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On the 11th May 1999 the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, on behalf of the Irish Government, issued the following apology to victims of child abuse;

“On behalf of the State and of all citizens of the State, the Government wishes to make a sincere and long overdue apology to the victims of childhood abuse for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue”.

(Ryan (2009) 1. p.1.1.01)
Methodology

- Michel Foucault's framework. (1926-1984) (Punishment of the body, punishment of the soul)
- Focus on 4 Industrial and Reformatory Schools.
- Identification of emerging and sub themes.
- Systematic literature review on emerging themes and contemporary issues.
- Conclusions.
- Formulation of “Relentless Suffering” 10 chapter report in 2011.
The Ryan Report (2009)

- The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (2009)
- Established to inquire into Child Abuse in Industrial and Reformatory Schools in Ireland from 1914-2000.
- The Industrial School system, which commenced in 1868, was intended to cater for children who were neglected, orphaned or abandoned. By 1875 there were 50 Industrial Schools in Ireland, rising to 71 in number by 1898.
The Children’s Act 1908 stated the following:

“The expression ‘Industrial School’ means a school for the industrial training of children, in which children are lodged, clothed and fed, as well as taught”

(Ryan 2009; 1.p.37;2.12) The Children's Act of 1908 was the main plank of legislation for vulnerable children in Ireland, replaced by the Child Care Act (1991) and amended as the Children's Act (2001)
Criteria for entry to Industrial and Reformatory Schools.

- Being needy or destitute and committed by the district courts.
- Committing a criminal offence and committed by the district courts.
- Non attendance at school and committed by the district courts.
- Committal by a local health authority.
- Voluntary committal.

( Morgan:Ryan 2009;5.p.11)
Their Voices

Some examples of the lived experiences of children and young people in Industrial and Reformatory schools in Ireland.
Sexual Abuse

- A witness recalled the first time he was raped: “Sex, my introduction to sex was in the back kitchen of Letterfrack, jammed up against a boiler, getting my leg burnt and getting raped by Br Dax (pseudonym)”

- (Ryan 2009.1.p341: 8.354)
Evidence given by a Christian Brother to the Commission

… “I remember teaching a lesson, it was English reading and it was about a family, and I discovered a boy in the class who didn't understand what the word “mother” meant. “brother” or “sister”, It meant nothing to him. I was taken aback by that”

(Ryan 2009.1.p.193:7.559)
Many of the witnesses spoke of their experiences of rosary bead making during their evidence to the Commission.

“….you had little pliers and wire and the wire was constantly digging into your skin and you just couldn’t work fast enough to reach the quotas every day, We were lined up every night, those who hadn’t reached the quotas were beaten” (Ryan 2009.2.p.294;7.253)
A male witness alleged that he was sexually abused by older girls in Goldenbridge when he was 8 years of age and described his experience. “I was put sitting on the edge of the bed and the covers were pulled down and one of the girls was exposed. I was told to feel her private parts, then I was told to feel another one of the women or girls private parts. My memory is this happening on more than one occasion”

(Ryan 2009.2.p.298; 7.286)
Infants were also in the population of children behind the gates of the Industrial Schools.
Goldenbridge

- The girls in institutions where there were infants and young children often were left to supervise and care for them without supervision by an adult. These duties included night time feeding, washing and feeding and resulted in missed schooling. "I used to have to look after the babies. I used to have to wash them, feed them and clean them, get them ready for bed. They were like little babies...you learned; the older girls would show you. I was about 11 or 12...there were about 6 or 7 babies’

(Ryan 2009.3.p.168; 9.152)
Witness account
(Ryan 2009.3.p 41:5.32)

“The nuns told me my mother was dead, they said “do you see that star up there, well she is up there" Then a few years ago, I got a phone call to say my mother was dead… (had just died)…I'm in such shock, I can't believe it. I asked some questions and then said “It's got to be my mother” if only I had been given a chance to see her, to say goodbye and to say ‘look mum I understand and I forgive”
Emerging Themes (King 2011)

Power

Powerlessness

Relentless Suffering
Emerging Themes (King 2011)

- Power
- Powerlessness
- Relentless Suffering
Summary

- From 1936-1970 170,000 children / young people entered 50 Industrial Schools.
- Their average length of stay was seven years.
- From 1936-1970 2,000-3,000 children / young people were committed to 3 Reformatory schools.
- By 1970 1,740 children remained in such institutions.

(Ryan 2009;1.p.41;3.02.3.04)
References


Visual images by Mark Monahan (2011) Trinity College, Dublin