

## Chapter 6

# Everyday life experiences of male witnesses in Schools

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- 6.01** This chapter of the Report refers to the information provided by the 413 male witnesses in relation to their everyday life experiences in Schools over a period of 67 years between 1922 and 1989. Witnesses reported improvements in the physical structure and the facilities in the majority of Schools during the relevant period.
- 6.02** There were many consistencies in the reports heard from male witnesses in relation to all the Schools over almost seven decades. Witnesses reported that staff in junior boys' Schools were almost exclusively female, both religious and lay, with the exception of workmen in the gardens and farms attached to some Schools and convents. Senior boys' Schools employed few female staff in the period prior to the 1970s with the exception of a small number of Schools where lay nurses and ancillary staff worked in the infirmaries, laundries, kitchens and religious staff houses.
- 6.03** The daily routine was described as commencing with an early morning call by bell for Mass, followed by breakfast in a communal refectory. Witnesses referred to a regimented day where activities were controlled by bell ringing and whistle blowing. The main meal was in the middle of the day with evening meal provided at approximately 5:30pm. Witnesses reported going to bed at various times between 7:30pm and 9pm. Bedtimes changed with other aspects of care provision in the post-1960s period. Witnesses from different Schools gave varying accounts of how their day was structured and what they did in the afternoons, early evenings and at weekends. A mixture of work and recreation was uniformly reported with different emphasis on each in different Schools and over different decades.
- 6.04** Clothing was made on site in many boys' Schools prior to the 1960s, and in some instances including the 1960s. Witnesses described being allocated a set of clothes when they were admitted: knee-length tweed trousers and jacket, woollen jumper and knee socks, nightshirt and boots. The clothes were identified as theirs by number. Underwear was confined to underpants and was not provided in all Schools. Most Schools provided 'Sunday suits' for Sundays and special occasions. Winter coats and wet weather clothing were rarely reported as were caps, gloves or scarves. Witnesses reported that the material used for the trousers and jackets was rough tweed, made in the weaving shops, and was uncomfortable, especially when wet. Boots were described as heavy, with steel caps or hob nails to minimise wear and tear. The Committee heard evidence of improvements in the standard of clothing provided and of more appropriate clothing for winter being provided from the mid-1970s. Some witnesses from that period had new clothes bought for them which were for their own use and not shared with other residents.
- 6.05** Personal hygiene was reported as attended to in a regimented manner using shared facilities with little or no toiletries provided before 1970. Increased provision of soap, toothbrushes, towels, toilet paper, combs and hot water were reported during the 1970s and 1980s. Witnesses

consistently described sleeping in large dormitories without any privacy or space for personal possessions until individual cubicles and smaller shared bedrooms were introduced from the late 1960s in many Schools.

- 6.06 Silence was commonly enforced in the dormitories, during mealtimes and while working. As described, silence was expected among the residents throughout most of the working day, including at times during recreation periods.

## Work

- 6.07 Work was presented by the majority of witnesses as a central feature of daily life in the Schools from a young age. Witnesses from junior Schools reported having daily domestic chores, while those from senior Schools described manual work as an integral part of their day, particularly from early adolescence. The types of work described included both indoor and outdoor work in the weaving, shoemaking, tailoring, and carpentry workshops, kitchens, staff residences, farmyards, fields and bogs, as well as day labouring for local farmers and businesses. The Committee heard reports from most witnesses about their experience of being engaged in often heavy, manual work as children for or on behalf of the Schools.

- 6.08 There were 245 reports of farm work that involved herding and milking cows, cleaning sheds, tending cattle, pigs and poultry, saving hay, picking potatoes, collecting and spreading seaweed as fertiliser, felling trees, cutting wood, cutting and saving turf on the bog and picking stones. Use of machinery on the farms was minimal and long hours were worked in all weather.

*From arrival at 12 I was assigned to the farm, I was afraid of animals. It was a big farm, only one lay worker and an elderly Brother. Boys did everything, milked morning and evening, herded animals, dropped potatoes, sowed sugar beet, turnips, hay making and harvesting. On a rote basis, we had to stay up all night with pigs who were due a litter, it was hard work, particularly in winter when no extra clothing was provided.*

- 6.09 The trade workshops were a feature of the School system in the period prior to the 1970s. There were 206 specific accounts of time spent in one or more different trade areas, referred to as 'shops'. The most commonly reported trades were tailoring and shoemaking. The work in these settings was believed to be predominantly related to meeting the institutions' needs for clothing, boots and leather straps.

*In the shoe shop you started off as a polisher, you polished the boots for everyone. Then you became a repairer, there was top, a piece of a tyre cut to save it ...(the boot)... when you were playing football. There was ...number... lads doing them. Then there was the "generals" who made the shoes and then there was the head shoe boy.*



*Everyone worked from day one. I was assigned to tailoring at 13 ...(years of age)... instead of school. I was not able to read and write. The tailoring was initially confined to making and mending boys' clothing.*

- 6.10 Associated trade activities were darning, mending, knitting and weaving, although accounts of these tasks were less often heard. While 27 witnesses reported developing skills in a trade that subsequently led to gainful employment most reported that the skills they learned were redundant when they were discharged as the weaving, tailoring and shoemaking trades had been largely mechanised. Other witnesses reported being so badly affected by the abuse they experienced in the context of work in the trade shops that they avoided similar work when they were discharged.

**6.11** The kitchens were another area where residents worked, both within the School and in the adjacent religious congregation houses. There were 78 separate reports of working in the kitchens. This work was more generally favoured as it provided access to extra food and warmth. The work described included washing and peeling potatoes, carrying heavy pots, scrubbing pots, pans and floors. Kitchen work was described as undertaken by one or two residents at a time and as more isolated than other work areas. The less attractive component of kitchen work for male witnesses was that the kitchens were frequently the domain of a single Brother, several of whom were reported as particularly harsh and abusive.

**6.12** Witnesses generally reported that they had little choice about the type of work they were appointed to do:

*Eventually I got a job in the shoe repair shop where I was not welcomed as I was left handed, I hated working there.*

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*I was told after 2 months "it is time to start earning your keep". I was put to work in the Brothers' kitchen where I remained during my stay in School. This meant I missed Mass as I had to prepare for breakfast for the Brothers and missed school as I was needed in their kitchen.*

**6.13** There were 21 witness reports relating to discharges prior to 1970 of being directly involved in commercial enterprises for the School, e.g. making Rosary beads for sale, chopping and selling firewood, tailoring, making furniture and working for local farmers and businesses.

**6.14** Changes were reported to have been introduced in the 1970s and 1980s that facilitated more choice, including paid work outside the institution, e.g. the local creamery, factory or hotel during the summer holidays and less work on farms attached to the Schools.

**6.15** There were few accounts of domestic staff being employed in the institutions; witnesses reported that the residents generally did all the housekeeping work, with the exception of the laundry. Local women were reported to be employed by some institutions, mainly in this area, but had little contact with the residents. Witnesses discharged in the late 1970s and 1980s reported the main type of work undertaken to be routine household chores that some Schools used as an opportunity for residents to earn points that could be exchanged for privileges such as home leave and outings.

## Food

**6.16** Food was generally served in large refectories designated for residents with members of religious and lay staff taking their meals in a separate area. Most witnesses commented on the provision of food, which was generally regarded as inadequate. The standard breakfast diet described was salted porridge with or without bread and tea or cocoa. The main meal was consistently described as boiled potatoes with vegetables and some meat. The evening meal was often bread and dripping, or jam and tea or cocoa.

*I worked for a time in the kitchen and used to see ...(what was provided)... vegetables came from packets, once a week mince, fish once a week. All meat was boiled and streaky. We were constantly hungry and we robbed each others food, you just grabbed. Youngsters who were weak suffered.*

**6.17** Witnesses reported that there was little or no access to extra food except what might have been obtained opportunistically by residents working in kitchens or the farmyards. Witnesses reported that cake and biscuits, jelly, ice cream and lemonade were at times provided on special occasions. Fruit was reported as an exceptional treat, most often at Christmas when witnesses

reported receiving an orange. Many witnesses reported that the only eggs provided were boiled eggs on Easter Sunday.

- 6.18** In more recent years witnesses commented that sausages, chips, eggs, cheese, fish fingers, cornflakes and milk puddings became part of the regular diet. Varying accounts were given of both the quantity and quality of the food provided with improvements noted in both areas in the reports relating to the 1970s and later.

## Play and recreation

- 6.19** The principal recreational pursuits reported by 226 witnesses in the decades prior to the 1970s were Gaelic sports, particularly hurling and football. A small number of Schools were reported to have been actively involved in competitions and games often involved travelling to outside venues. This was an attraction in itself as the games provided an opportunity to interact with 'outsiders', and on occasion provided access to better food. The external competitions were believed by witnesses to provide some protection and relief from physical abuse.

- 6.20** Apart from participation in organised Gaelic team sports the most frequent reports regarding recreation were of witnesses playing in the yard and making their own entertainment. In addition, handball and boxing were reported as recreational activities by 131 witnesses and a small number competed nationally. Many witnesses discharged before the mid-1960s reported that performing drill movements and gymnastics for long periods was a common activity and was feared by those who were not well co-ordinated, due to the harsh nature of some 'drill masters'.

- 6.21** Indoor recreation facilities and activities were less frequently reported but included table tennis, card and board games, reading and listening to the radio in recreation halls. Witnesses described the limited availability of recreational equipment and resources. One hundred and eleven (111) witnesses reported they enjoyed attending films both within the Schools and in later years at local cinemas. Sixty-four (64) witnesses reported that long regimented walks on Sundays in silence '*in line like a crocodile*' were less than enjoyable. Routes described by witnesses were up to 10 miles long.

- 6.22** Six (6) senior Schools were reported to have had bands and the Committee heard 40 witness accounts of playing in the band as a recreational activity. As with some competitive sports being a band member provided opportunities to travel around the country, including trips to race meetings, regattas and other local sporting events and, in some instances, overseas. Band membership and associated activities were regarded as a privilege and provided welcome respite from the institution. As with other activities that had a public component, band performances also provided opportunities for extra food. It was reported that these privileges were counter-balanced by exceptional demands on their performance, appearance and general behaviour.

- 6.23** In a small number of Schools summer holidays and trips to the seaside were a popular break from the everyday routine of life. Thirty three (33) witnesses from Schools situated near the sea, lakes or rivers described being taken swimming and also for holidays at the seaside.

*Recreation all depended on the Brother, if he had an interest. There was one Brother who loved swimming. He brought us all the time, you could go down and dive in.*

- 6.24** Witnesses reported improvements in recreational facilities and equipment after the 1960s. These changes included the development of external links to local communities, involvement in local clubs, outings to the cinema, new playground equipment, increased availability of library facilities and more access to television and radio. A further change reported in the 1980s was of

residents being divided into small groups with individual facilities for play and recreation in each group.

## Education

- 6.25** Classroom education at primary level was described as mainly provided on-site in the Schools prior to the 1970s with classrooms either located within the same buildings or on the grounds of the Schools. In the majority of boys Schools reported to the Committee primary level classrooms were segregated and not attended by children from the local area. Teaching staff were described as both religious and lay and predominantly male. Witnesses discharged up to and during the 1960s reported that generally their classroom education finished when they were 14 years old with a few accounts heard of witnesses attending either technical or secondary school during that period.
- 6.26** All 413 male witnesses reported attending primary school for some time during their admission to the Schools. Eighty five (85) witnesses reported passing their Primary Certificate examinations. An additional 65 witnesses reported attending technical or secondary schools in the local area, mainly since the 1970s. Twenty five (25) of these witnesses received their Group, Intermediate or Leaving Certificates. Twenty (20) witnesses described the positive value of the education and training they received.
- 6.27** Prior to the 1970s, classroom attendance in a number of Schools was described as generally confined to the morning period followed by afternoons spent working in the trade workshops or on the farms. A number of witnesses reported being removed from the classroom to work full-time. Many witnesses stated that the main emphasis in the School was on manual work for the institution with minimal emphasis on academic education apart from Irish and religion:
- Education was not important. You were moved from class to class; the main aim was to get you working at 14. The teachers ran a strict regime rather than provide knowledge.*
- 6.28** Many witnesses described their time in the classroom as dominated by fear, the anticipation of being abused and that the classrooms were frightening places.
- 6.29** Witnesses reported that there was little assistance for residents who found school work difficult. There were a small number of exceptions where accounts were heard of special arrangements being made to meet the residents' particular educational needs. In a small number of Schools remedial help was provided for residents who had learning difficulties.
- 6.30** Witnesses discharged during and since the 1970s more often reported that their education continued beyond the primary school level. Those who attended secondary and technical schools in the local area appreciated the benefit this opportunity allowed to have contact with the outside world. They also reported a consequent reduction of abuse and bullying from both staff and residents in the Schools. A small number of witnesses reported being sent out of the institution to mainstream boarding schools and were encouraged to do the Leaving Certificate examinations and to enrol in higher education colleges.
- 6.31** The majority of witnesses reported finishing their classroom education by the time they were 14 years old. The following table shows the reported school leaving age of male witnesses:

**Table 16: Reported School Leaving Age – Male Industrial and Reformatory Schools**

<b>Reported school leaving age</b>	<b>Number of witnesses</b>
Under 10 years	2
10–12 years	29
13–14 years	260
15–16 years	100
Over 16 years	17
Not available	5
<b>Total Witnesses</b>	<b>413</b>

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

- 6.32** Three hundred and thirty seven (337) witnesses (82%) reported that they left school when they were aged 14 years or over. There were 71 witnesses who reported that their classroom education finished before the official school leaving age and five for whom there was no information available.

## Religion

- 6.33** The practice of religious observance was reported to have brought comfort and sanctuary to some witnesses and hurt to others. There were 381 accounts of regular attendance at Mass in the 26 Schools that were reported to the Committee, with daily Mass more commonly reported by witnesses discharged before the mid-1970s. Daily Rosary, evening benediction and prayers were described as part of the regular timetable by 187 witnesses. Attendance at Mass was either within the institution or at the local parish church where witnesses generally reported being segregated from local people: *'We sat in our own corner'*; *'We had to attend side chapel in the local parish church'*.
- 6.34** Catechism was reported by many witnesses to have been taught *'vigorously'* in the classroom to the detriment of other lessons.
- 6.35** Clergy from local parishes and elsewhere were reported to undertake a chaplaincy role in some Schools. Witnesses reported that these members of the clergy said Mass, heard Confessions and officiated at various religious ceremonies during the year. It was generally believed that they did not otherwise have a formal role in the operation of the Schools.

## Health and medical care

- 6.36** Provision for the assessment and treatment of residents' health needs was inconsistent as reported among the Schools. Routine medical inspections were reported in most of the Schools and varied from cursory to regular and comprehensive. There were 327 witness reports of some attention and treatment from health professionals being available to residents. Ninety seven (97) witnesses reported having no recollection of receiving any medical or other attention regarding their health.
- 6.37** Witnesses reported being assessed and treated for normal childhood accidental injuries and illnesses as well as physical injuries resulting from assault while resident in the Schools. Medical inspections, on-site infirmaries, immunisation and dental treatment were reported by many witnesses, as indicated in the following table:

**Table 17: Types of Healthcare Reported – Male Industrial and Reformatory Schools**

<b>Healthcare</b>	<b>Number of reports</b>
Infirmary available	228
Nurse available	185
Doctor attendance	115
Hospital attendance	106
Dental care	65
Immunisation	53
Medical inspection	29

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

- 6.38** Two hundred and twenty eight (228) witnesses reported that there was an on-site infirmary in the School for the provision of medical care and attention. The infirmaries were described as varying in size from a designated 10-bed unit to a space under the stairs. Infirmaries were generally described as the domain of either male or female religious staff and, in a few instances, lay female nurses. In some Schools the infirmary was reported to be a room where the nurse kept supplies of medicines, including: iodine, bandages and cod liver oil. Residents were sent there for attention and returned to bed in their dormitory.
- 6.39** There were 185 witness reports of availability of nursing care by religious and lay staff in the Schools' infirmaries. Witnesses reported being sent to the nurse for treatment of ailments including: cuts, bruises, scabies, lice, ringworm, impetigo, boils and abscesses, colds, flu, and rectal prolapse. Childhood injuries, both accidental and non-accidental, were reportedly treated by the nurse and included broken bones, lacerations, and eye, ear and head injuries. Witnesses stated that there was a limited range of non-prescribed medication available and described cod liver oil, castor oil, 'Black Jack' and iodine being regularly used.
- 6.40** One hundred and fifteen (115) witnesses reported being seen by local doctors while in the School and 53 witnesses reported being immunised by either a doctor or a School nurse.
- 6.41** The Committee heard 106 witness accounts of hospital attendance while in the Schools for the treatment of accidental and non-accidental injuries in addition to normal childhood conditions such as tonsillitis, appendicitis, tuberculosis, and eye and ear infections.
- 6.42** Nursing staff were reported to be employed in some Schools at different times and the presence of staff described as 'nurses' was recalled by witnesses in other Schools. Witnesses reported that unqualified staff carried out many treatments such as lancing boils, treating ringworm and other infections, lacerations and injuries without medical advice.
- 6.43** There were 65 reports of dental treatment, which were reported by witnesses to be mainly extractions. Dentists were reported to have made routine visits to some Schools and in other instances witnesses reported attending local dentists. Among those discharged before the 1970s a number recalled having their teeth extracted without anaesthesia.

## **Inspections**

- 6.44** The Committee heard 145 reports of inspectors visiting the Schools. Witnesses were not always clear which government department the inspectors represented. There were 82 reports of government inspectors visiting the Schools who, it was believed, were primarily concerned with the condition of the physical surroundings. There were 29 reports of classroom inspectors, often referred to as the Cigire. Witnesses believed that these inspectors were concerned with aspects

of their education and did not specifically address the individual care and welfare needs of the residents. Witnesses also reported that doctors visited for routine medical inspections.

- 6.45** Ninety seven (97) witnesses reported that the general conditions for their care and welfare were temporarily improved for inspections, with extra food, toothbrushes, schoolbooks, better clothes and bedding reported as available for the duration of the inspector's visits. Fifty four (54) witnesses reported that the Schools were thoroughly cleaned in preparation and 32 witnesses described being dressed in their 'Sunday best' or 'going-out' clothes when inspectors came. Twenty eight (28) witnesses reported that bedspreads were put on each bed prior to visits from a Department of Education or other inspector and were removed when the inspector left. Witnesses recalled that the leather straps were put away and residents were warned beforehand to be on their best behaviour and told that the inspector was '*the teacher's boss*'. Forty one (41) witnesses stated that they were coached in advance about what they could and could not say when the inspectors came. Sixty four (64) witnesses stated that residents were not spoken to directly and that staff were always present.

*I have no memory of anything really being inspected, we were never spoken to, we wore our Sunday clothes and had extra food. We saw them at a distance, you would see them for a moment standing and looking, they were always accompanied, you would be asked to recite a poem for them in class.*

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*We always knew when inspectors were coming as white quilts and pillows were put on the beds. The inspectors walked around with the Brothers, they didn't speak to the boys.*

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*The food was always very good with chops or other recognisable meat, vegetable and dessert for the inspection. Boys were coached by Br ...X (Resident Manager)... to say it was like this all the time, the inspector spoke to boys, who followed the instruction with Br ...X... present and did not complain.*

## Official visitors and others

- 6.46** In addition to routine inspections there were 34 witness accounts of official visitors, including a President, Taoisigh, government ministers, bishops, judges, foreign dignitaries and officials from the Gaelic Athletic Association, politicians, celebrities and superiors of religious orders. There were a further 19 witness reports of visits by priests to examine catechism in the classroom and to conduct retreats. Other visitors included parish priests, professionals and local personalities. Preparations were reported to have been undertaken prior to all visits. A number of Schools were reported to have had official visiting Sundays, usually on a monthly basis, for residents' parents and relatives.

- 6.47** A small number of witnesses reported being specially dressed up and shown to visiting couples understood to be prospective adoptive and foster parents, some of whom selected witnesses and/or their siblings to adopt or foster.

*Once a month on visiting Sunday the place was cleaned, we all wore our best clothes, the parents were conducted around, by the priests and Brothers who monitored the visits, we were all warned to say nothing.*

## Volunteer workers and visitors

- 6.48** Witnesses reported that volunteer workers and visitors were involved with many Schools in what they believed to be an informal capacity to assist with the residents' care and recreation



activities. Witnesses reported that these volunteers were generally described as members of the public, mostly male, both lay and religious. They assisted with regular activities such as homework and sport. Some befriended particular residents and took them out of the School either for day outings or overnight trips and holidays. Witnesses also reported regular visits to the Schools by clergy and Brothers who were not part of the day-to-day School staff or did not appear to have any specific role or function within the School. In addition there were reports from a small number of Schools where visiting Brothers and novices relieved care staff during summer holidays.

## Arrangements for discharge

- 6.49** Many witnesses reported that they experienced considerable adjustment difficulties when they were discharged, including feeling abandoned and unable to cope with the transition from institutional care. Their isolation from the outside world while residents of the Schools, the rural location of a number of Schools and the loss of family contact during admission was described repeatedly by witnesses. Many witnesses stated that the only preparation for their discharge was being told of their discharge date. As 232 male witnesses had been in residential care for between six and 18 years, many without any family contact, the experience of leaving the Schools was particularly traumatic. These witnesses reported that they had almost no experience of everyday life outside an institution and no experience of being on their own prior to being discharged.
- 6.50** Male witnesses discharged before 1970 gave accounts of being given a new suit of clothes for their departure, sometimes referred to as '*the liberty suit*'. Witnesses who worked in the tailoring shops reported making their own discharge suit and in so doing were alerted to the fact of their imminent release.
- 6.51** Witnesses reported a variety of arrangements made for their discharge from the Schools. One hundred and ten (110) male witnesses reported that they were discharged home to their families. Where parental contact had been maintained with witnesses while they were in the School the transition home was more often reported to have been positive. Having a supportive family network generally contributed to subsequent stability.
- (Brothers)... they more or less told you before you left ...named School... that if you talked about any of the crap that was going on there ... I would be brought back for another 2 years. That I could be kept there until I was 18, for 2 more years. So when I was out I was straight on the B and I boat ...(to England).... My mother gave me the money. I went to the brother ...(witness's sibling).... I couldn't read and write, I couldn't fill out a form to try for a job. I worked on the buildings.*
- 6.52** One hundred and six (106) witnesses reported that some arrangements were made for their aftercare in the form of placement in employment, with lodgings provided in many instances. The majority of the witnesses who reported being discharged to employers as live-in labourers had spent most of their lives in an institution and/or reported that they had no known family contacts. A small number of witnesses noted that the intervention of the Agricultural Inspectors was helpful in obtaining 'back' wages and having social welfare contributions credited where they had been denied.
- 6.53** There were 12 witness accounts of being visited following discharge by lay or religious staff from the School and of receiving valued assistance from the religious staff when they got into difficulties. In some situations where work placements broke down alternative positions were found, mostly in better circumstances.

- 6.54** There were a number of witness reports of employment placements that provided enduring support. Several witnesses spoke with feeling about the families they worked for who, in the words of one witness, '*showed me the only kindness I had ever known*'. Another witness stated:
- I didn't get much preparation leaving the School at 16. The family I went to helped me, they stood me in great stead and I am still in touch with them.*
- 6.55** Thirty two (32) witnesses from a small number of Schools reported receiving some post-discharge support during the 1970s and 1980s. For example, 10 witnesses reported that accommodation in a hostel was arranged for them when they were discharged and was described as '*a halfway house for institutionalised boys trying to find their way. Conditions there were excellent*'. Another hostel was reported as being helpful through its policy of not charging residents from Schools for their accommodation until they found employment. However, while witness reports of being discharged from Schools since the 1970s indicated improvements in discharge planning, and that some preparation for independent living and follow-up were provided, such improvements were inconsistent.
- 6.56** A number of witnesses presented the Committee with copies of correspondence between their parents, Resident Managers, gardaí and Department of Education officials relating to their early release. Eight (8) witnesses reported being granted early release to their parents following such parental intervention.
- 6.57** The aspects of everyday life described in this chapter provided the context in which witnesses experienced the abuse reported in the following chapter.