform future societal perspectives was emphasised by a number of participants who also acknowledged and welcomed the positive changes in general present-day attitudes. For example:

*I have to admit I have come back to a different Ireland, a better Ireland than when I was younger. I have to admit I have seen wonderful changes here. I think the Irish people there is a hunger for, I know when I speak there is, I know when I engage an audience there is a hunger for this young people especially don't seem to have a distinctive language or approach or terminology or difference in any way... is great and refreshing*

But despite these changes, people have continued to experience stigma within their families or communities or still be affected by stigmatisation in the past. Many examples were provided of continued use of offensive words or phrases.

Participants also noted how the use of such words and phrases can be intended to cause hurt, but in many instances, they are used unintentionally without full recognition or appreciation of their meaning and associations:

*I remember bawling my eyes out because that hadn't crossed my mind commenting that: people really have no filters and really that is one thing that needs to be accentuated, that people stop and think and step back before they open their mouths*

### 3.8.5 Use of language and terminology by media

Mixed views were expressed by participants in relation to media reporting of experiences associated with the institutions and their treatment. Similar to the Church and society, generally participants found that some media portrayals could be patronising and again display a power imbalance.

Discussing the role of the media, they noted the retraumatising effect of insensitive, offensive or negative reporting by media outlets while also acknowledging the need for widescale and continued attention to the issues. As expressed by participants:

*The media highlighting the whole thing again and then listening to the different stories, it has been horrendous, a horrendous road*

*We need the media to shine a light on the cruelty and to call for more accountability from the Church whereby there is more acceptance that these things went on instead of denying it and pretending that these things didn't happen*

Importantly participants noted the need to recount and record their experiences and to avail of opportunities to do this as they arise:

*I am a living witness. It is not my history; it is my life. But you won't see me being interviewed in many places, especially by RTE media, by radio. We need to make sure we tell our story*

Some people felt misrepresented by the media and described how media did not always accurately represent their experiences or circumstances.

They also emphasised inconsistency by the media in the level of attention to particular issues, referring to how attention waxes and wanes over time depending on other stories of the day:

*I still think that on the whole, the media take an interest in us now and again when we are the flavour of the week or the flavour of the month. But by and large then we are getting to that point where I think people are going, this is getting a bit tiresome, are they still not sorted yet?*

The challenge of getting the balance between telling the factual truth and not being too graphic for the public readership was also discussed.

Specifically, participants talked about how the media talk about abuse as a general catch-all term, when the reality is even more stark and involves rape and incest:

*Okay there is a dilemma in writing an article for a major newspaper in what you would use to describe something, there is only so much horror you can put into a sentence or graphic word to describe something*

People also talked about the need for greater respect from politicians and the media with regard to sensitivity and empathy in terms of their experiences and continued efforts to find their accurate information and truthful records:

*For us this is personal, but it also demands a certain respect from politicians, from the media, from those that report on it, that families like... who have looked for decades for either the true identity of themselves or for the lost relative*

## 3.9 Summary

A total of 43 participants were involved in this research study. This included 26 one-to-one interviews and eight participants in a group interview. Nine written submissions were also included for analysis. Participants included women who had direct experience of institutions and their children, and adults who had been adopted as babies or children.

All participants emphasised the importance of language, terminology and representation and discussed how impactful it can be and has been in their lives. All were very keen to share their views with the research team and had prepared for the interview in advance.

At an overall level the majority of participants emphasised an individual's right to make their own choice about language and terms when talking about or describing their own experiences. They highlighted each person's right regarding their own identity and identification.

Many people referred to the significance of the context within which language and terms are used and how this can impact on the perceived or intended meaning.

'*Mother*' was the word discussed most often in the consultations, with the majority of respondents providing their perspective on the word '*mother*' and related terms. Within this, the most common starting point was with the term '*birth mother*' but as discussed in detail previously, there were mixed views about its use and its connection to associated terms including '*natural mother*' and '*adoptive mother*'.

Most people also discussed the terms '*child*', '*children*' and related terms. Many and varied opinions were expressed on these terms, again showing the depth and breadth of perspective and feeling on these often-contentious terms. The impact of words such as '*illegitimate child/illegitimacy*', '*bastard*', '*adoptive child/adoptee*', '*baby*', '*unaccompanied child*' was emphasised by participants.

Almost all respondents spoke about some dimension of the words '*Home*' or '*Mother and Baby Home*', '*County Home*' and/or '*Institution*'. The majority of participants emphasised the absolute misuse of the term *home* in this context.

Many and varied points were made by participants on language, terminology and representation in relation to the process of adoption. Dominant themes discussed by participants included forced adoption, illegal adoption, child trafficking, the process of being '*chosen*' for adoption, and the difficulty in accessing accurate information.

The majority of participants discussed the use of the terms '*survivor*' or '*victim*', with a range of views expressed. Some preferred the term '*survivor*' while others felt '*victim*' was a more accurate description. Overall participants felt people should be free to choose whatever term best represented their experiences.

Participants referred to inappropriate and offensive use of language or terminology in written and spoken communications now and in the past from those with power to influence. These included members of government, the church, the MBHCOI, officers working in adoption agencies and other relevant professionals, family members and general society and the media.

# 04

Findings from *the* Consultations  
on *‘What Should Be Done’*

“

what you are saying may have a huge impact on the person sitting next to you or facing you , or the stranger at the bus stop or sitting next to you on an aeroplane

”

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we summarise the findings from our consultations regarding ‘what can or should be done’ to address the issues raised. This chapter builds on findings from Chapter 3 where some suggestions have already been made. This chapter provides a more detailed account in relation to the question of what can be done and the contribution this project makes.

**Four main messages have come from the consultations to inform present and future actions. We discuss these in the sections of this chapter as follows:**

1. Use simple, clear and respectful terminology.
2. Educate and raise awareness about language and terminology.
3. Communicate and report with focus on ‘truth telling’.
4. Ensure inclusive and collaborative representation of the views and experiences of those directly affected.

## 4.2 Use simple, clear and respectful terminology

*So, I think a good outcome for the project would be yes language is constantly changing, representation is constantly changing. And that also means that we shouldn't forget how people were referred to in the past and... how stigmatising that language was and how it landed on those people*

**In this section, there are two main messages to inform approaches to language and terminology:**

1. To make the language simpler and clearer while capturing complexity in a sensitive way.
2. To use terms differently or use different terms.

### 4.2.1 Using simple, clear language

A key message from the findings is to make terminology and language clearer in a way that can capture complexity, and to be sensitive in doing this. The following commentary highlights some of the main points made in the consultations to inform how we can do this.

Some recommended making the language simpler and clearer so that it is ‘*easily understood*’ especially by...

*People that will come after us that won't even understand what the hell they are talking about.*

Reports such as this one should be presented in accessible language especially for people who have not had direct experience, younger generations, and those learning the history of the institutions. Policy makers need to avoid being overly legalistic and academics need to communicate in *lay terms*.

Overall, there is a need to avoid acronyms, for example, PFI – pregnant from Ireland. Participants who had been forced to return to Ireland from England to have their babies discussed how they only found out they were labelled ‘PFI’ many years later:

*I don't understand how anyone would say PFI as if will save them a few words in an article. You have got to think about that, how people don't think about it, you know. And I guess if they are meaning to do well and highlight something then they need to have the full context of why it is hurtful and why it needs to be remembered and why it was said*

More sensitive use of language requires increased awareness of the impact of offensive language, whether it is intended to offend or not, as reflected in the findings in Chapter 3. It is clear that certain words are found by most people to be offensive. A strong and clear message from the research is to stop reusing offensive language unnecessarily. For example, the offensiveness of the term ‘bastard’ to many people was highlighted in Chapter 3.

One person, noting that the ‘Irish language is very colourful’, pointed out there is no need for continued use of the word because hearing the word causes offence to some.

As one person suggested:

*If the language isn't there and being used continually people will get to move away from it.*

And another put it even more strongly:

*I hope to live to see another day when negative labels will be banned in usage of description of human beings.*

At the same time, the need to be explicit about terminology, even though some words are harsh and difficult to hear, is important, because not using the words can minimise recognition of the harm and severity of experience. For example, reference was made to the use of the word ‘abuse’ in Chapter 3. Simplistic use of the term puts all forms of abuse into one category, which denies or hides that in this broad range of experience, *rape* is one severe and specific form of abuse. Some people talked about how rape was rarely spoken about, as if to deny it had happened to a woman who became pregnant, or to a person abused within an institution – even though there is such clear evidence of this from existing inquiry reports (e.g., Ryan Report, the MBHCOI Report) and testimonies from those directly affected.

Along similar lines, the following quote calls for greater honesty about the reality of how some women came to be in the institutions and the need for this to be communicated truthfully, not to blame but to accept that the past dictates the future:

*For me I always believed it was to do with the fathers, that they were terrified of the fathers being made known. Maybe you have six girls in the one institution carrying a baby for the same priest. It doesn't look good. If you have incest, if you have rape, they are not nice things. But they are our truth, and you deal with the truth... I am not here to accuse anybody of anything, I don't believe in blame, and I certainly do not believe in living in the past. That was then and this is now. But in order to move forward I believe the past does dictate the future*

The need to find ways to respectfully capture the complexity of the issues was also discussed. The following quote illustrates this point with reference to

*The three sides in this issue – the mothers who gave birth, the people who were adopted, and the families who adopted:*

It is not just about specific words but generally about open dialogue about what happened in some institutions in the past:

We should be as horrified about what happened in our own history as we might be if we were looking out for similar stories elsewhere:

*This is not easy, and no doubt there will be very diverging views, but this is how I personally feel, as one who gave birth to a child who was subsequently adopted. Naturally, one's own personal experience colours one's point of view. What is important is that whatever terms are used, they should be positive and respectful*

*[Don't] pretend it didn't happen or keep it hidden.*

*If we read about the Tuam babies and they were in Wales or Scotland everybody would be horrified.*

#### 4.2.2 Using terms differently or use different terms

Many identified the need to find different terminology. There is a need to discuss what terminology will be used and how people can best work together to

*'do something right for people who got such a raw deal':*

*It is the next word that is the so important one. And I think this is where we all have to put our heads together and bang it off the wall until we get the proper word that fits into that whole sorry saga of this stupid country that was there. I know we can't take back and we can't undo the wrong, but we might be able to do something right for people who got such a raw deal*

This includes finding ways to address contested terminology and to use it differently. We need to be sensitive to this, recognising that some terms – like those relating to *'mother'* – can be divisive.

The importance of reflecting on the findings and thinking about how we might use terms of a sensitive and contested nature was emphasised. People recognised that there is no simple answer and identified the need to acknowledge differences of opinion and to consider alternatives. The need for different terminology in relation to women that reflected gender inequality, stigma, blame and shame is an example of the discussion.



In the quote below, one person captured this in discussing the term

*‘Humankind’ – ‘the importance of one word’, which, for her, gave that sense that ‘I am as equally a human as a male [is]’:*

*I was reading something, and this word jumped out at me, humankind. My whole life it would have said mankind. And I got the shock of my life, I went wow, we finally have arrived... this says humankind, not mankind, human. That means I have arrived in the sense that I am as equally a human as a male. Females, males, it didn’t matter... Do you see how it can change people’s minds and thought process? We were subordinates my whole life*

Also, some terminology that is lacking regarding gender relations needs to be created. For example, as referenced in Chapter 3, many noted the absence of stigmatising terminology for men who were fathers – the unspoken terminology. Chapter 3 also discusses the absence of attention to how men and fathers were excluded when they wanted to be involved, and the language to describe that.

Likewise, the absence of reference to the experiences of boys was highlighted:

*Okay the mums are all female but the kids, where are all these boys, what happened to them?*

It is of note that the term *‘adoptive father’* did not come up in the discussions, another notable absent term.

The findings of Chapter 3 highlight some words that *should* be used, and many examples have already been given. The need to keep working on alternative terminologies was suggested as an action for the future. For example, suggestions were made for use of the terms *‘hidden grief’* and *‘living bereavement’* to reflect the particular nature of loss experienced.

Another word suggested to represent people’s experience was the Gaelic word *scaradh* (meaning separation).

This was suggested as a

*‘Unifying and an umbrella phrase from which everything else flows underneath’.*

This was discussed in the context of a need to stop creating division between diverse experiences:

*And when you talk about schools, Mother and Baby Homes, laundries, boarding-out... illegal adoptions, what it does is it creates a separation in the debate. And it creates, I think as well, a division in perceptions of suffering as well. They are all elements of the same thing*

Many people promoted the use of the term ‘citizenship’ or ‘citizen’ and challenged the use of the term ‘second-class citizen’. It was pointed out that ‘citizenship’ as an overarching term of reference to people with direct experience

*‘Would cut through an awful lot because then that sort of makes you real in the eyes of a lot of different departments and that’. It offers a way to capture the principles underpinning a more just and respectful approach for the future and a way to help redress power imbalances.*

*It is a very simple word, but I think it would cut through a lot, it is the word citizen just isn’t used around this an awful lot... But the word citizen just isn’t there and to me that would cut through an awful lot because then that sort of makes you real in the eyes of a lot of different departments and that*

*It keeps coming down to power, for me anyway, you don’t have access and that is why citizen would be really important because there you just have rights. I am an EU citizen, I am an Irish citizen, end of story. But if you are not thought of that way or you are not framed that way well everything is sort of the king or queen can grant or leave*

Education and awareness raising were seen by many as crucial for present and future to get the terminology right and use respectful terminology.

## 4.3 Educate and raise awareness about language and terminology

*By sharing it and putting the language in place... it gives me hope for the ones coming after because it is a dark period... it is not one you would bring up at tea break*

All the findings so far can inform the development of education and awareness programmes. In this section, we summarise specific findings on the details of how this might be done. In this section, the three main messages were:

1. The importance of education and awareness in informing present and future generations.
2. The specific need for education and awareness raising for government ministers, policy makers, the media and others in positions of authority.
3. The need for awareness and education programmes to be inclusive and representative of people with direct lived experience.

### 4.3.1 The importance of education and awareness in informing present and future generations

The intergenerational impact of language and terminology was highlighted in Chapter 3. As one person expressed, the intergenerational *ripple* effect needs to be better understood. The importance of education for younger generations about the history and its ongoing impact in the present has been highlighted. Discussions about what should be done reiterated this need for the public, across generations, to have the opportunity to understand the history and the language and terminology, to create awareness about the impact of past language and its continued use.

Some emphasised the importance of school and university education including this history:

*We have covered the famine, and we have covered the 1916 Rising, this is like Ireland's own holocaust really of women, in particular women'. And to realise that this history is very much in the present: 'In the sense of when we are describing history, I am a living witness. It is not my history; it is my life.*

The damaging and offensive power of words needs to be better understood by the public. There is a need to be more sensitive and aware of how our words and conversations – and use of labels – can have such a hurtful and damaging effect, even if not intended.

Casual use of labels like those discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 needs to be challenged and changed:

Greater awareness that one's words or comments may impact someone with direct experience is also needed:

*You may never know your audience:*

*What you are saying may have a huge impact on the person sitting next to you or facing you or the stranger at the bus stop or sitting next to you on an aeroplane  
Better education and awareness will also help people to learn about the words of the past and the impact they had so that they won't ever use them with their children because they will know how damaging they can be and hopefully their children will never find themselves in any situation that I found myself in*

*'Labels are for jars, not for humans'.*

Specific education for survivor's children to help them understand and make sense of their mother's experience and the possible lifelong impact of this on them was also recommended.

The need for education that changes attitudes was emphasised:

*We need to pay huge attention for our young minds, all of the stuff that they learn will create their, I suppose their concept of their world or whatever, how they perceive it. But also, it leads to attitudes. Now attitudes are the hardest thing to change*

And there needs to be a recognition that while most attitudes have changed toward lone parenthood (for example), this is not yet universal based on experiences people have shared.

This links to changing people's... *Perception of who we are, our parents were, through language: They weren't whores, they weren't sluts, we are not bastards, we are not illegitimate, we are not useless*

The Dóchas Code of Code of Conduct on Images and Messages was recommended by one participant as a guide that could inform the development of policy, education and awareness.<sup>44</sup>

### 4.3.2 Educate and raise awareness of government ministers, policy makers, the media and others in positions of authority

Anger, frustration, disappointment and a feeling of being let down by government departments was expressed in Chapter 3. The need for ministers, government policy makers and members of the media to be educated about relevant language and terminology was discussed by some people. One example related to use of the term '*resident*' in public speeches and documents – despite so many pointing out this was offensive.

One person suggested that this needs someone to have

*The power to say to a TD or a minister or whatever, you are calling these people residents when in actual fact that is the total wrong word.*

This urgent need for better listening was discussed in the consultations. There was a strong sense from many of not being listened to and a frustration with hearing words used and reused even though the issues with the terminology had been raised:

*I would love to see somebody just walk into that Dáil when they are in full session and say, excuse me boys but I am going to show you how to say the right word... And to teach them to cop on and to respect the people that was in those places, they weren't homes, they were whatever you want to call it, I get mad when I start talking about it*

The importance of listening is discussed further in Section 4.4.

The *political* nature of language was emphasised and the need for those who have benefitted from education to lead in this area was argued for:

*But what I am trying to express to you is you can communicate, because most of the government ministers have been in higher education as well, I don't mean that you are above us, I don't mean that, you are where education is concerned though, let's call it a fact because facts and facts. And you have a more political way of describing stuff. There is a political language*

44. [https://www.dochas.ie/assets/Files/Code\\_of\\_Conduct\\_on\\_Images\\_and\\_Messages.pdf](https://www.dochas.ie/assets/Files/Code_of_Conduct_on_Images_and_Messages.pdf)

Wider public and professional awareness in Ireland and internationally is also needed for an understanding of the terminology of people's paperwork. This came up specifically in relation to adoption-related paperwork, as discussed in Chapter 3.

People also talked about having to explain things over again in so many contexts or having difficulty with international authorities when it comes to producing birth certificates for marriage or passport purposes (for example):

*We have copies of Irish birth certs, that is not one. You have all those life events that people, someone getting married, someone going for a mortgage, there is all these points where this stuff keeps coming up and someone needs to know the right response*

As discussed in Section 4.4, people spoke about how important it was that any plans for education and awareness programmes are inclusive and representative of people with direct experience. The need to work together to find better terminology was emphasised.

A participative approach needs to be informed by awareness of the power differential that has existed, leading to people feeling silenced:

*I was silent for years and then I started hearing myself saying I have a voice now because for years people have told me what to do whereas now, I do, for myself, I say what I want to say and how I say it.*

Section 4.4 focuses on communication and reporting with an emphasis on 'truth telling'.

## 4.4 Communicate and report with focus on 'truth telling'

Truth can be overpowering hurtful damaging, yet it is the crux of the starting point for us all to deal with truth in order to recover and heal as society, culture as respected equal humans with traffic past hurts.

In comments about what needs to be done in the present and the future, many points have been made about how language and terminology is used in communication and reporting. This has already been covered to some extent in Chapter 3. An additional theme here relates to the importance of truth telling in the use of language and terminology, especially by those in authority, e.g., the government, professionals and the media.

With regard to the institutions and people's experiences within them, the issue of '*using language that reflects the truth*' was discussed in the context of how communication and reporting by various people in authority needed to change. As referred to in Chapter 3, there was a view that in some communications with government departments, '*they destroy it with their language*', and reference was made to an unwillingness to listen.

Truth telling by those in authority, especially government, was connected with the need for greater *respect*:

This importance of respect in communication generally, by not continuing to reinforce old concepts, was also highlighted:

With reference to false documentation and the truth about heritage, greater acknowledgement by the government of the impact of this is needed:

How issues are communicated and framed/ represented by the media has a major impact and media need to be '*on board*' in helping to change the type of language used in some reporting:

*Truth is important and I think coming out of today, if we have truth and respect, we have everything. But we don't have either of those from government as we stand*

*Respect of us as humans. And the other one would be not to continue and reinforce old concepts. To open their minds, to open their hearts as well, this is important, if you care enough about your fellow human to respect the differences in humans. And I do believe we can do that. We may never agree with each other, we may dislike what somebody else believes is okay or whatever. But in communications, in clear communications, if we can prioritise humans first then I think the rest will fall into place*

*The government have downplayed, as we kept saying the illegal adoptions. They knew records were falsified, they knew themselves, they have known it for at least... a couple of decades. But I think it is the continuous disregard for how that impacts on the community of survivors*

*It would be good if the media got on board with whatever glossary comes from this and stop referring to us as adopted children or that we were tracking down our families and that mother/birth mother situation. Even that would help, the language being used, it would help because it was problematic up to this point, we feel that we are being interminably infantilised and silenced by the language that has been used up to this point*

The need for comprehensive reporting (by media for example) was also emphasised:

*Really, they just need to put it all in a bag, get it out there and deal with it once and for all and give people who are survivors a chance to be able to move on. Because if you are going to get a new news story next week, in the same issue with a different slant, you know, we are back there again. And I often say to myself, no not again*

Not wanting to hear the truth was identified specifically in relation to the media with one person expressing the view that those deemed *safe* to speak to were most likely to be focused on within the media, on TV for example:

*They don't want to hear living witness, but they will welcome the children or the grandchildren who died before me. That is safe, it is very safe to speak to somebody who is relating to their grandmother or their mother or their aunt. It is almost like they are afraid of the truth. I am not sure*

Most people were very aware of the difficult balance between being clear about the words used and not causing additional offence by reusing words.

As one person said regarding public communication, getting the balance is challenging:

*We are looking for better words to describe it, I do think it is important that it isn't too nicey-nicey because it wasn't nice*

The view was expressed that a more honest history and transparent terminology to help heal so many wounds is needed:

*What is essential to help heal so many hidden wounds is transparent terminology. Clearer linguistics is description and non-misconstrued version of truth. Truth can be overpowering hurtful damaging, yet it is the crux of the starting point for us all to deal with truth in order to recover and heal as society, culture as respected equal humans with traffic past hurts*

Those writing policy and media reports need to be more specific and spell out the words but be sensitive in doing this.

It is not just about using the '*right words*' but also about acknowledging

*What was the language before.*

As referred to in earlier sections, trying to sanitise or be too careful about using terminology, thinking this is a *good thing*, can have the result of

*Doing more harm and sort of minimising something when they are highlighting how hard it was.*

Similarly for professionals such as social workers, the need for greater awareness of the impact of written communications is illustrated by the following quote reflecting on the impact of getting written communication about their identity:

Leading into Section 4.5, the way truth telling is facilitated and supported is essential. As one person said:

*The letters that came or the phone calls that came from a social worker to say to, you know, over 100 people you are not of the family that you think you are, you were adopted into a family. Imagine getting that letter for any of us today or getting a phone call and saying this is not your identity*

*I had spent my life living a lie and not telling people anything about my life. And I wanted to tell the truth before I popped my clogs, as they say, because to a certain extent me keeping it quiet adds that shame maybe to it. And other people take... how it is represented from me*

## 4.5 Ensure inclusive and collaborative representation of the views and experiences of those directly affected

*Anything that is written about us has to be written in reflection of us*

A number of people emphasised the need for a collaborative and inclusive approach to developing guidance around use of language. There are inter-related themes here that build on the findings already reported:

- Opportunities to talk and tell one's truth
- Listening
- Accountability and respect leading to action
- Greater empathy toward people's experiences
- Appreciation of complexity and avoidance of generalisation.



## 4.5.1 Opportunities to talk and tell one's truth

Creating the appropriate space and support for people affected to talk and tell their truth is key: 'giving voice to the experience'. While acknowledging that words and terminology of the of the past are no longer acceptable, people discussed the importance of this not becoming 'restrictive' for people who want to talk about their experience or too 'sanitised'.

Such sanitisation was connected with the ongoing cruelty of concealing the truth:

*The cruelty of all of this needs to really be exposed. And I think that sanitising by way of language is a method of concealing what truly happened*

It was noted that many people have not talked about their experiences directly with anyone at all, or with only a small number of people and

*They shouldn't have been left to deal with... a horrendous thing:*

*It is very rare that you get to sit and talk in this way and explain it to somebody, language matters and certain words are triggering because, and not just triggering because of the past trauma but they are still continuing harm for this exact same reason. So, I feel quite happy that I have been able to let that go*

Many people welcomed the opportunity to consult in this project. Some also considered it a responsibility to speak out to inform the next generation:

*And I am grateful for this opportunity as well. I never thought I could feel relaxed at an interview like this, so it is just having belief in myself and helping others to have a belief in themselves. That is my big motto now, to encourage and just hopefully give people a realisation that this world doesn't belong to us, we are only minding it for the next generation*

Another benefit of being able to talk about the issues and have the appropriate words and terminology to do that is that it 'normalises' the situation when someone listens:

*Nothing I say surprises people which to me is a great sense of, you know, they are just hearing my version.*

Connecting with findings from Chapter 3, many people have expressed the need to talk and tell the truth, 'even though difficult', in communication about personal experience like the fact that a child was conceived through incest and/or rape, the losses experienced by women, the challenges experienced by some when they did meet their children as adults and the impact this had on them and their family relationships. But fear about speaking out was also raised due to a concern about how people are going to react. For example, people talked about a 'fear of going through this complete rejection again by society' as a result of being open about experiences and circumstances.

And this was linked to a view that, because of societal attitudes, stigma and shame:

*Many survivors need to be very, very careful of how they expose themselves to the general public because the general public still don't accept us in being human beings, in ordinary human beings. They classify us, their perception of people like us*

This leads to a related theme of the importance of how people's stories are listened to and heard.

## 4.5.2 Listening

The need to consider all perspectives when listening to people's experiences was emphasised.

The comment below reminds us of the need to avoid over-generalisation, like assuming that a person who is adopted is not also concerned about *'the mothers who have lost children as well'*:

*I think we have a bit more of an understanding and people tend to listen to the stories of adoptees and how difficult and it is totally valid... but I think we also need to listen to the stories of the mothers who have lost children as well because their stories are important and their stories impact on adoptees as well and the way that they think about themselves*

And also, to recognise the lifelong impact on some people and the need to be able to speak openly about this:

*(It is) important that women can speak openly and honestly in their own language about what happened and what continues to happen. Because it is a lifelong experience, it is not over because the report came out. It is not over because research... it is never going to be over, never*

The disempowering impact of not being listened to is reflected below where a person speaks about their own feelings of utter powerlessness:

*I feel so utterly powerless. I am going to get emotional again here because that is probably the thing that has marked 30 years of this, is just that lack of any sense of power about something that is me*

And on the other hand, below is an example of the positive impact of situations where people have felt listened to by an organisation – in this case, Tusla.

*I think the people in Tusla then came out and interviewed my mother... it takes great satisfaction to know she was listened to in the end. And it gave her great satisfaction that she wasn't such a sinful person, and she wasn't such a bad person because that is what she always felt, she was tarnished, she was dirty, she was sinful*

### 4.5.3 Accountability and respect leading to action

Listening is not in itself sufficient, as expressed below. Accountability and respect need to go with listening, as seen in the two quotes below:

*We, our members, are still being discommoded and disrespected and dis-included. The language is often about we are listening to you, and this is what the Church has said, we are listening, but quite frankly we are sick of being listened to. We want to be truly respected by the state in recognition of the trauma that has been inflicted not just on one generation but on subsequent generations and it continues*

*It is just about respect, when it comes down to it, it is just about treating people with the bare minimum of respect, and we haven't had that afforded to us until this point believe it or not*

The need to stop '*speaking over us*' was expressed with a call for the government to follow through with actions from reports such as this one:

*You are speaking over us; in fact, it causes more problems. So, I would like that to happen. And I would like to actually do something with it and not just put it in a report and on a shelf to gather dust like all the other reports and... bills that they were going to bring. We are gone beyond patient at this stage, we want action, no more talk*

This leads on to the related theme of the need for greater empathy.

### 4.5.4 Greater empathy toward people's experiences

People emphasised that more empathy with people with direct lived experience is needed. '*Words are like weapons*', as quoted in Chapter 3.

Greater awareness of the pain caused by offensive and stigmatising words is needed:

*Words are important, words are important to survivors. And when I talk to survivors, they can talk to me and it is not an issue because they know that I am very direct in this way, and I can feel their pain because I had that pain and I know that they will never go outside me and talk specifically about what happened to them. And they carry this pain to their grave which is a shame when really it can alleviate the fact you have it*

There is also a need for greater empathy and understanding of the ‘*enormity and the lifelong impact*’ for many, already referred to in earlier findings:

*It is important there is support for women when talking about their situations... people don't really seem to have any understanding of the enormity and the lifelong impact of it, or it is not something that you get over or goes away. It is always going to be there, and it doesn't get any easier. It definitely got worse, definitely got worse when I met my son again, it became hugely complicated*

For some, this requires confidential and trustworthy trauma counselling that goes beyond the general HSE Helpline offered to those who spoke to the MBHC, for example.

#### 4.5.5 Appreciation of complexity and avoidance of generalisation

Leading on from the need for greater empathy is the need to find ways to capture the diversity of experience and the uniqueness of each individual experience better:

*It is my story and I have said it, I will always tell my own story, I don't need anybody else's, it is not my place*

This also links with truth telling, which includes the need to avoid imposing generalised assumptions onto people and instead appreciating the diversity of experiences:

*I am asking you, be very careful of the way you describe words or sentences to use to describe the average person's experience in the convent.*

Keeping with the importance of understanding diverse experiences, for some the desire is to be more present and future focused and to speak about what changes have happened including acknowledgement of where positive change has happened:

*We have moved on so much. I just find it amazing how much society as a whole has moved on. So that is wonderful for me to see. It is really. I am astounded to see how much we have moved on; it is great*

*There is a lot of wonderful stories out there that should be shared and people like myself maybe who are less able in some sense to be able to share them, I think they should be encouraged that it is a positive environment*

The present day was acknowledged as an easier context for some people who were in a ‘*good*’ place:

*I accept that and people have suffered challenges as a result and I kind of get that. But I think if we can... try and, not dress it up but make it as positive an outcome for everyone involved as possible and acknowledging the shortcomings that are there and evident and moving it on that way*

## 4.6 Summary

- Any actions developed, such as those summarised here, should ensure that people with direct experience are to the forefront to redress power imbalances and ensure that peoples varied and diverse experience, including negative and positive stories, are heard.
- With regard to developing an inclusive approach, more opportunities to talk and tell one's truth is needed. Listening is important but not enough on its own. There is a need for respectful engagement, accountability, and action in response to the learning from direct experience about terminology and language.
- There is a need to show greater empathy toward people's experiences, to be aware of how differently people have been affected and to be more careful about the use of labels and terminology that offends.
- Deliberate efforts are necessary to achieve a balance between speaking the truth and detailing experiences in a simpler and more clearly understood way. Sanitised language should be avoided, and greater attention paid to listening and acting in response to truth telling.
- Some people felt disempowered and let down by not being listened to by those in authority, especially within government. A lot of anger and frustration was expressed by people at the lack of listening, respect and most critically action on issues raised regarding use of certain terminologies.
- Ways to take cognisance of contested terminology and how it might be used differently need critical consideration and space to explore, where relevant, alternative terminologies. This needs to be inclusive and done in partnership with people with direct lived experience.
- Education and awareness raising are essential and need to be targeted at school and university curriculums, government and public service authorities, professionals and members of the media. It needs to be informed by critical understandings of stigmatising language, power and impact, and to be developed in an inclusive manner that recognises the complexities and avoids generalisation or re-labelling.
- A more honest and transparent terminology for talking about history and the ongoing impact of history in the present is needed. The public need to show more empathy, avoid the use of labels and show greater awareness of the lifelong impact of their experiences for some people.
- Those communicating via policy, professional practice and the media need to be cognisant of the impact of language and there needs to be greater sensitivity to its potential impact. Greater empathy and understanding of the lifelong impact for some people is needed.
- The impact of terminology in official documentation – such as the word 'illegitimate' in birth certificates – needs to be understood and addressed, and greater sensitivity is needed to the day-to-day impact of words and terms used on people's historical documents.

# 05

## Summary, Recommendations *and* Conclusion

“

It is my story and I have said it, I will always tell my own story, I don't need anybody else's, it is not my place

”

## 5.1 Introduction

Language, terminology and representation relating to people with direct experience of the institutions is complex. While guides and glossaries help to summarise and highlight some important words and terminology, they cannot always capture the contested nature of terms and the connection between language and terminology and how it is represented in different contexts. This study was not intended to establish whether language, terminology and representation have been offensive and stigmatising. It started with the knowledge that this was a known fact and the reason for this project, initiated by the Collaborative Forum, was to contribute to addressing this. Our findings and analysis have highlighted the extent, nature and impact of this.

As stated in the Collaborative Forum Report (2018, published 2022) the forum was established by Minister Katherine Zappone:

*‘To facilitate dialogue and action on issues of concern to former residents of the institutions which historically focused on services for unmarried mothers and their children.’ (p.4).*

In this chapter, ways in which this project can contribute to this dialogue and action are set out based on the findings of this research.

Many of the recommendations provided here could also inform the recommendation of the Collaborative Forum to establish an:

*‘Expert working group comprising of representatives of mothers and children formerly detained within the institutions, under investigation, their advocates, sociolinguists and historians’ (2018, published 2022, 55).*

As set out on the report, the object would be to deliver an:

*‘Approved template of terms and language’ and ‘stipulate the labels and language... which are regarded as offensive by survivors’ groups, or which are historically inaccurate, which need to be withdrawn from contemporary use’ (2022, 55).*



Specifically in the Collaborative Forum Report (2018, published 2022) a recommendation has been made that:

*‘Legislators, policy makers, social workers, historians, political and media commentators and those professions offering services to the former detainees of the various institutions would implement the following terminology suggestions in their style guides and would immediately cease to use the phrases/words shown in the attached tables, given the huge offence and hurt they cause.’ (2018, published 2022, 56).*

Three tables were provided to follow setting out preferred phrases for describing the institutions, people and for use by social workers, TUSLA, Adoption Authority of Ireland, policy makers, legislators, DCYA, commentators. These tables are provided in full in Appendix One.

This research also makes a contribution to the Forum recommendation for:

*‘research into the misuse of language across the institutions... to arrive at an accurate and era-specific glossary of terms’.*

Contribution to this glossary has already been made by the Collaborative Forum, as discussed in Chapter 2, and this research is intended to build on and contribute further to this wider recommendation of the Collaborative Forum. Another important source to consult is the Testimonials of those who contributed to the Confidential committee of the Mother and baby Home Commission report, discussed in Chapter Two.

Collectively, these three sources of knowledge, all informed by direct expertise by experience, should contribute significantly to action planning relating to Terminology, Language and Representation towards the eradication of use of stigmatising and offensive language and the creation of opportunities for dialogue and actions to inform context specific and sensitive use of terminology and language in the present and future. This study specifically offered the opportunity to focus on the complex issue of language and how it has been used to reinforce stigma and discrimination both in the past and present. Its contribution is based on the content analysis provided in Chapter 2 and the significant body of findings provided in Chapters 3 and 4. The findings have demonstrated the significance of a focus on stigma and the importance of testimony and evidence of injustice with regard to this.

**The findings also give expression to the critical themes identified in Chapter 2 in relation to:**

- Gendered and the patriarchal power of both the State and Church at different times.
- The importance of lived experience and testimony and the use of victim and survivor-led language.
- A commitment to truth telling and the challenging of epistemic and testimonial injustice.
- The link between the past and the present (history of the present) including a recognition of inter-generational trauma.
- The importance of implementing transitional justice measures to achieve historical justice.
- The importance of implementing approaches to education and learning for a range of stakeholders and the general public, led by those directly affected.

Our consultations with people with direct lived experience was the most significant aspect of this study. Findings from Chapter 3 and 4 have highlighted the importance of greater critical awareness of the stigmatising and offensive nature of much language use regarding the institutions and people’s experiences. Many actions are needed to address the ongoing stigmatising and offensive use of language within aspects of public sector, media and the general public. This project contributes to this, but as already discussed above, is only one of a number of actions and responses required.

**Overall, the research has shown:**

- The stigmatising effects of certain language, and the offence this has caused to some people directly impacted by the institutions discussed in this report.
- The power of social forces, actions by those in authority and general societal attitudes in reinforcing stigma and shame.
- How language and terminology is represented and misrepresented by media, government, religious orders, professionals, members of society and families.
- The interplay between individual experience and wider macro cultural, social and political factors (e.g., government, church, society); this is complex and the different power relations need to be highlighted.
- That it is not just the words and terms that affect people, but the context they are used in to represent someone's identity and experience.
- The lifelong and inter-generational impact of offensive language and terminology for many people.
- The need for a more historically just, accurate and honourable representation of people's experiences and identities.
- The importance of representing the diverse views of people directly affected by the institutions.
- The urgent need for actions by key stakeholders to prevent further stigmatisation and oppression through language, terminology and representation with regard to how the institutions, and those affected by them, are spoken about, discussed and written about.

During the research process, Section 2.1 of the Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022, was signed into law on 30 June 2022, which addresses some of the issues raised in this research. For example, it outlines the term '*mother*' as meaning, in relation to a person, the woman who gave birth to them. It uses the term adoptive parent as meaning 'in relation to an adopted person, a person who has adopted him or her, and "*adoptive father*" and "*adoptive mother*" shall be construed accordingly'. This amended legal platform offers a basis from which ongoing dialogue and action can be taken relating to the use of terminology specifically relating to mothers. The legislation also provides a full and clear right of access to birth certificates and birth and early life information for all who were adopted, boarded out, the subject of an illegal birth registration or who otherwise have questions in relation to their origins. It also allows for access to information by next of kin in certain circumstances.

The new law establishes a Contact Preference Register and a robust tracing service, as well as a range of new bespoke measures to address issues arising for people affected by illegal birth registration. While the implementation of the legislation should go some way to addressing critical issues raised in this report such as the use of terminology for *'mother'* and the processes relating to adoption information, a legal change in itself will not simply erase the complexity demonstrated in this report of how terminology is used, its impact, its endurance even when *'officially'* or *'legally'* not used (like *'unmarried'* or *'illegitimate'*).

This report also shows that while some words are universally disagreed with, others bring a variety of perspectives and part of the challenge for the present and the future is to create space for dialogue and actions arising from this. The legal changes have also come under considerable criticism for its limitations in relation to redress, especially the fact that it is unavailable for those who spent less than 6 months in an institution. This arbitrary decision about perceived impact of time versus experience denies the evidence provided in this report and highlighted by many activists and persons advocating for rights and interests of persons affected by the institutions and mis-recognises many peoples lived experiences and their life-long impact.

This chapter focuses on how approaches can be developed to inform how we use language and terminology in a more respectful and justice-oriented way in the present and into the future.

**In Section 5.2**, we summarise how the overall findings can inform the development of appropriate tools and approaches.

**In section 5.3**, we offer a practical toolkit and guidance to inform the ongoing work needed in relation to language, terminology and representation.

**In Section 5.4**, we briefly explore the limitations of the research and make suggestions about future studies and methodological approaches based on our learning.

This work is intended to contribute to a wider commitment to challenging and eliminating oppressive language and promoting ways to ensure more sensitive, empathic and respectful language and terminology. This is only one minor contribution to a much larger social issue in Ireland presently, which needs an in-depth policy, political and social response based on a wide range of social and historical justice measures.

## 5.2 Overview of Findings

This critical analysis is based on the insights, experiences and expertise of people directly affected by the institutions, as presented in the findings in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. This is informed by the analysis provided in Chapter 2. These findings inform a critical understanding of:

- The impact of stigmatising and offensive language in the past and the present.
- How language is used to represent and misrepresent.
- Actions to address the learning from the findings.

The Tables below provide a summary overview of themes discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

**Table 5.1: Experiences and views of people with direct lived experience  
(Summary of Chapter 3 themes)**

Main issue discussed	Details of language, terminology and representation discussed
Terminology relating to <i>'mother'</i>	Birth mother Adoptive mother Unmarried mother Expectant mother Natural mother Absence of birth father
Terminology relating to child/children	Illegitimate, illegitimacy, illegitimate child Bastard Adopted child/adopted baby/baby/adoptee
Reference to places	Home Mother and Baby Home County home Institution Resident
Reference to processes of adoption/being adopted	Forced adoption Illegal adoption Child trafficking Being chosen for adoption Seeking access to adoption birth certificate Accessing information
Use of term survivor/victim	Mixed views on use of terminology Importance of choice Need to explore alternative terminology
Language, terminology and representation by those with power to influence	Government Catholic church and Church of Ireland Mother and Baby Home Commission Report Officers working in adoption and other relevant professionals Family members General society Language used in the past and language used in the present

Table 5.2: What should be done (Summary of Chapter 4 themes)

Main themes	Details of language, terminology and representation discussed
Use simple, clear and respectful terminology	Make the language simpler and clearer Use terms differently or use different terms
Educate and raise awareness about language and terminology	Importance of education and awareness to inform present and future generations Specific need for education and awareness of government ministers, the media and others in positions of authority Awareness and education programmes need to be inclusive and representative of people with direct lived experience
Communicate and report with focus on truth telling	The importance of truth telling in use of language and terminology, especially by those in authority, government, professionals and the media
Ensure inclusive and collaborative representation of the views and experiences of those directly affected	Opportunities to talk and tell one's truth Listening Accountability and respect leading to action Greater empathy toward people's experience Appreciation of complexity and avoidance of generalisation

### 5.2.1 Learning from people with direct experience about the impact of stigmatising language

Chapter 3 and 4 have reported detailed insights, experiences and expertise from people with direct experience about the impact of stigmatising and offensive language in the past and the present. Participants gave extensive examples of stigmatising, inappropriate and offensive language or terminology in written and spoken communications now and in the past from those with power to influence. These included members of government, the church, the MBHC, officers working in adoption agencies and other relevant public officials, professionals, family members and general society.

All participants emphasised the importance of language, terminology and representation and discussed how impactful it can be and has been in their lives. The findings have highlighted the lack of awareness amongst many in positions of authority of the impact and importance of language and terminology.

**This included:**

- The use of inaccurate and inappropriate language in official processes and documentation.
- The need for greater sensitivity about the use of terms from the past no longer acceptable while at the same time not losing or forgetting this history.
- To avoid sanitising language in a way that denies an accurate record of what happened to people (e.g., not to use the general word 'abuse' rather than the specific word of *'rape'* where it applies).
- An individual's right to make their own choice about language and terms when talking about or describing their own experiences rather than have certain terminology imposed on them that they do not agree with (e.g., terminology to describe motherhood and childhood).
- Each person's right regarding how their own identity and identification are described, written and spoken about must be respected (e.g., with regard to persons personal records and information).
- The significance of the context within which language and terms are used and how this can impact on the perceived or intended meaning. (e.g., this context was described in detail showing a range of experiences, some positive but mostly negative, with regard to how language, terminology and representation impacted them in the past, and for many, to this day).

Some words were found to be offensive and/or stigmatising to many or all people. Other than instances in which individuals choose to identify with such words, all efforts need to be made to avoid reuse and reinforcement of such terminology. Other words were more contested and show the need for sensitivity and awareness of their impact on people. In the section that follows, we highlight some of the main terminology discussed making a distinction between words that were universally opposed and those that had more mixed views. Many other words are expressed in Chapters 3 and 4 and we recommend a full reading of these findings for persons taking forward the actions and recommendations of this work.

**Terminology Relating to 'Mother'**

*'Mother'* was one of the words most often referred to with most respondents providing a perspective on the word and related terms. *'Unmarried mother'* was universally rejected as unacceptable. The most discussed term was *'birth mother'* where findings show the strength, complexity and diversity of viewpoints on this terminology. Several people discussed how they disagreed with the term *'birth mother'* and found it extremely offensive. Many people were strongly opposed to its use and described in depth the negative impact of use of this term had on them. Many and varied reasons were associated with this viewpoint; some participants felt it denigrated the role of the mother who had given birth, others felt it offended adoptive mothers.

However, others agreed with the use of *'birth mother'* and thought it accurately described the circumstances of the child's birth. This view was partly influenced by whether the person was a mother or a person who was adopted as a child. However, a simple linear connection cannot be made from the findings. There were many different diverse individual viewpoints expressed. Many other associated terms including *'adoptive mother'* and *'natural mother'* were discussed. The lack of use of *'normative'* terminology like *'expectant mother'* and the absence any reference to *'birth'* fathers was also highlighted.

Overall, in these findings, the striking feature is the challenges involved in deciding on a single appropriate term which is also highlighted in Chapter 2. Use of any or all these terms show the complexity and depth of feelings involved and this in itself is an important message from the research. Some people advocated for the use of *'just mother'* without adding any other labels. As discussed earlier, even with legislative change that is now in place, where *'birth mother'* is referred to as (just) *'mother'*, further acknowledgement and efforts to respond to the intensity of feeling and identification with the terminology and identity relating to motherhood needs to be at the centre of any further work done relating to language, terminology and representation.

### Terminology relating to 'Child'/Children'

Most people also discussed the terms *'child'* and *'children'* and related terms. Many and varied opinions were expressed on these related terms again showing depth and breadth of perspective and feeling on these often-contentious terms. The impact of words such as *'illegitimate child/illegitimacy'*, *'bastard'*, *'adoptive child/adoptee'*, *'baby'* and *'unaccompanied child'* was emphasised by many participants. For example, a number of people talked about the unacceptability of the terms *'illegitimate child'*, *'illegitimate'* and *'illegitimacy'*. Nobody supported its usage, Although the word *'illegitimate'* was abolished under the Status of Children Act 1987, the findings show how the word continues to have a huge impact and effect. *'Illegitimate'*, *'illegitimate child/illegitimacy'*, were terms people still have to hear, read and deal with. This is especially in relation to sharing records, discussing birth details, managing access to adoption/care records. While the term itself is illegal, it still has a strong presence in the present day through official documentation particularly. *'Bastard'* was also discussed by many who found it offensive when used both for a specific meaning and as a general swear word.

Views on terminology of *'child'* are strongly connected with representation of motherhood. For example, in relation to *'unaccompanied child'*, the implicit assumption that their mother was not there for them denied the reality for some mothers of not having any choice about their child being adopted from them; not having voluntarily left their child adopted and for some, having spent considerable time with them before they were separated. The impact of being denied the identity and opportunity of motherhood is highlighted reflecting themes covered in Chapter 2 also. Overall, the findings relating to motherhood and childhood throughout this report echo the discussion in Chapter 2 about the power of gendered patriarchal assumptions regarding motherhood and childhood and echo the *'othering'* of motherhood outside of assumed traditional norms reinforced by the gendered and patriarchal power of Church and State. Marital status, social class and a question as to who was deemed respectable in Irish society remain at the core of how a number of groups of individuals were denied a different type of family.

### Terminology relating to Places and Processes

Many examples of language and terminology relating to places and processes which consultees found to be inaccurate representations of their situation and offensive when used relating to their experiences are also evident in the findings. Almost all respondents spoke about some dimension of the words *'home'* or *'Mother and Baby Home'*, *'County Home'*, *'resident'* and/or *'Institution'*. The majority of participants emphasised the misuse of the term *'home'* in this context and considered *'institution'* a more accurate description or, for some, a *'prison'*. Words like *'slavery'*, *'prisoners'*, *'inmates'* and *'lack of choice'* were used to depict better terminology to represent their situations in the institutions'. Another strong argument against use of the term *'home'* was the level of abuse and discrimination that occurred within the institutions especially towards children from Traveller backgrounds/Mincéir children, children from a different racial background, or children with intellectual or physical disabilities.

### Terminology Relating to processes of adoption/being adopted

Unacceptable or misused terminology in relation to adoption included '*forced adoption*', '*illegal adoption*', '*child trafficking*', '*being chosen for adoption*' was also discussed by many. Many varied points were made regarding language, terminology and representation in relation to the process of adoption. This included '*forced adoption*', '*illegal adoption*', '*child trafficking*', the process of being '*chosen*' for adoption, the difficulty in accessing information, getting inaccurate information, and the impact of this. How terminology was used to represent or misrepresent in relation to seeking access to adoption birth certificates and accessing information was also emphasised.

### Terminology relating to 'survivor/victim'

The majority of participants also discussed the use of the terms '*survivor*' or '*victim*' with a range of views expressed and the importance of viewing these terms as complex and loaded. Others identified the need to find different terminology. In this discussion, it was clear that the term may be deemed appropriate in some contexts or moments in time but not in others for different people. One alternative suggestion was to use the Gaelic term for the word '*separated*' which is '*scaradh*' deemed to refer to many of those with direct experience of institutions. The word '*citizen*' was also promoted as a more appropriate term. Overall participants felt strongly that people should be able to choose whatever term they decided best represented their experiences,

### Final Points on Stigmatising impact of Language and Terminology

In terms of general feelings of mothers and former children, '*shame*', '*blame*', '*guilt*', '*second-class citizen*' are just some of the many examples of words used to describe the stigmatising effect of language in so many different contexts as described in the findings. Some of the starkest language in the findings related to language used by people to describe how stigmatising language affected them. Developing and drawing on Goffman's theory of stigma, Whelan discusses the notion of '*spoiled identity*' and '*impression management*' whereby some people felt, and continue to feel, they have to hide or deny their identities because of the stigma attached.<sup>45</sup> This is referred to by Goffman as Dramaturgy theory. Overall, our findings demonstrate how stigmatising language has had the effect of disqualifying the individual from full social acceptance. It has '*othered*' them and they do not feel fully accepted or respected. It has also shown how throughout their lives, many people have had to wear masks, maintain secrecy through shame, and hide their own experiences.

It is important to also note though that in this study, not everyone expressed their experience of language and terminology in terms of stigma. Some expressed frustration, anger, disappointment, a sense of powerlessness and lack of trust, especially in relation to inactions or inappropriate actions taken by those with influence. Also, while most people referred to the negative effects of terminology and language, some had no problem with the language, welcomed the changes in language and terminology in the present (especially relating to younger generations), warned against being too politically correct, and/or wanted to emphasise the change that has happened over time.

45. Whelan, Joe. "Specters of Goffman: Impression Management in the Irish Welfare Space." *Journal of Applied Social Science* 15.1 (2021): 47-65



## 5.2.2 How language is used to represent and misrepresent

It is also clear from the findings and analysis that it is not just terminology and words that should be the focus but also how language was used to represent or misrepresent people, their identities and experiences. The findings show that while words themselves create meaning or impact, the broader context in which they are delivered can also make an impression or attach significance, whether positive or negative.

Specific concerns about misrepresentation in the findings related to the misrepresentation of people's identities through the use of offensive terminology to describe their status as mothers or children. For example, several participants discussed the experience of becoming and being a mother and how they were treated at this time, and the impact of being denied their motherhood. All the experiences reported were negative with a range of reasons attributed to this. Largely this was seen to be a result of their single status and the judgement associated with this. Also, findings relating to views on the processes associated with adoption and placement reflected concerns about how records were written, inaccurate information or inability to gain access to records. Another example of misrepresentation discussed by many was the exclusionary nature of the Redress Scheme, misrepresentation by the media, and inconsistency in the level of attention to particular issues.

Lack of representation from the perspective of those with lived experience is also strongly evidenced – this can be referred to in Fricker's words as '*testimonial injustice*' which is a '*direct discrimination*' against those speaking or trying to speak out.<sup>46</sup> The need to address the lack of adequate representation of the views, experiences and expertise of those with lived experience is very clear from this study. The importance of more just representation of personal narratives of people directly affected is demonstrated in both the consultation findings and the analysis and informs the principles suggested to follow.

With regard to representation and misrepresentation, the final section of Chapter 3 focused on Language, terminology and representation by those with power to influence. This section provided a detailed section of specific issues arising with terminology used in different contexts by Government, Catholic Church, Mother and Baby Home Commission Report, Officers working in adoption and other relevant professionals, Family members/society and the media. This section highlights especially how those with power to influence often misrepresented, disrespected and reinforced stigma by their use of language. For example, regarding members of Catholic Church, the degree of control and shaming of women and children was emphasised. Regarding government officials, much anger and frustration was expressed regarding the continue re-use of terminology despite many advocates and groups raising awareness about this with Government. Issues including power, lack of inclusion, not listening and reinforcing negative and offensive language were discussed.

Regarding those working as professionals and/or officers, negative and demeaning use of language by a range of personnel including doctors, nurses, social workers, social welfare officers, adoption officials was highlighted. Negative and stigmatising assumptions, attitudes and stereotypes traversed society, the church, family life and the wider institutions of health and education. Overall, the complexity of the relationship between individual and/or family behaviours and attitudes, and wider societal and cultural forces has been highlighted in the findings. Finally, mixed views were expressed by participants in relation to media reporting of experiences associated with the institutions and their treatment. Similar to the Church and society, generally participants found that some media portrayals could be patronising and again display a power imbalance.

46. Fricker, M. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford University Press: Oxford (2007).

Overall, the findings show the power of language to misrepresent women and children involved in the institutions through negative and stigmatising use of language and terminology. A recurring theme throughout is the power those in authority had to mis-represent people to such an extent that it affected not only their lives and engagement within relevant authorities connected to the institutions, but much more widely within families and society. These findings reinforce and add to extensive existing evidence pertaining to experiences in Ireland including that provided by the testimonials of persons as expressed in the Mother and Baby Home commission report especially the Confidential Committee Report and also in the Collaborative Forum Report (2018, published 2022).

### 5.2.3 Learning from people with direct experience about what should be done

Chapter 3 and 4 has provided insights, experiences and expertise from people with direct experience about what should be done in the present and future. A clear message is that any actions developed should ensure that people with direct experience are to the forefront. This is necessary to address the existing power imbalance, and ensure that varied and diverse experience, including negative and positive stories, are heard. To achieve a just and inclusive approach, the need for more opportunities to talk and tell one's truth was discussed. Participants pointed out that listening is important but not enough on its own. Respectful engagement, accountability and action in response to the learning from direct experience about terminology and language is essential.

As demonstrated in the findings, in all actions, there is a need for appreciation, empathy and respect for complexity and diversity and an avoidance of generalisation to allow everyone's story to be heard and respected. Even in our relatively small sample, the range of experience, expertise and viewpoints expressed emphasises the offence caused by stereotyping and generalisation of people's experiences.

There is a need to be more critically aware of how differently people have been affected and to be more careful about use of labels and terminology that offend. This is especially important for those in power and with direct responsibility in relation to supporting people or developing policies relating to the institutions and those affected by them. Deliberate efforts are necessary to achieve a balance between speaking the truth and detailing experiences in a simpler and more clearly understood way. In doing this, sanitised language should be avoided. The impact of terminology in written documentation – such as the word '*illegitimate*' in birth certificates – also needs to be highlighted. Overall, there is a need for greater sensitivity to the day-to-day impact for people in relation to the words and terms on their historical documents.

The fact that so many people felt disempowered and let down by not being listened to by those in authority, especially within government and public sector, needs to be addressed through dialogues and actions. People expressed a lot of anger and frustration at the lack of listening, respect and action in relation to issues raised regarding use of certain terminologies. Some have found speaking out empowering and many we spoke to were engaged in various levels of advocacy and support networks from local to national contexts.

The findings show the importance of creating opportunities to explore how contested terminology is addressed and where relevant, alternative terminologies promoted. This needs to be inclusive, representative and in partnership with people with direct lived experience. Education and awareness raising are essential and need to be targeted at school and university curriculums, government and public service authorities, professionals and members of the media. This needs to be informed by critical understandings of stigmatising language, power and impact. This needs to be developed in an inclusive manner that recognises the complexities and avoids generalisation or re-labelling.

Participants emphasised the need for a more honest and transparent terminology to talk about history and the ongoing impact of history in the present was discussed. Those communicating via policy, professional practice and media need to be cognisant of the impact of language.

Greater empathy and understanding of the lifelong impact for some people is needed.

Also, the need for the general public to show more empathy, avoid the use of labels and have greater awareness of the lifelong impact their experiences have had for some people was highlighted.

In sum, because many words are contested, specific efforts are necessary to give greater attention to different viewpoints and experiences about use of language and terminology. This needs to be done through inclusive and collaborative approaches to find ways forward particularly surrounding terminology regarding *'mothers'* and *'children'*.

In his 2020 article on the Irish State, historical child abuse and transitional justice, Gallen calls for:

*'a profound, widespread and systemic reform of how the state engages with victim-survivors, a reform embracing the challenge of transitioning from a society that marginalised those deemed 'other' to one that meaningfully recognises, protects, and promotes the dignity and value of all'.<sup>47</sup>*

In her discussion of strategies which could developed to *'embrace survivors' justice needs'*, Patricia Lundy argues that a fundamental principle is:

*'the full participation of survivors from an early stage in the development, design, and implementation of justice responses'.*

She goes on to argue that the development of a strategy that could:

*'embrace survivors' justice needs and empower genuine participation (beyond giving testimony) would require political will, resources and a paradigm shift toward a victim-led approach to historical institutional abuse'.<sup>48</sup>*

As both Gallen and Lundy make clear, there are many challenges involved in developing a transitional justice approach, and the principles are not always easily translated into practice. At present, the Irish response is not yet framed in the context of transitional justice, and thus the scope of this project and its potential are limited by this constraint. But the broad ambition toward such an approach, and the principles that derive from it have underpinned this study. We found in our consultations that many of the actions and approaches proposed by people with direct experience were in line with this broad position. This is reflected in the emphasis of the importance of 'truth telling' and the centrality of an inclusive, respectful and participative partnership with people with direct experience.

47. Gallen, James. "Transitional Justice and Ireland's Legacy of Historical Abuse." *Éire-Ireland* (St. Paul) 55.1-2 (2020), p. 67

48. Lundy, Patricia. "I Just Want Justice": The Impact of Historical Institutional Child-Abuse Inquiries from the Survivor's Perspective." *Éire-Ireland* (St. Paul) 55.1-2 (2020), p. 278

## 5.3 A practical toolkit, guidance and suggestions for eliminating hurtful and stigmatising historical and current labels

### Section 1: Underpinning values and principles for any Guidance to be developed

- All future actions to address language, terminology and representation need to be inclusive and participative, with those directly affected having a leadership role.
- Commitment to a human rights approach, mutual respect, promotion of citizenship rights and entitlements directed by the principles of transitional justice.
- Be critically aware of power differentials, abuse of power and the need for affirmative actions to rebalance power towards those most directly affected.
- Privilege the views and experiences of all people with direct experiences of the institutions and address the power barriers that prevent this.
- Commit to use of terminology that accurately reflects people's reality and experience taking into account diversity and ensuring equal representation of different voices.
- Respect the complexity and diversity of language and challenge generalisations such as assuming all mothers or all former children have agreed viewpoints on language, terminology and representation.
- Avoid and challenge sanitised references to something being '*of its time*' to embrace a more critical understanding of the ongoing impact of history in the present.
- Commitment to every individual's right to make their own choice about language and terms when talking about or describing their own experiences.
- Commitment to every individual's right to say how their own identity and identification is written and spoken about.
- Accept that the State, the Church and those in authority have significant influence over terminology and language to decide whether to ignore views expressed here or proactively promote education and awareness to ensure more sensitive and informed use of terminology.
- All relevant stakeholders take responsibility for affirmative action to directly address the ongoing stigmatising effect of certain language and terminology in present and future practice, written and spoken.
- Avoid and/or be sensitive in the use of terminology known to offend some people
- Engage in constructive dialogue about terminology that is contested and create meaningful forums and supports for this to occur.
- Recognise and take measures to respond to intergenerational trauma and the process of trauma as lifelong: as one individual highlighted 'people don't really seem to have any understanding of the enormity and the lifelong impact'.
- Commit to avoiding language that has been specifically identified as offensive in this and/or other relevant research and reports.
- Commit to reading the full report, especially the findings from people consulted, to get a full appreciation of the range of terminology and language found to be stigmatising and suggestions for alternative terminologies.

## Section 2: Key actions based on the underpinning values and principles

- Enable everyone who wants to tell their story to be heard and respected.
- Carefully listen to, acknowledge and believe those who are directly affected.
- Show empathy toward people's experiences, be aware of how differently people have been affected and actively avoid and challenge use of labels and terminology that offend.
- While being sensitive to the impact of terminology, do not sanitise it either in a way that misrecognises people's experiences.
- Provide appropriate space and opportunity to listen, respond, act and believe those directly affected by the institutions.
- Acknowledge diversity of opinion and contestation, particularly surrounding the terminology specified below.
- Explicitly recognise the power of language, its impact and reach.
- Explicitly avoid and challenge offensive terminology.
- Create an action plan to deal with contested terminology.
- Make the language simpler and clearer, recognising this is not about people's inability to understand. It is about who holds the power to decide what language is appropriate and acceptable.
- Depending on what power you have, and what position you have as a key stakeholder, develop a specific action plan informed by the suggested actions below.

## Section 3: Specific actions for key stakeholders

Our findings have informed specific actions that can be taken by the range of stakeholders including politicians and policy makers, professionals and others in authority, media, Catholic Church representatives, academics, researchers and members of the public that contribute to the recommendations of the Collaborative Forum referred to above.

### Suggested actions for politicians and policy makers – with leadership from the DCEDIY

- Develop a communication strategy that is cognisant of the impact of stigmatising language.
- Develop a code of conduct in relation to communication similar to that provided by the Dóchas Centre (Dóchas, 2006). This is based on three principles:
  - ◊ Respect for the dignity of the people concerned;
  - ◊ Belief in the equality of all people;
  - ◊ Acceptance of the need to promote fairness, solidarity and justice.
- Develop explicit guidance, policy and legislation on appropriate use of language and terminology.
- Consider legal routes for people to have the word 'illegitimate' removed from their birth certificates, as it carries no legal status and continues to cause offence.
- Develop participative approaches to promote more appropriate use of language in the present and into the future. Make particular efforts to ensure people with direct experience can lead in partnership and in collaboration.
- Ensure language and terminology are mainstreamed as a core, not separate, aspect of an overall action plan for redress and memorialisation.
- Educate and develop tools and training to ensure greater consciousness of language and its power.
- Provide adequate funding to support the development of education and training within schools, universities, professional training programmes and public awareness programmes.
- Develop a public awareness campaign to ensure that appropriate language is the present and the future in all aspects of Irish life.
- Develop detailed guidance for the use of the term '*mother*' within the legislation to emphasise and recognise the complexity and depth of feeling associated with terminology that accurately and respectfully describes people's diverse experiences of parenthood and childhood.

### Suggested actions for professionals and those in authority

- Ensure communication via policy and professional practice is cognisant of the impact of language used.
- Develop training and Continuing Professional Development in relation to:
  - ◊ understanding impact of history on the present and the diversity of people's experience;
  - ◊ the power of language and its stigmatising effects;
  - ◊ critical reflection on how professionals and those in authority have contributed to and reinforced misrepresentation of people's identities and experiences in their practice;
  - ◊ how historical terminology, e.g., in written documents, can be handled more sensitively in the present.
- Develop guidance on the use of terminology and language relating to mothers and children to inform how people's motherhood, childhood and/or personal history is talked about and recorded by professionals and others in authority.
- Develop participative approaches with people with direct experience to work together to understand the offensive impact of language.
- Actively promote more appropriate use of language in the present and future especially when dealing with historical experiences, records and information in present day practices.

### Suggested actions for the media

- Ensure communication via media is cognisant of the impact of language, and that greater sensitivity to its potential impact is shown.
- Develop participative approaches with people with direct experience to work together to understand the offensive impact of language and to consider how to promote more appropriate language in the present and future especially when dealing with historical records and information.
- Use the learning from the findings to frame the complexities relating to language, terminology and representation and avoid over-generalisation.
- Avoid and actively challenge the reinforcement of stereotyping and stigmatisation in reporting on these matters.
- Update media Codes of Practice (e.g., the Press Council of Ireland) to provide guidance on language and terminology referring to the past and its use in the present specifically relating to reporting on the issues relating to the Institutions and people's experiences of them as discussed in this report.

### Suggested actions for those responsible for the institutions including Church orders and leaders

- Openly acknowledge and address the extensive evidence of the harmful, stigmatising and offensive nature of language and terminology used by people working with institutions led by religious orders.
- Fully acknowledge the ongoing impact of this in the present day and take active steps to address this.
- Take responsibility for the coercive power of the Church in reinforcing negative and stigmatising language and shaming women and their children which has come through so strongly in participants' accounts of their experiences.
- Develop a strategy for learning and educating within Churches about the impact of the words, language and terms used, including raising awareness of power relations and the lifelong impact for some people directly affected.
- Commit to a more open and collaborative way to reflect on and learn from the past and show greater empathy and accountability.

### Suggested actions for academics and others researching the history of institutions

- Commit to participative and collaborative approaches to further research through advocacy for structures, support and resources to ensure the principle and value of participation and inclusion can be fully achieved.
- Engage in critical debate and discussion about power of language, words, terminology and representation and acknowledge the role of academia in relation to this.
- Actively avoid reusing offensive language in new historical research and publications relating to the institutions and people with direct experience of these, and where it must be used, ensure that the context is made clear.
- Show greater awareness of the way academic writing and communication is presented, to give audiences more clarity about who the communication refers to.
- Incorporate the learning from this project into teaching across disciplines in relation to history and use of language and terminology past, present and future.

### Suggested actions for the public

- Improve how we use language and terminology based on the learning from this report.
- Show greater empathy and understanding at individual/family level and wider community and societal levels.
- Develop greater awareness and acceptance of diversity and context to avoid further over-generalisation and stigmatisation.
- Recognise that history is very much the present for some people and that it is not acceptable to simply deny it, say it was '*of its time*', or fail to critically engage with and advocate for those who continue to be negatively affected in the present day.
- Develop greater public effort to avoid patronising assumptions and to appreciate that those directly affected are citizens from diverse backgrounds with different viewpoints, some not affected at all, some more affected in the past, and others who continue to be very much affected.
- Be more critically aware that use of terminology as general swearwords, like '*bastard*', causes great offence to some people, whether this is intended or not.
- Be more sensitive to language, terminology and representation when discussing aspects of the former institutions and the experiences of those directly affected.
- Challenge ongoing generalisations, stereotypes and prejudices that reinforce stigma through use of language, terminology and representation.

## 5.4 Limitations of Research and methodological learning

In Chapter 2 we discussed some of the barriers and challenges in conducting this research. Some can be articulated as learning for future studies including the development of different methodologies as summarised below:

- One of the greatest barriers is the historical legacy of neglect of many issues relating to the former institutions, which has made focusing on the discrete matter of language, terminology and representation more difficult.
- The research took place within a complex context where many other major issues of concern regarding the institutions in question, and those who experienced them, remain unaddressed or inadequately resolved.
- The fact that the report of the Collaborative Forum, an instigator to this research when produced in 2018, was only published in November 2022 created a barrier to use of this work at an earlier stage of the research.
- This was a small-scale study showing a diversity of unique experiences. Larger studies and wider public consultations would add to the learning from this study.
- The narrative methodology was effective in ensuring people told their stories in their own words and were not pressurised to speak about anything they did not raise themselves. But to explore the challenging contexts of language, terminology and representation further and in more depth, a more structured and in-depth interview – using careful ethically informed approaches – may also be suitable.
- We acknowledge that there are many other aspects of analysis that could apply in this work, such as more in-depth sociolinguistic analysis.
- Whatever method is used, it should be explicitly designed as collaborative and participative from the outset. This requires careful thought about power imbalance and the creation of advisory structures that ensure full support for all members.



## 5.5 Conclusion

We can conclude that there has been much important and significant learning from this report. We also recognise that much more needs to be done. Many people have advocated for decades relating to matters pertaining to the institutions including the ‘Mother and Baby Homes’, ‘County homes’ and ‘related Institutions’ including the need to address and correct the offensive use of terminology relating to people’s identities, experiences and contexts. The Collaborative Forum are particularly acknowledged for calling for such a project and for the work they have done to influence change including their highlighting of the urgency of work in relation to language, terminology and representation. In their report in 2022, they have already set in train a programme of work to inform a glossary of terminology.

This was not offered as prescriptive by the forum. Instead, as explained in the report it was argued that:

*‘We are not the arbitrators of approved terminology, but we offer these as examples of some of the worst phrases in use and hope that our suggested alternatives will encourage consideration of the hurt and damage that language can cause. (2018, published in 2022, 56).*

Likewise, our learning from this study is also not intended to be prescriptive but instead to contribute to the ongoing dialogue and action so urgently needed.

We recognise that this study offers only one set of perspectives that further informs how stigmatising and offensive language can be replaced by a respectful and inclusive approach to terminology that challenges misrepresentation and recognises diversity. But this perspective, we believe, offers much that can be built upon. We wish to end with our sincere thanks again to those who came forward to speak with us in the consultations. You have contributed significantly to our critical awareness of language, terminology and representation and have helped to build on work already completed and inform future ongoing work in this area.

We end this report with a heightened and urgent awareness of ours and other’s obligations and responsibility to continue to act upon the learning from those who are expert through their experience, working from the values and principles so vividly articulated by those we spoke to and which we have sought to summarise.

*...I know it is not about putting anything right because it can’t be put right and there can’t be justice for that either, but when there are still ongoing harms, that is the real issue, the harm needs to stop, and I don’t think it has*

# Appendices

# Appendix 1

Excerpt from Collaborative Forum Report  
(2018, published 2022) – preferred phrases (pp. 57 – 63).

Preferred phrases describing institutions.

Preferred Phrase	Definition	No longer to be used
Institution	An organisation founded for a religious, educational or social purpose – in the case of Ireland to isolate and detain unmarried mothers and/or their children; to isolate and detain the destitute elderly and infirm.	Home
Mother & Child Institutions	Isolated, walled institutions designed to contain unmarried mothers, their children (up to age 8+) plus unaccompanied children	Mother & Baby Homes
County Institutions	The successors to the 19th Century Poor Houses dating from the Poor Reform Act of 1906, tasked with “looking after” the “destitute elderly & infirm”, but in practice housed other marginalised groups such as unmarried mothers and their children <sup>49</sup>	County Homes
Bethany Institution	The original Bethany Institution was based in Blackhall Place, Dublin 7 but relocated to Rathgar Road from 1934 until its closure in 1972. It aimed to accommodate women and girls of the protestant faith who were on remand or unmarried and pregnant <sup>50</sup>	Bethany Home
Protestant Institutions	These were smaller outfits, run along the same institutional lines as the Bethany Institution, by members of various Protestant organisations e.g. Westbank Orphanage; Ms. Carr’s Flatlets, Bird’s Nests institutions.	Protestant Homes

49. See Donnacha Sean Lucey “The End of the Irish Poor Law”, Welfare and Healthcare Reform in revolutionary and independent Ireland. Manchester University Press, 2015

50. See Niall Meehan “Church and State and the Bethany Home.” [http://www.academia.edu/320793/Church\\_and\\_State\\_and\\_The\\_Bethany\\_Home](http://www.academia.edu/320793/Church_and_State_and_The_Bethany_Home)

## Preferred phrases describing people.

Preferred Phrase	Definition	No longer to be used
Natural Mother <sup>51</sup>	An unmarried mother (in rare cases, also possibly a married, widowed or separated woman), whose child was forcibly separated from her because of her marital status	Birth Mother Biological mother Tummy Mummy
Natural Father	An unmarried father	Birth Father Biological Father
Non-marital child	A child born outside of marriage, detained with its unmarried mother or unaccompanied within a Mother and Child Institution before being boarded out, sent to an Industrial School or taken for adoption	Illegitimate; Bastard
Extra-marital child	A child born to a married, widowed or separated woman, whose former husband was not the natural father of the child; detained with its mother or unaccompanied within a Mother and Child Institution before being boarded out, sent to an Industrial School or taken for adoption	Illegitimate; Bastard
Natural Sister/ Brother	The full or half sibling of a non-marital or extra-marital child	Birth Sister; Birth Brother
Family of Origin	The natural family of the non-marital child before s/he was boarded out, sent to an Industrial School or taken for adoption	Birth Family
Unaccompanied child	A non-marital or extra-marital child detained alone in a Mother and Child Institution due to his/her mother's marital status	Baby
Confinees/ Detainees	Expectant mothers; unmarried women and girls who had previously given birth; their children and unaccompanied children detained without leave in various institutions due to the mothers' marital status or to the children's status at birth	Resident
Mothers, their children and unaccompanied children	Expectant mothers; unmarried women and girls who had previously given birth; their children detained without leave in various institutions due to the mothers' marital status or to the children's status at birth	Residents
Survivors	Those mothers or now adult children, who survived a brutal and neglectful detention whilst detained in one of the incarcerative institutions described above	Former residents

51. Although the Mother and Child Institutions were designed to accommodate unmarried mothers and their children, it is known that some married women, including separated and widowed women were also detained due to the social stigma of having an extra-marital child or a child she could not afford

<b>Victims</b>	Those people harmed, injured, or killed as a result of crimes committed within the various institutions including but not limited to enforced disappearance; forced labour; illegal vaccine trials; forced adoption; illegal adoption, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, withholding of medical treatment	Former residents
<b>Living witnesses</b>	Those individuals with a direct memory of their experiences within the institutions	Former residents
<b>Repeat victims</b>	Those unmarried mothers who were detained more than once in an institution because of a subsequent pregnancy	Repeat offenders
<b>Indentured child labourer</b>	Unaccompanied child detainees in Mother & Children Institutions, County Institutions and Bethany Institutions were deprived of the care of their families of origin by the State in favour of leasing them out to local businesses/ farmers as indentured labourers	Boarded out children
<b>Mixed Race</b>	Children of mixed ethnicity	Negroid; half cast, coloured
<b>Adopted Adult</b>	The vast majority of people adopted – informally, legally or illegally are now adults	Adoptee, adopted child

## Preferred phrases to be used by social workers; TUSLA; Adoption Authority of Ireland; policy makers; legislators; DCYA; commentators.

People who have been boarded out, informally adopted, illegally adopted, legally adopted, their mothers, their siblings and other relatives (repeatedly but without success) complain about the stigmatising language they feel is cynically used to diminish the injuries they have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of the State's and various church's approach to unmarried mothers and their children.

Below are examples of those phrases and the alternatives suggested by the victims

Preferred Phrase	Definition	No longer to be used
Forced Adoption	The State sanctioned and financed practice of separating non-marital children from their unmarried mothers, based merely on the mother's marital status	Adoption
Family Destruction	The State sanctioned and financed practice of separating non-marital children from their mothers, based merely on the mother's marital status	Adoption Placement
Taken for adoption	Those children born in Mother and Child Institutions, County Institutions and in State Maternity Hospitals to unmarried mothers had their children taken from them for Forced Adoption. Children were forcibly signed over to the religious heads of various orders or adoption agencies, who processed them as they saw fit	Given up for adoption; abandoned
Daughter/Son	The child forcibly taken from its mother for the purposes of adoption	"Third party"; social workers in TUSLA have used this phrase to describe a mother's child to her
Establishing one's identity	The act of completing one's family tree in order to establish one's identity; this does not always mean that contact with family members is sought	Tracing
Remove completely	The 2016 "Adoption Information and Tracing Bill" suggests that various parties (including social workers) can block the release of an adopted person's birth cert "information" from them by citing compelling reasons, such as "danger of death" to the natural mother	Danger of Death





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# RESPECT

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#### UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre

Institute for Lifecourse and Society,  
Upper Newcastle Road, University of Galway,  
Galway, Ireland

Telephone: +353 91 495 398

Email: [cfrc@universityofgalway.ie](mailto:cfrc@universityofgalway.ie)

Web: <https://www.universityofgalway.ie/cfrc/>

Twitter: [@UNESCO\\_CFRC](https://twitter.com/UNESCO_CFRC)



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