

Chapter 13

Special needs schools and residential services

13.01 This chapter of the Confidential Committee Report presents witness evidence of abuse in schools and residential services¹ providing care and education for children with special needs as a result of learning, physical, visual, hearing or speech impairment and disability. Some of the schools also had facilities for children to attend from home on a daily basis. A number of the services were formerly known as schools for the mentally handicapped and for deaf and blind children.

13.02 Arrangements were made by the Committee to ensure that each witness was afforded the best possible opportunity to place their experiences on record. Witnesses could be accompanied by a companion or professional person to provide support and any necessary assistance during their hearings. Some intellectually disabled witnesses chose to be accompanied by social workers, care workers or other professionals, without whose presence and support a number of witnesses would otherwise have been unable to attend. Commissioners and witnesses were facilitated during some of the hearings by Irish Sign Language (ISL) and British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters. As reflected in the Report, a number of intellectually disabled witnesses attended to give evidence regarding specific incidents of abuse and gave no further information about their current lives, personal history or everyday experience in the facilities where they resided as children. A small number of hearings were conducted in or close to the witnesses' place of residence.

Witnesses

13.03 The Committee heard 59 reports of abuse from 58 witnesses, 39 male and 19 female, in relation to their time in 14 different special needs schools and residential services, which were all managed by religious Congregations. One witness reported abuse in two different special needs schools. Nine (9) of the special needs day and residential facilities were gender segregated and five were mixed gender facilities for at least some period of their operation.

- Thirty seven (37) witnesses reported abuse in day and residential schools and services for intellectually disabled children.
- Nineteen (19) witnesses reported abuse in day and residential schools and services for children with sensory impairments².
- Two (2) witnesses reported abuse in schools and services for children with physical disabilities.

¹ The terms schools, services and facilities are used interchangeably throughout this chapter of the Report and signify the complex range of services provided.

² The principal sensory impairments referred to are those of sight and hearing.

- 13.04** In addition to the accounts of abuse in special needs schools and services that are summarised below, four witnesses also reported abuse in Industrial Schools, foster care and a Children's Home, the details of which are covered in the relevant chapters of this Report.
- 13.05** This Chapter refers to a 58-year period, with the earliest admission to out-of-home care being in 1935 and the latest year of discharge being 1993.
- 13.06** Ten (10) of the schools and services were located in Irish cities and the other four were in rural and provincial locations.

Social and demographic profile of witnesses

- 13.07** Varying levels of detail were provided to the Committee by witnesses regarding their background and social circumstances. A number of witnesses reported knowing very little about their family of origin or the circumstances of their admission to the schools and services. Details regarding family of origin, place of birth, current residence and other aspects of the witnesses' lives are, therefore, not always complete. They are differentiated by gender when there are notable differences. The age profile of witnesses at the time of their hearing is shown in the following table:

Table 54: Age Range of Witnesses at Time of Hearing – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Age range	Males	Females	Total witnesses
20–29 years	2	1	3
30–39 years	2	2	4
40–49 years	10	8	18
50–59 years	15	7	22
60–69 years	9	1	10
70+ years	1	0	1
Total	39	19	58

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

- 13.08** The majority of witnesses were aged less than 60 years at the time of their hearing. Compared with the age profile of witnesses reporting abuse in other settings a notably high proportion of witnesses reporting abuse in special needs facilities were in their 20s and 30s.
- 13.09** Thirteen (13) of those who reported being abused in special needs services were discharged during the 1980s and 1990s. A further 36 witnesses were discharged during the 1960s and 1970s. The remaining nine witnesses were discharged prior to 1960.
- 13.10** Thirty five (35) witnesses, 29 male and six female, reported being born in three Irish counties. The remaining 22 witnesses were born in 12 other Irish counties, the UK and elsewhere. There was no information available regarding the birth place of one witness. At the time of their hearings 52 witnesses were living in Ireland and six were residing in the UK.
- 13.11** Forty three (43) witnesses, 27 male and 16 female, reported being born into two-parent families. Eight (8) witnesses were the children of single mothers, and six witnesses did not know or did not provide information about their parents' marital status, as outlined in the following table:

Table 55: Marital Status of Witnesses' Parents at Time of Birth – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Marital status of parents	Males	Females	Total witnesses
Married	27	16	43
Single	7	1	8
Widowed	0	1	1
Unavailable	5	1	6
Totals	39	19	58

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

- 13.12** The occupational status of witnesses' parents at the time of their admission was not always reported to the Committee, and was at times unknown. Table 3 indicates the information provided by witnesses regarding their parents' occupational status:³

Table 56: Occupational Status of Witnesses' Parents – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Occupational status	Males	Females	Total witnesses
Professional worker	0	1	1
Managerial and technical	0	1	1
Non-manual	4	3	7
Skilled manual	5	2	7
Semi-skilled	4	1	5
Unskilled	14	8	22
Unavailable	12	3	15
Total	39	19	58

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

- 13.13** Fifteen (15) witnesses did not report or did not know their parents' occupational status at the time of their admission, further reflecting the fact that many of the witnesses had little or no information about their family of origin.
- 13.14** Forty two (42) witnesses reported having siblings, including 17 who had brothers and sisters in out-of-home care, some of whom were in special needs schools as a result of disability. Altogether the 17 witnesses reported having 38 siblings in out-of-home care. Thirty three (33) witnesses were from families of five or more children and nine witnesses reported having between one and three siblings. Twelve (12) witnesses provided no detailed information regarding their family of origin and four witnesses reported that they had no siblings.

Circumstances of admission

- 13.15** The admission circumstances reported by the 58 witnesses varied but were principally related to the perceived educational and treatment needs of children with specific impairments or disabilities, for example hearing and sight impairments and learning disabilities.

³ The categorisation is based on Census 2002, Volume 6 Occupations, Appendix 2, Definitions – Labour Force. In two-parent households the father's occupation was recorded and in other instances the occupational status of the sole parent was recorded, in so far as it was known.

13.16 Thirty seven (37) witnesses reported being placed in a special needs school from their family home following assessment of their particular learning or treatment needs. Six (6) of those admissions were reported to have occurred in the context of family breakdown occasioned by parental death, serious illness or marital separation. Six (6) of the 37 witnesses reported that they had started attending local primary schools where their learning difficulties were first recognised. In most instances the witnesses were the only members of their family to be placed in an institution.

13.17 The other 21 witnesses reported being placed in special needs schools for a variety of reasons, 17 had more than one previous placement and had been in residential facilities since early childhood. Eight (8) of these 17 witnesses reported that they were born to single mothers and had been in residential institutions since birth, five of whom were admitted to special needs services from Industrial Schools or Children's Homes and three were admitted from mother and baby homes or county homes. Six (6) witnesses did not know or were unable to report on the circumstances that led to their placement in residential facilities; in three instances accompanying care workers confirmed that nothing was known and no records were available regarding the witnesses' early life history.

13.18 The following table indicates the age at which witnesses were first admitted to out-of-home care including admissions to other facilities prior to a special needs service:

Table 57: Age on First Admission to Out-of-home Care – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Age of first admission	Males	Females	Total witnesses
0–5 years	15	13	28
6–10 years	14	2	16
11–15 years	9	3	12
16+ years	1	1	2
Total	39	19	58

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

13.19 Twenty eight (28) witnesses reported being admitted to a residential facility for the first time before the age of six years and 30 witnesses reported being in residential facilities for more than 10 years, as the next table indicates:

Table 58: Length of Stay in Out-of-home Care – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Number of years in care	Males	Females	Total witnesses
0–5 years	6	1	7
6–10 years	16	5	21
11–15 years	11	12	23
16+ years	6	1	7
Total	39	19	58

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

13.20 The length of time witnesses reported spending in school and residential services varied. On the basis of information provided this variation could be understood to have been influenced by the

witnesses' age when first admitted, the different reasons for their admission and their family circumstances. The average length of stay in residential care reported by the witnesses from special needs schools and services was 11 years. It is important to note that not all of the time indicated was spent in special needs facilities, it also included time spent in mother and baby homes, children's homes and other residential services.

- 13.21** While more than half of the witnesses were admitted to the schools and residential services from their family homes, and had living relatives, they reported having spent most of their childhoods in institutions. The majority of specialist facilities and treatment services were centrally located during the period covered by this Report. At the time it was common for both children and adults from rural and provincial areas to travel long distances for specialist treatment. Care and residential services were, consequently, a practical necessity. As the following table shows, almost half of the witnesses reported being over 18 years of age when they were discharged from those residential facilities:

Table 59: Age when Discharged from Out-of-home Care – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Age when discharged	Males	Females	Total witnesses
<15 years	8	1	9
16 years	6	2	8
17 years	6	7	13
18+ years	19	9	28
Total	39	19	58

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

- 13.22** Twenty five (25) of the 28 witnesses who reported being discharged when they were over 18 years of age also reported having remained in supported accommodation placements for most of their adult lives. In many instances these accommodation facilities were provided by the same organisations who managed the special needs services where the witnesses had been admitted as children. The accounts of abuse included in this report occurred when the witness was under 18 years of age, in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

Record of abuse

- 13.23** The nature and extent of abuse reported by witnesses varied, and reports included descriptions of single incidents of abuse and accounts of multiple experiences of being abused over long periods of time.
- 13.24** Most of the facilities were the subject of more than one witness report:
- Nine (9) special needs facilities were each the subject of 4–12 reports, totalling 54 reports.
 - Five (5) facilities were each the subject of a single report.
- 13.25** Forty one (41) witnesses reported abuse over a 35-year period prior to 1970 and the remaining 17 witnesses gave evidence in relation to their admissions throughout the 1970s, 1980s and the early 1990s.

- 13.26 Witnesses reported the four abuse types as defined by the Acts⁴: physical and sexual abuse, neglect and emotional abuse. Abuse reports included single incidents of abuse and combinations of abuse as follows:
- Forty eight (48) witnesses reported physical abuse.
 - Thirty six (36) witnesses reported sexual abuse.
 - Twenty five (25) witnesses reported neglect.
 - Twenty four (24) witnesses reported emotional abuse.

13.27 Combinations of the four abuse types were reported in the order of frequency shown below:

Table 60: Abuse Types and Combinations – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Abuse types and combinations	Number of reports
Physical and sexual	13
Physical, neglect and emotional	11
Physical, sexual, neglect and emotional	9
Physical	9
Sexual	9
Physical, sexual and neglect	2
Physical, sexual and emotional	2
Physical and neglect	1
Physical and emotional	1
Sexual and neglect	1
Neglect and emotional	1
Total	59

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

13.28 As shown, the most frequently reported abuse combination was physical and sexual abuse, of which there were 13 reports. There were a further nine reports of physical and sexual abuse combined with emotional abuse and neglect. In all, 26 witnesses reported being both physically and sexually abused in facilities for children with special needs.

Physical abuse

*The wilful, reckless or negligent infliction of physical injury on, or failure to prevent such injury to, the child.*⁵

13.29 This section describes reports of physical abuse, non-accidental injury and lack of protection from such abuse given in evidence by witnesses to the Committee. The forms of physical abuse reported included hitting, punching, kicking, beating, bodily assault with implements, and immersion in water. The Committee heard accounts of assaults that were so severe that injuries were caused which required medical intervention.

13.30 There were 48 reports of physical abuse from 32 male and 16 female witnesses in relation to 13 of the 14 special needs schools and facilities reported in this category. Twenty eight (28) reports related to experiences in schools and facilities for children with intellectual disabilities. Nine (9)

⁴ Section 1 as amended by section 3 of the 2005 Act.

⁵ Section 1(1)(a).

facilities were the subject of between two and 10 reports, totalling 43 reports. Five (5) facilities were each the subject of single reports.

Description of physical abuse

13.31 Witnesses reported that while attending special needs services they were physically abused and assaulted by various means including being hit with leather straps, canes, spade and broom handles, various types of sticks and brushes, kitchen implements, wooden coat hangers and rulers. They also reported having their heads held under water, being put into cold baths, having their hair cut and pulled, being forcibly fed, and being locked in outhouses, sheds and isolated rooms. Witnesses with sensory impairments described the particular fear and trauma associated with being physically abused when they could not see or hear abusers approaching them.

13.32 Other forms of physical abuse and assault reported by witnesses included being punched and kicked, pinched, slapped across the face and ears, held by the throat, lifted by the hair and ears, and having their left hands or both hands tied behind their back to prevent use.

There was a whole load of them... (religious and lay staff)... who'd slap me across the face or with the strap on my legs I didn't feel I was a trouble maker but I was active, they just picked on me ... they just kept slapping me the whole time and they all said I was a trouble maker, they gave me a bad name.

13.33 Witnesses reported being severely physically punished for certain behaviours, in response to particular occurrences and frequently for no reason that they could understand. Among the events reported to have been so punished were: running away, bed-wetting, talking to co-residents, not completing chores, disclosing abuse, being forced by violence to carry out sexual acts, taking food, making mistakes in the classrooms or workshops, using sign language, not using disability aids properly, losing or damaging disability aids, wear and tear on clothing, walking out of line, having soiled sheets or underwear, and being out of bed. Several witnesses reported that using sign language and writing with their left hand was forbidden.

The first time I was hit, a crowd of us used to queue to get our hair combed. The Brother in charge ...(named religious) ... said to me "you are going without getting your hair combed". I wasn't, he beat me then.... He put me over his knees and hit me with his hands, I was totally puzzled, I couldn't figure out why I was hit. I hadn't done anything wrong, I hadn't been hit at home even though I had done things wrong.... That was the first of many times being hit ... It was Br ...X.... He invented excuses for hitting fellas, such as he invented this thing that ...younger co-residents... could not talk to ...older residents.... He'd beat you for a lot of things with the leather, your trousers would be down, it ... (the beating)... could be over the stool or over his bed. One of the things was I got beaten for putting polish on my socks, you'd get beaten if you didn't have Rosary beads with you, they used have Rosary every night. If a fella had a hole in his jumper, if it turned into a hole before I realised it, I would be beaten.

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Br ...X... would bring the bed-wetters into his room and flog them. He'd make them have a cold bath whether it was winter or summer and you could hear the screams, the screams, he was very violent. He was a big strong fit man, I was petrified of him, it came back to me in dreams, the dreams of it returned.

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There is the whole issue of... (mannerisms)..., people have sort of mannerisms maybe, shaking backwards and forwards, you'd be beaten for that.

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We were punished for signing. ... It was very, very difficult to control. ... It was our language, it was the way we communicated. It was natural for us to use gestures, we were deaf.

- 13.34** The random nature of some beatings was described by witnesses. One said he was severely beaten after the residence he occupied was accidentally flooded. He was not there when the accident happened, but was blamed nevertheless. Another witness described how a particular staff member would: *'beat you wherever he could get you, I got used to being beaten up, I didn't care'*. Others commented that they did not know why they were being beaten as nobody explained anything to them. They accepted physical abuse as part of life in the institution.
- 13.35** Witnesses said they were physically abused in many locations but most often in the classrooms, dormitories, stairs and corridors, staff bedrooms, and in the external playing areas. Five (5) witnesses reported being held down across furniture by older residents to be beaten on their bared bottoms by religious and lay staff.

Injuries

- 13.36** Ten (10) witnesses reported receiving injuries as a result of the physical abuse they experienced, including five accounts of receiving wounds that bled and four accounts of extensive bruising. There were separate accounts of injury to one witness's arm that the witness believed resulted in permanent disability and injuries to another witness's head and ears, which were believed to be the cause of subsequent hearing loss. Another witness stated that she required sutures to her arm following a severe beating with a broom handle. Both religious and lay staff were reported to have perpetrated abuse that resulted in these injuries and one female witness reported injuries that were the result of being assaulted by a group of older co-residents.

She ... (Sr X)... beat me,... (on)... me arms, me legs. She used to put me across the table and beat me, it could be the strap, the ruler, it could be anything, she used pinch me so hard. I used be black and blue my legs would be black when she'd be finished with me.

Reported abusers

- 13.37** Evidence was heard regarding 80 staff and co-residents who physically abused witnesses in special need facilities.
- 13.38** Witnesses identified 57 staff, 24 male and 33 female, by name as physically abusive. A further 16 staff, 13 male and three female, were identified by their position as abusive but were not named by witnesses. Thirty seven (37) of those identified by name were religious staff and 20 were lay care staff, teachers and ancillary workers. Eight (8) named staff who were identified as physically abusive were also reported as being sexually abusive. It is possible that there is some overlap between staff identified by name as abusive and those who were not named by witnesses.
- 13.39** There were seven accounts of physical abuse perpetrated by co-residents, including three co-residents who were named by witnesses. The other four accounts were of groups of co-residents referred to as *'gangs'* who were physically abusive and who taunted and threatened witnesses and other residents. Witness information regarding precise numbers of co-resident abusers was incomplete. As numbers are uncertain, each group is included in the following table, as one abuser and, therefore, could be considered an under-representation of the actual number of co-residents reported as abusers. It is also possible that there is some overlap between co-residents identified by name as abusive and those who were not named by witnesses.

13.40 Table 8 shows details regarding the reported position and numbers of named and unnamed individuals described as physically abusive:

Table 61: Position and Number of Reported Physical Abusers – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Position of reported physical abusers	Males	Females
Religious		
- Authority figure	6	5
- Care staff	18	5
- Teacher	7	7
Lay		
- Care staff	0	11
- Teacher	2	4
- Ancillary worker	4	4
Co-resident	6	1
Total	43	37

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

13.41 Eleven (11) of the religious staff reported as physically abusive were described as either being in charge of the institution or the Principal of the school. The 34 religious and lay staff, listed in Table 8 as care staff, were described by witnesses as having contact with residents in the context of their personal or everyday care. Lay staff who were occupied as night watchmen and laundry workers, and others with designated tasks, are identified above as ancillary workers. Religious and lay staff listed in Table 8 as teachers were either referred to as teachers by witnesses and/or were described as abusing witnesses in the classroom.

There was one person very cruel, he was a teacher, he used to tell us he would go to hell when he died because he did not beat us enough. He had been in another school and he was dumped into ... (witness's special needs school).... He was a very unsuitable man, he would use a full cane with the ridges on it, he would beat you anywhere. I remember him beating me around the neck, it was quite strong, he was lashing out generally. Usually it was for inability to learn Irish, I was not bad at Irish, he beat me, I don't know why, I didn't know what was happening to me.

Sexual abuse

The use of the child by a person for sexual arousal or sexual gratification of that person or another person.⁶

13.42 This section summarises the witness evidence given of sexual abuse, ranging from contact sexual assault including rape to non-contact abuse, such as voyeurism and inappropriate sexual talk. Witnesses gave as much or as little detail as they wished when describing their experiences of being sexually abused. While some witnesses provided detailed and disturbing accounts of sexual abuse, less detailed accounts were sufficient to clarify the acute or chronic nature of both contact and non-contact sexual abuse.

13.43 Thirty six (36) of the 58 witnesses who reported abuse in schools and residential services for children with special needs reported being sexually abused. The 36 reports were from 29 male and seven female witnesses in relation to 10 separate special needs facilities. Twenty seven

⁶ Section 1(1)(b).

(27) reports referred to abuse in facilities for children with intellectual disabilities and eight reports referred to facilities for those with sensory impairments. One report referred to abuse in a residential facility for physically disabled children. Eight (8) facilities were the subject of between two and 10 reports, totalling 34 reports. Two (2) others were each the subject of single reports.

Description of sexual abuse

13.44 The forms of sexual abuse reported by the 36 witnesses included voyeurism, inappropriate fondling, mutual masturbation, oral/genital contact, penetration with objects, kissing, vaginal and anal rape. Eleven (11) witnesses, nine of whom were male, reported being raped. With one exception witnesses reported being raped many times, in some instances on a regular basis for periods up to five years.

13.45 Witnesses reported that sexual abuse occurred in private and was most often perpetrated by specific individuals over a period of time. Witnesses from three facilities described being taken from their beds at night by male religious staff and being sexually abused in the staff members' bedrooms. They reported being raped, fondled and molested, and some described being unable to walk following such episodes of abuse. Other witnesses reported being sexually abused by staff members while engaged in routine activity or while entrusted to their care.

There was another Brother, he brought me into his room I didn't like it, he did things, he hurt me. I was crying ... it was at night time, he made me do things.... He did things to me ... he hurt me. Sometimes he took me into his room, he slept in a room on his own off the dormitory. ... I didn't like that going on. He was nice to me after it ...(anal rape)....

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I was sexually abused by ...named lay ancillary worker... at 13 or 14 years of age, a few times. He agreed to bring me home to where I came from for a visit. I knew him so well. He started to touch me in my private parts and kissed me. He stopped in a lane on the way home ...distressed.... It's all bad.

13.46 Witnesses also described being raped and/or inappropriately fondled in their own beds at night by religious and lay staff. Other locations of sexual abuse reported by witnesses included toilets, bathrooms, dormitories, classrooms, yards, play areas and off-site locations.

Br ...X... used do dirty things to me at night when I'd get my period. He used to wake me at night and took off all my clothes and pull the things up on me. He raped me when I'd get my period, he did it 5 or 6 times and he'd touch my chest.... I told ...named lay care staff... and she put me to bed late ... (to avoid contact with Br X)....

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From the time I was 7 until I was 14, maybe 3 nights a week maybe 4, 2 or 3 Brothers sexually abused me. They took turns, not every day, doing the night duty, walking around ... they had different shifts, they would enjoy themselves. They knew which boy was in the bed. ... Sometimes they would follow me behind the toilets in the day time and do it again, they would pretend to dry ...(me)... with the towel and they would do that, mess with you, kissing, touching....

13.47 Six (6) male witnesses reported that violence was a component of the sexual abuse. They were either beaten before they were abused or sexually violated as they were being beaten. Witnesses reported being subjected to extreme forms of physical violence, including having their heads held under water, being bound and gagged and otherwise restrained while being sexually assaulted and being beaten with leather straps on their bare bottom prior to being sexually assaulted. Two (2) of the six witnesses reported being physically and sexually assaulted by 'gangs' of co-residents.

13.48 A female witness reported being sexually abused by the father in a 'holiday' family to whom she was regularly sent from the special needs facility for many years. The witness believed that reports of abuse had been made in relation to this man prior to her being sent to the family. She did not understand what was happening, as she did not know what sexual abuse was. She had no family or other visitors and nobody to whom she could confide about her experiences at the time.

13.49 Three (3) male witnesses reported different forms of non-contact sexual abuse including being shown pornographic photographs, being photographed while naked and being stared at by religious care staff supervising showers and swimming activities.

13.50 Witnesses reported being forced to endure and comply with sexual abuse through threats of violence, isolation from their peers, deprivation of family visits and being threatened that they would be reported to authority figures. Witnesses also reported being subjected to various bribes and inducements, including money, cigarettes, sweets and alcohol:

Another Brother ...(X)... (teacher)... he used to bring a white bag with scones in it from the Brothers' kitchen to our rooms and he would give the scones to the children who would let him feel their legs and touch them. ... He would examine their essays, check their spellings. ... He would check us all out closely and while he was doing that he would be sitting quite close to us and feeling our legs, at that stage I was quite innocent.

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One ...(Br X)... didn't teach in class, he would look after pupils, he was a big man. ... On the day before I left I asked him for ...a book... he told me to go upstairs. He suggested he would go to the room where he kept his books, but he took me to his bedroom and he closed the door and I got a fright. ... He pushed me over onto his bed, he was wearing his habit. I was trying to resist, I could see his face, he was really red in the face. ... I couldn't feel his private parts because he had his habit on and that was ok. ... (witness described molestation)... Afterwards he gave me a bar of chocolate and told me to keep quiet about it, I was very shocked.

13.51 Two (2) male witnesses from one facility reported that male religious staff who were sexually abusive would select them and other residents to accompany them on outings to town where they were taken into pubs and given alcohol. One witness reported being taken by a Brother to a pub instead of the cinema and returning to the cinema before the film finished. This Brother was reported to have sexually abused the witness on a regular basis over a three-to four-year period.

13.52 One witness named a man by whom he was sexually abused. He was a member of the public who had access to the grounds of the intellectual disability service, and who befriended the witness in the course of his activities there:

He ...(X)... asked me to meet him one night outside. ... I got out the window and I met him down the way, he came out in his car and he made sure there was nobody looking and he asked me to get in. He was doing his usual thing on the way across ... (touching witness).... I thought he was bringing me home but we ended up in a Bed and Breakfast. ... By that stage I knew what he was doing was wrong. He took my clothes off ... he just did what he wanted to do to me ... (witness described anal penetration).... He said if I ever told anybody he'd get me, he'd know where I was. ... He left me home to my parents' place, they were waiting outside the door, he walked up and said "I found your son, he was walking the streets, I picked him up". ... He never told them anything about what he'd done. ... (Witness never saw abuser again)....

Reported abusers

- 13.53** The individuals identified as sexually abusive came from a wider range of occupations both within and outside the institutions, than those reported as physically abusive, and almost half of those reported as sexually abusive were co-residents.
- 13.54** There were 28 staff, 26 male and two female, identified by witnesses as being sexually abusive, including 19 who were named. Seventeen (17) of the named staff members were male and two were female. Thirteen (13) of those named were religious staff and six were lay care staff and ancillary workers. One male religious staff member was specifically described as the person in charge. The other religious staff were described as being in care roles at the time of the abuse although their assigned roles were not always clear to the witnesses.
- 13.55** There were a further nine reports of sexual abuse by religious and lay staff where the reported abusers were not identified by name. They were described by their role as Brothers, night watchmen and care staff. It is possible that there is some overlap between those staff who were identified by name and those who were not named.
- 13.56** Two (2) Brothers were identified by name as sexually abusive by six separate witnesses and three other Brothers were each identified by name by two separate witnesses. A further 14 other religious and lay staff were each the subject of single reports of sexual abuse.
- 13.57** The following table lists the number of named and unnamed sexual abusers, by their reported position:

Table 62: Position and Number of Reported Sexual Abusers – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Position of reported sexual abusers	Males	Females
Religious		
- Authority figure	1	0
- Care staff	16	0
- Teacher	1	0
- Ancillary workers	1	0
- External clergy	1	0
Lay		
- Care staff	1	1
- Ancillary worker	6	1
Visiting professional	1	0
Weekend or holiday placement carer	1	0
Volunteer worker	1	0
General public	1	0
Co-resident	23	4
Total	54	6

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

- 13.58** Twelve (12) witnesses identified 16 co-residents by name as sexually abusive. One co-resident was identified by name by three witnesses. There were a further 11 reports of sexual abuse by co-residents who were not named. In five instances witnesses reported being frequently sexually

abused by co-residents over a period of years. As with staff members, there may be some overlap between those co-residents who were named as abusers and those who were not specifically named.

13.59 Those reported as sexually abusive included three groups of male co-residents who were described as threatening and physically intimidating in addition to being sexually abusive. Two (2) witnesses described being assaulted by groups of co-residents who restrained them and subjected them to penetration by objects. As witness information regarding the precise numbers of abusive co-residents is incomplete the numbers reported above could be considered an under-representation.

13.60 In addition to staff members and co-residents who were reported as sexual abusers there were five witness reports of sexual abuse being perpetrated by the following male adults who were external to the institution: a visiting GP, a chaplain, a father in a 'holiday' family, a male member of the public, and a volunteer worker who took residents out to the cinema.

There was a man ... (member of the public)... he used to watch me, he was always a bit of a loner. ... He came across me one day when I was alone and he invited me into ... (the) ... shed and he started touching me. It happened on 3 occasions. He wasn't part of the staff but he used to use the facilities. To begin with he used to just touch me, then he removed my clothes. ... There was a dirty mattress and he pushed me down and he got on top of me, he was pushing himself up and down on top of me, he had his clothes off. I didn't really understand what he was doing.

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When I was taken out... (by holiday family)... I was abused, I was sexually abused, it was a man... (father in holiday family)... I was sent out nearly every weekend and holidays and it went on for years and years of my life...distressed...I can't get over it, it just gets to me. I was 7 years of age.

Neglect

Failure to care for the child which results, or could reasonably be expected to result, in serious impairment of the physical or mental health or development of the child or serious adverse effects on his or her behaviour or welfare.⁷

13.61 This section summarises witness accounts of general neglect. Descriptions of neglect refer to all aspects of the physical, social and emotional care and welfare of the witnesses. It also describes other forms of neglect that are regarded as having a negative impact on the individual's emotional health and development, for example failure to protect from harm, to educate and to adequately supervise.

13.62 There were 25 reports of neglect heard by the Committee from 13 male and 12 female witnesses in relation to 11 special needs schools; three of the schools were the subject of reports by both male and female witnesses. Sixteen (16) reports were related to witnesses' experiences in schools for children with sensory impairments. Six (6) schools were the subject of between two and seven reports, totalling 20 reports. Five (5) schools were each the subject of single reports.

Description of neglect

13.63 The forms of neglect reported to the Committee included inadequate education and training, poor and insufficient food, poor hygiene, lack of recreational activities and inadequate supervision.

⁷ Section 1(1)(c) as amended by section 3 of the 2005 Act.

Supervision

- 13.64** Eleven (11) witnesses identified poor supervision as a source of neglect in the schools where they were placed. One witness described being sexually abused by a member of religious staff at night in his bed although a Brother had supervisory duties in the dormitory and *'was there in a flash if you whispered to another boy'*. Nine (9) witnesses, both male and female, reported being physically and sexually abused by staff and co-residents in circumstances where there was no effective supervision. Witnesses also reported being abused by groups of co-residents in circumstances where there was no available protection and where older residents had unsupervised access to younger, vulnerable residents.
- 13.65** Witnesses described making various attempts to protect themselves or seek protection from others. One witness who was sexually abused by a co-resident was separated from the abusive co-resident by care staff to whom he had disclosed the abuse. This resulted in an improvement in his situation until the following year when there was a change of staff and he was once again placed in proximity to the person who had previously abused him. He was once again abused on a regular basis for some time by that person. Another witness reported being repeatedly sent to a holiday family where she was sexually abused, despite her protests that she did not want to return there. She believed that staff should have responded to her indications that she was unhappy although she felt unable to articulate that she was being sexually abused.

Education

- 13.66** Fourteen (14) witnesses reported inadequate education as their main form of neglect. They gave examples of educational disadvantage caused by being made to work instead of attending school. Witnesses reported that in schools for children with sensory impairments classwork was primarily focussed on using disability aids, such as hearing aids, speech and vocalisation aids and touch text for those with sight impairments. Most of the 14 witnesses reported that their education was impeded by fear of physical abuse in the classroom.

The inspectors would come in, but they ...(teachers)... generally knew when they were coming. ... Everything was lovely, the stick would be put away, out of sight.

- 13.67** Three (3) witnesses reported that their sensory impairment was not recognised and they were inappropriately placed in schools for learning disabled children where their educational needs were neglected.
- 13.68** Witnesses with sensory, physical and intellectual disabilities commented on the accompanying communication difficulties they experienced. Deaf witnesses described the distress they endured when forced to communicate through speech instead of sign language and the considerable time and effort that was devoted to teaching them Oralism while forbidding any other form of communication:

They were treating me like a stupid ...child... because I didn't learn properly. I was very intelligent when I was small, I was very quick at picking up things through sign but I couldn't learn through oralism, I was very, very low, my confidence was gone, my self-esteem was gone. I was very, very disappointed with myself, because I couldn't learn through oralism, and then they would hit you if you didn't understand and so we pretended to understand to avoid being hit all the time.

- 13.69** Witnesses with intellectual disabilities repeatedly commented on the fact that *'nobody explained anything'* as a result of which they did not understand what they were supposed to do and at times why they were being punished or abused. Witnesses with sight and physical disabilities commented that they were treated as if they were deaf, that staff frequently spoke about them as if they were not there and that nobody ever asked them for their opinion.

- 13.70** In addition to the reports of inadequate classroom education five witnesses reported that the education and training offered in the workshops attached to the schools did not prepare them for independent living following their discharge. The lack of preparation for independent living was reported as abusive. They commented on the traumatic impact of being discharged from the shelter of residential settings without any aftercare or follow up:

(Discharge preparation)...didn't give us a great start, the best of us got through, if you had a strong character and if you came from a strong family home, that would support you but if you didn't have that going for you, you kind of fell into a survival method.

General welfare and personal care

- 13.71** Four (4) particular special needs schools were reported more often than others as providing a poor standard of physical care. Witnesses from those facilities consistently described cold, hunger, inadequate clothing and poor hygiene facilities. Ten (10) witnesses from those schools reported being frequently hungry or being forced to eat unpalatable food, three of whom also reported being forced to eat regurgitated food.
- 13.72** Poor hygiene and management of menstruation was cited by four female witnesses as an aspect of their neglect. They described being given little or no information about menstruation and were not provided with sanitary protection or the necessary facilities to maintain appropriate personal hygiene. Four (4) other witnesses described not having their own clothes and having to wear clothes from a communal supply that was infrequently changed and laundered.
- 13.73** Female witnesses reported being expected to undertake domestic work within the schools and two described being exploited as unpaid domestic staff. In addition to work tasks being described as an alternative to classroom education in the special needs facilities, witnesses also remarked on the absence of recreational activities. Witnesses with restricted mobility commented on the boredom associated with institutional living where it was reported that no effort was made to occupy or provide age-appropriate activities to children who were bed-bound.
- 13.74** Witnesses also reported being subjected to inappropriate daily routines that they believed were maintained for expedience. One example provided was of being awakened at 6:00 every morning to be washed and dressed by the night staff before they finished their shift. She reported being then left sitting in a cold room, waiting for breakfast that was not served until approximately two hours later.

Emotional abuse

Any other act or omission towards the child which results, or could reasonably be expected to result, in serious impairment of the physical or mental health or development of the child or serious adverse effects on his or her behaviour or welfare.⁸

- 13.75** This section describes witness evidence of emotional abuse by deprivation of affection, family contact and approval, loss of identity, and a lack of safety and protection. It refers to both what was done by religious and lay staff and others who had responsibility for the residents in their care and what they failed to provide. These deprivations impaired the social, emotional, physical functioning and development of witnesses and were identified by them as generally disturbing both at the time and in the subsequent course of their lives.

⁸ Section 1(1)(d) as amended by section 3 of the 2005 Act.

- 13.76** The Committee heard 24 reports of emotional abuse by 11 male and 13 female witnesses in relation to 10 special needs facilities. Fourteen (14) of the reports referred to witnesses' experiences in services for children with sensory impairments. Six (6) facilities were the subject of between two and seven reports, totalling 20 reports. Four (4) facilities were each the subject of single reports.

Description of emotional abuse

- 13.77** Emotional abuse described by witnesses included deprivation of family contact, social isolation and humiliation, lack of affection, personal ridicule, constant criticism, bullying, fear and threats of harm.

*I can only think of years of abuse and torture and being a punch bag and crying...
Lonely and crying in bed most of the time and being scared and not being able to tell anyone.*

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To begin with, I was more or less bullied ... (by)... older lads ... often times they used do it for money. ... We used to go out and do work experience ... anytime I'd get paid for it they'd want the money off you ... I tried to say I didn't have it, or something. ... They used to call me all sorts of names. ... I thought at first I'd avoid them, but every time I went to go off somewhere they'd follow me. ... They went on to kick the back of my heels, pushing me down the stairs, stick my head underwater and stuff.

Personal ridicule and humiliation

- 13.78** The most consistently reported form of emotional abuse by the witnesses with special needs was of being denigrated, humiliated and disparaged about their appearance, mannerisms and intelligence. They reported being called names and made the subject of derogatory comments by certain staff, some of whom encouraged co-residents to jeer at their behaviour. Witnesses said their weakness and distress was subject to particular derision and they were further humiliated when they cried or demonstrated distress.

They treated me like a dog, I couldn't read and I couldn't speak, the ...religious staff... called me names, terrible, they beat me up with a leather.

Deprivation of family contact and identity

- 13.79** A reported consequence of the loss of family contact in the process of being institutionalised was loss of identity. Twelve (12) of the 58 witnesses reporting abuse in special needs schools had little or no information about their birth or family, and had no contact with family members after their admission. Three (3) witnesses had no information at all about their family of origin, and all they knew about themselves was their name.

I suppose some of it was my fault really, I was looking for my mother, there was no answers... I heard girls talking about their Mammies and I had nobody to come up to see me, nobody. I knew nothing... (about family)... so I took these fits of tempers, I was a handful.

- 13.80** In general, witnesses reported that family contact was restricted to the routine Christmas, Easter and summer school holidays. Witnesses who were admitted to special needs services from home gave accounts of being deprived of contact with their families after their admission and of family visits being denied as punishment for alleged misbehaviour. Several witnesses commented on the fact that their homes were long distances from the schools and as a result their families were unable to visit. They reported that all other contact, apart from going home for holidays, was confined to letter writing, which had particular limitations for residents with sight and learning impairments. Witnesses reported that their letters were dictated and strictly

controlled. 'We were not allowed to ask for anything or to say anything about our daily life there.'

Deprivation of affection

- 13.81** Witnesses commented on the absence of any demonstration of verbal and physical affection towards them by staff. For those witnesses admitted at a young age from family homes where they had experienced warmth and affection this deprivation had a particularly disturbing impact. Witnesses with sensory impairments found being 'sent to Coventry' particularly distressing. They described not being spoken to by staff and co-residents, and being isolated in rooms.
- 13.82** Many deaf witnesses described how distressing it was to be denied the use of sign language, which was their only means of communication. Sign language was also the accepted manner in which many witnesses communicated with their family. Loss of contact with family members was accentuated for some witnesses as a result of their parents being told by staff in some schools not to use sign language during holidays. Deaf witnesses who were compelled to communicate verbally reported being socially isolated as a result of the difficulty they experienced with this process. Witnesses reported that loneliness and isolation were further exacerbated by restrictions on communication and the reported disapproval of friendships between residents.

Exposure to fearful situations

- 13.83** Witnesses with sensory impairments described their extreme fear and distress when they were locked in rooms as punishment. One witness described the terror experienced when locked in an outhouse with animals, another of being left overnight in a washroom without any bedding as punishment for bed-wetting or other alleged misdemeanours.

I was locked in the washroom overnight.(named religious staff member)... would walk out and close the door, you'd have your ...night clothes... on and you could stand at your basin and do what you liked but you had to stay there, no blankets, mattress, sleep on the bare floor. We used to get together in a corner and try to keep each other warm, it was scary, you'd hope that nothing would happen, you could also be there on your own. ... You could be there for more than a few nights in a row, freezing cold.

- 13.84** Witnesses who were sexually abused described the pervasive fear associated with constant vigilance in anticipation of the next episode of abuse. Other witnesses with learning disabilities reported being terrified of making mistakes and that learning was stifled by the fear of physical punishment and humiliation.
- 13.85** Eight (8) witnesses reported being sexually abused by staff members who also subjected them to severe physical abuse. They reported being intimidated by staff as a warning against disclosure, they lived in fear of certain staff members who abused them on a regular basis, reinforcing silence by threats of further abuse.
- 13.86** In addition to the reports of abuse by staff and other adults, there were 33 reports of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse by co-residents. Witnesses generally described abuse involving co-residents as occurring either in the company of other residents, described as 'gangs', or in open places where it was believed others could observe what was happening. Inadequate supervision exposed vulnerable residents to bullying and abuse and created fearful situations that many witnesses reported being forced to endure.
- 13.87** Four (4) witnesses gave accounts of their lives being threatened by groups of co-residents who bullied them. One witness reported to a staff member that he was being sexually abused and bullied by a group of co-residents, which resulted in further abuse from his co-residents. He reported that they held him over a stairwell and threatened to drop him the next time he told

anyone that he was being abused. He was further threatened that his younger sibling would be punished in the same way. Another witness reported being threatened that he would be pushed from a height if he disclosed physical abuse and bullying by co-residents.

They ... (older co-residents)... brought me up to the top of ... in the grounds and held my hands behind my back and pushed me over to look down off it, I thought they were going to push me down off it, lucky enough someone was passing by and they saw what was happening and they stopped, when the fellas saw who was there they ran away.

Witnessing the abuse of others

- 13.88** Several witnesses described the distress they experienced as a result of hearing and seeing co-residents being beaten and humiliated. The sound of other children being beaten was reported to be particularly distressing in addition to the pervasive fear generated in an environment where, as the following witnesses described, there was a constant threat of being hurt:

You see a lot of the trouble for me was listening to fellas getting beaten, listening to fellas being flogged. I remember a fella who used to shake himself and shake his hands and things like that, he was quite bad at it. This Br ...(X)... got an idea into his head that he would stop this fella from doing these things. Every time he saw him doing it he'd slap him, he'd stop him by hitting him. Eventually he stopped...shaking... during the day, he'd wag in the bed at night and the bed was a noisy springy bed. This Brother would beat him in bed at night. ... That chap became a bed-wetter after that happened. The bed-wetters, I'd hear the screams, it would give me a dry retch even though I had nothing in my stomach, it used to affect me very badly.

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He... (lay teacher)... beat them ...(co-residents)... around the room like cattle, they would be crashing into desks and he would say "would you mind my lovely furniture". It was very bad listening to it. I couldn't learn, you couldn't learn in the atmosphere of violence ... if you didn't give an answer you'd get battered.

Knowledge of abuse

- 13.89** Witnesses believed that much abuse was reported at the time and that staff and residents were aware of it or had observed it, and people outside the institution were also told about it. Witnesses also observed the abuse of their co-residents. Witnesses reported that disclosures of abuse were at times investigated with positive results. Other witnesses stated they were either ignored or punished.

- 13.90** Witnesses generally reported having great difficulty in finding ways of disclosing their abuse to anyone. In all instances the witnesses' particular disability was described as a barrier to communication and disclosure, both at the time and subsequently. A number stated that this difficulty was particularly highlighted when addressing such a sensitive topic as sexual abuse.

I never told my parents because I didn't know what to say ... and I didn't know if they'd believe me and it's only now, many years later, that these secrets are out in the open and the Brothers can be challenged and that is why I'm here to tell you.

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I reported to the ...lay Principal.... I do feel it's ...(sexual abuse)... my fault, I told him ...(named lay ancillary worker)...I didn't want sex but he wouldn't listen to me. I wish I could forget about it but I can't, it makes me sick and angry.

13.91 Twenty six (26) witnesses reported telling someone at the time that they were being abused, 19 of those witnesses stated they were believed, but not necessarily with positive consequences. Disclosures were most often made to parents, staff and authority figures within the school. There were isolated accounts of disclosure to the gardaí and a visiting priest. *'I ran away once, the police found me. I tried to tell them I wasn't happy and what was happening, but they wouldn't believe me.'* Another witness gave the following account of what happened when his mother complained about physical abuse:

My mother was washing me, she seen the bruises, my older brother saw black and blue. I didn't understand, I was used to it. She said "what happened, where did you get that?" I had bruises all over my body. She wrote a letter to the head Brother and he sent for my mother. My mother and me went to talk to him and he said it wouldn't happen again. I was about 8 or 9. After that, the next day, a few Brothers beat me up and said "shut your mouth". They beat me up... really it was terrible. My mother did complain but what could you do?

13.92 Witnesses with intellectual disabilities described being bullied and threatened by staff and co-residents not to tell others they were being abused. They also reported being punished and further abused when they disclosed their abuse to others. The impact of this experience was made evident to the Committee by a number of witnesses who sought reassurance from accompanying companions and from the Commissioners that they would not be punished or 'get in trouble' for attending the Commission.

13.93 Seven (7) witnesses reported that when they told staff they were being abused they were not believed and the staff did nothing to address the reported complaint. Witnesses commented on the fact that disclosure often resulted in being punished for 'telling tales'. In other circumstances witnesses reported that while their disclosure was punished, the abuse subsequently stopped.

I went back to the orphanage and told them that I was being abused, she... (person in charge)... told me "you are always causing trouble", she wouldn't listen to me. She told me I was lying. How can any child... (make up something like that)... she wouldn't listen to me. I didn't even know what sexual abuse was. I thought it was the right thing, he was giving me money. When I tried to explain to one of the nuns that he was touching me she said "there you are, lying again" and pushed me away.

Outcome of disclosure

13.94 The Committee heard evidence that in seven instances the offender was removed from the school following disclosure to either the witnesses' parents or staff within the school. An additional three witnesses reported being separated from abusive co-residents that led to a cessation in the abuse for some time. Another witness reported that religious staff in charge of one school appeared to be aware of sexual abuse among residents and became more vigilant in their supervision of recreation time.

13.95 Two (2) other witnesses reported that their parents wrote letters of complaint to the person in charge who subsequently met them and minimised the seriousness of the disclosed abuse. *'I told my parents, they believed me, as far as I know. My mother wrote to ...named lay teacher... but it made no difference.'* There was no positive outcome for these witnesses. Another witness's father intervened and spoke to the person in charge, it was believed the reported abuser was reprimanded but not removed. Following parental intervention another witness reported being removed from the residential part of the service to continue attending as a day pupil.

13.96 A positive example of external intervention was provided by a witness who complained repeatedly to staff that he was being bullied by older co-residents and was punished in

response. Despite his complaints being ignored by staff he persisted in complaining about being constantly picked on and taunted by a group of older boys whom he feared. The witness reported that one day this group of co-residents threatened his life in a public place. A passing member of the public saw what was happening and intervened 'Actually a doctor rang the staff and they were told off for it. ... I think they were a bit afraid after that.'

Positive experiences

- 13.97** Twenty six (26) witnesses reported having some positive memories of their time in the special needs schools and services. The kindness of religious and lay staff was often reported in relation to admission to the facilities and the assistance provided to witnesses when they were leaving. Fourteen (14) witnesses commented on the good experience of having kind teachers and 11 religious staff were named as particularly kind by a number of witnesses.

Some of the nuns were very, very nice. I can't take that away from them... I'd have to say they were fairly good to us....There was one nun, Sr ...Y..., she was a nice person, she took me and said "listen, you aren't a bad person".

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The... (lay care worker)... was one of the nicest, kindest people ever in my life, he would give us chocolate to keep us quiet, rocked us to sleep. I don't remember anything bad ever happening with him.

- 13.98** Three (3) other witnesses commented on the positive changes introduced by new staff, particularly those in authority. One of those witnesses reported that, following such a change, more thorough assessments took place, as a result of which the witness was transferred to another facility where his particular educational needs were addressed.
- 13.99** Ten (10) witnesses commented positively on the level of care provided to them and the general and academic education they received. They commented on the beneficial outcome to them of treatment and training provided by the special needs services. In a small number of instances witnesses reported that their families were unable to care adequately for them or that they were abused and neglected prior to their admission. The witnesses remarked that their placement in the special needs school or service had a protective component for which they were grateful.
- 13.100** Six (6) witnesses commented that family visits and the opportunity to go home for holidays and be outside the institutions were the most positive memories of their time there.

Current circumstances

- 13.101** The following section summaries the information provided by witnesses during their hearings regarding their adult lives, including details about relationships, employment and parenting. It also identifies some of the reported ongoing effects of childhood abuse in the witnesses' lives.

Relationships

- 13.102** Thirty two (32) of the 58 witnesses, 22 male and 10 female, who reported being abused in special needs facilities were single at the time of their hearing. Twenty eight (28) of those witnesses reported never having been married or involved in intimate relationships. Four (4) other witnesses were currently single having been previously involved in relationships for short periods. Twenty two (22) witnesses, 13 male and nine female, were married. Four (4) other witnesses reported being in long-term relationships, currently or in the past.

- 13.103** Twenty six (26) witnesses, 19 male and seven female, who reported being single and who had never married, were in sheltered living situations or had lived in residential facilities for most of their lives. Eighteen (18) witnesses, 11 male and seven female, who were married at the time of their hearing described their marriages as happy, stable, supportive and of many years duration. Several witnesses reported meeting and marrying partners who had similar childhood experiences as their own.

Met... (my)... husband to be, got married and didn't go back to work. When I met my husband we had great communication ... I was so happy to be with him ... we left all the past behind, we really forgot about that ...(childhood abuse)...

- 13.104** Eighteen (18) witnesses described themselves as having struggled with the effects of institutional care and abuse for years following their discharge from special needs schools and residential facilities. Childhood sexual abuse was reported by 10 witnesses to have had a particularly detrimental effect on their adult relationships. Alcohol abuse and unresolved anger were noted features of the relationships difficulties described by a small number of witnesses.

I started drinking too much, found myself not able to go into work the next day and I didn't feel very good about that ... went to AA ... for all my sins I think I do still drink more than I should ... they all say to me "you're such a nice man without it" ...

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For...years after I left I lived the best I could. I wasn't aware that things were so difficult as they were, I normalised all that went wrong...That left me socially very difficult...I couldn't handle it at all, relationships and that...

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I'd say all the group... (former co-residents)... ended up in trouble with alcohol, or social isolation or didn't make it into relationships at all.... A lot of them... (are)... very bitter and isolated, they continue to survive, just survive.

- 13.105** Counselling and the support of partners, family and professionals were all reported to have contributed to happier outcomes for a number of witnesses.

Married... (many years)... very happy. My wife understands my problem. We have...children. I didn't understand for a long time, when I got married first ... about... (sexual)... relations...(until)... I went to see the counsellor ... I don't know how ...wife ... did enjoy the relationship. Because of sexual abuse in the school, that put me off... I can't enjoy sexual relations... (but)... we have worked it out,... wife...is brilliant.

Parenting

- 13.106** Twenty (20) witnesses, 12 male and eight female, reported having a total of 59 children. Ten (10) described having good relationships with their children. Four (4) witnesses described themselves as overprotective of their children and another three reported being harsh or abusive parents. They reported hitting and slapping their children, commenting that they treated their children as they had been treated themselves.

When my children were bold or wild I slapped them. Sometimes I slapped them around the face and I remember one day.... I slapped him... (son)... repeatedly around the face. He started crying, he got frightened, I lost my temper with him I think, I didn't realise until afterwards that it was wrong to slap. It was what I had learned in school ... I didn't know anything about child abuse. I remember when I was driving there was a big...(advertising poster)... about how not to slap your child, that it can affect them mentally, and that had a huge impact. I was wondering, you know, what did I do to my children?... (I)... felt so guilty, so very, very guilty. I was very hard on them, I did slap them very hard ... distressed and crying ... I remember seeing this poster and I felt so

guilty.... I loved them... and they loved me and I remember thinking why did I do that to them?... I realised I learned that from the school, they did that to me all the time and I did that to the children. I feel terrible guilty about that ... and then I stopped and they behaved very well after that.

- 13.107** Other witnesses described being angry a lot of the time for unspecified reasons. They now believe their anger and unhappiness was related to childhood experiences, which they acknowledge contributed to unhappy family lives for their own children.

Occupational and employment status

- 13.108** Twenty-three (23) witnesses, 15 male and eight female, were employed at the time of their hearing, three others were working at home and three were retired. Five (5) witnesses reported being unemployed and the remaining 24 witnesses, 18 male and six female, were in receipt of disability income. Five (5) of these 24 witnesses had been previously employed for substantial periods of time.
- 13.109** As previously stated, many of the 19 witnesses with sensory impairments commented on the inadequate level of education provided for them in the schools, where the main emphasis was on remediation for their particular disability. They reported being denied both an academic education and the means to communicate effectively in mainstream society. These witnesses repeatedly remarked on the consequent disadvantages for them in their later work lives. While many witnesses established themselves in successful careers, they nevertheless reported having struggled for years to overcome the shortcomings of their education.
- 13.110** Eighteen (18) of the 58 witnesses reported receiving second-level education for some time in their adolescence. Five (5) of these 18 witnesses subsequently attended third-level education. The remaining 40 witnesses reported attending school at primary level, in 20 instances until they were aged 16 years or older.
- 13.111** Witnesses generally commented on the difficulty they experienced finding employment when they were discharged from the special needs schools and services. It was consistently reported that there were little or no formal placement or aftercare services available for them as young people with special needs. Telephonist training, tailoring, shoemaking, clerical employment, and assembly work were traditional areas of work mentioned for those with sensory and other impairments. Witnesses commented that these designated fields of employment did not suit everyone but prior to the 1970s there was very little, if any, choice available.
- 13.112** Twenty three (23) witnesses reported having stable and predominantly satisfying work careers and often commented on the helpful intervention of individuals they met along the way. One witness described himself as fortunate to work with someone who acted as a mentor and who advised the witness to travel and experience life in other places. He reported that he would be forever grateful for the encouragement he received from this person and was aware that his own circumstances were better than many of his peers who remained in the same jobs where they were originally placed by the school.
- 13.113** Three (3) female witnesses reported being retained in their particular special needs schools as domestic workers for a number of years. These witnesses all subsequently arranged alternative employment for themselves outside the institutions and commented on the assistance they were grateful to receive from kind work colleagues in the schools.
- 13.114** Five (5) witnesses reported that they are involved in the disability sector either working within organisations for people with disabilities or on behalf of people with special needs.

13.115 Twelve (12) witnesses stated that they have been in sheltered work situations since they were discharged from the special needs schools and services, some of which have been provided or supported by the same organisations who managed the special needs facilities. Involvement in the sheltered employment programs was, in some instances, part of the aftercare service provided by organisations in conjunction with sheltered accommodation. Other sheltered employment services were provided by voluntary community-based organisations to which residents were referred when they were discharged from the special needs schools.

13.116 For other witnesses employment was reported as a problematic area of their lives. Fifteen (15) reported having great difficulty settling into employment and as a result have been unemployed for substantial periods of time. The Committee heard numerous reports of witnesses being poorly treated by employers and making frequent job changes in attempts to find better situations. Relations with work colleagues were cited as a problem area. Several witnesses reported that communication difficulties with their work colleagues contributed to them feeling victimised in various ways. Others commented on the fact that they were disadvantaged in employment situations by what they regarded as the prejudice of both co-workers and employers towards people with disabilities. The lack of preparation for independence and a social life outside the institutional setting was believed by many of these witnesses to have contributed to the particular difficulties experienced.

I was raped when I was... (homeless)... it was a bad rape. I think I had a breakdown, I was working on kind of overdrive ... I didn't care anymore what happened to me, I'd get a job and then I'd lose it. I felt like I closed down a great deal. I gave up wanting to get a job.

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I was happy... (at work)... and everything was good, but as soon as I was given out to again it all came flooding back. They were wrong at school to be constantly giving out to us, because we didn't know how to answer back, we didn't know how to be ... assertive.

13.117 Seven (7) witnesses stated that they have been on disability income all their lives and had never participated in any formal employment activity.

Accommodation

13.118 Witnesses reported having reasonably settled accommodation, with 18 witnesses owning their own home. Most of the 23 witnesses who were living in sheltered accommodation had resided there since their time in the special needs facility. As previously stated, sheltered accommodation programs were, and continue to be, provided by some of the special needs services as part of their ongoing service delivery. Witnesses in sheltered accommodation programs described different living situations. A number lived in group homes with other adults who had similar needs and required minimal daily assistance. Others lived in small residential units with 24-hour staff cover. Witnesses in sheltered accommodation generally reported having good support services and relatively secure accommodation. Lack of income security provided considerable difficulty for 17 witnesses, who were dependent on the private rental market or the goodwill of friends and relatives for accommodation. Reported housing arrangements at the time of hearings were:

- Twenty three (23) witnesses lived in sheltered accommodation.
- Eighteen (18) witnesses reported that they owned their own homes.
- Eleven (11) witnesses lived in rented accommodation, either in the private or public sector.
- Six (6) witnesses lived with friends or relatives.

Health

13.119 During the course of their hearings witnesses provided general information regarding their health and well-being, both directly and in the context of describing their current life circumstances. For the purpose of writing this Report the Committee categorised witnesses' physical and mental

health status as good, reasonable or poor based on the information provided at the hearing about their current and past health history. Twenty two (22) of the witnesses who had intellectual impairments provided minimal details regarding their health status and are categorised as ‘unknown’ in the absence of sufficient information being provided to allow a more accurate description.

- 13.120** Sixteen (16) of the 36 witnesses who provided information about their general health status described having good physical health. In general these witnesses commented that they have not had any major health concerns apart from routine or age-related conditions that had responded well to treatment.
- 13.121** Fifteen (15) witnesses described physical health circumstances that the Committee categorised as ‘reasonable’ for the purpose of this Report. The witnesses reported having, and receiving treatment for, a range of conditions including heart disease, arthritis, diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome and epilepsy, which continue to have some debilitating effect on their everyday lives.
- 13.122** Five (5) witnesses reported poor physical health including terminal conditions and the chronic symptoms of alcoholism and eating disorders. One witness reported poor physical health as the consequence of a severe physical disability. At the time of their hearings, four of the five witnesses who described serious physical health concerns also reported experiencing poor mental health.

Table 63: Current Physical Health Status – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Physical health status	Males	Females	Total witnesses
Good	9	7	16
Reasonable	8	7	15
Poor	4	1	5
Unavailable	18	4	22
Total	39	19	58

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

- 13.123** Eleven (11) witnesses reported having no particular mental health problems. Six (6) of the 11 witnesses who reported good mental health described experiencing some emotional difficulties in the past. Such difficulties included anxiety, loneliness and depression, which they believed was related to their childhood abuse. A number of witnesses reported that counselling had helped them to deal with their emotional difficulties and others commented that they had learned to accept their painful memories and experiences of their childhood.

Since I’ve gone to counselling and that I don’t feel as bad as I used to ... I think the counsellor put it into perspective ... It wasn’t my fault, I’ve nothing to be ashamed of

•

Counselling was very helpful. It’s finished. I miss her... (counsellor)... terrible but she thinks I was ready to finish.

•

I... (get depressed)... sometimes,...(there’s)... no treatment, nobody could cure me. I’ll go with it to the grave. I’ll never change, it’s impossible, it’s in my mind.

- 13.124** Fourteen (14) witnesses described a range of mental health concerns including depression, alcoholism and anxiety, which have had a notable impact on their lives and which in five instances have necessitated in-patient psychiatric treatment in the past. Three (3) of the 14 witnesses reported that their alcohol abuse was a response to feelings of depression, loneliness and anger related to childhood abuse. One witness reported a past history of self-harm and two

other witnesses reported that they had acted on suicidal thoughts in the past. The mental health status of these 14 witnesses was categorised as reasonable by the Committee and were markedly different to the circumstances of other witnesses whose mental health status was categorised as poor.

A certain thing will remind me of it... (childhood abuse)... like food reminds me of it. I do attribute myself being overweight to... (childhood memories of food)..., now I eat what I want when I want it, and not horrible food and food that was never touched in there...(school)..., not potatoes. I was bulimic for a while first when I left... but I stopped that ... and self harm, I was cutting myself.

- 13.125** The 11 witnesses categorised as experiencing poor mental health circumstances reported ongoing feelings of depression with past or current thoughts or attempts of suicide. They reported being currently treated with medication for their depression and three witnesses had received in-patient psychiatric treatment in the recent past. Two (2) witnesses described suffering with agoraphobia and another witness reported repeated attempts at self-harm. Five (5) of the 11 witnesses described themselves as being actively suicidal in the past.

Table 64: Current Mental Health Status – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Mental health status	Males	Females	Total witnesses
Good	6	5	11
Reasonable	8	6	14
Poor	7	4	11
Unavailable	18	4	22
Total	39	19	58

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

- 13.126** In summary, the most consistently reported features of the health profile of witnesses who had attended special needs facilities was depression with associated alcohol abuse, suicidal thoughts and self-harm. Twenty two (22) witnesses reported being treated for depression either currently or in the past and 31 witnesses reported having received counselling.

Effects on adult life

- 13.127** Communication impairments restricted a number of witnesses' ability to report in detail about their experiences. It was also remarked that sensory and other impairments made it difficult for witnesses and others to access information about the work of the Commission. It is important to note that the evidence presented to the Committee was received from witnesses who were less restricted than others in their capacity to communicate independently and/or had access to good support networks. Witnesses repeatedly made the point to the Committee that this was not the reality for many of their former co-residents. Nine (9) of the 58 witnesses in this group did not elaborate on their life experiences since being discharged from the special needs services they attended as children. A number had gone on to live in sheltered accommodation facilities provided by the same organisations who managed the special needs services they had previously attended.
- 13.128** The table below lists the negative effects described by the 49 witnesses, 32 male and 17 female, who reported abuse in special needs services and also gave an account of their adult life circumstances.

Table 65: Reported Effects on Adult Life – Male and Female Special Needs Schools and Residential Services

Male witnesses		Female witnesses	
Effects on adult life*	Number of reports	Effects on adult life*	Number of reports
Counselling required	17	Counselling required	14
Abuse not easily forgotten	12	Abuse not easily forgotten	12
Lack of trust	12	Feeling isolated	9
Suicidal feelings or attempt	12	Lack of trust	9
Alcohol abuse	11	Anxious and fearful	8
Feeling isolated	11	Post-traumatic effect	8
Angry	10	Tearfulness	7
Loner	9	Loner	7
Sleep disturbance	9	Mood instability	7
Gender identity and sexual problems	8	Feeling different from peers	5
Lack of self-worth	8	Feelings related to being a victim	5
Anxious and fearful	7	Suicidal feelings or attempt	5
Nightmares	7	Alcohol abuse	4
Tearfulness	6	Angry	4
Feeling different from peers	6	Issues of needing approval	4
Mood instability	6	Sleep disturbance including nightmares	4
Feelings related to being a victim	5	Somatic symptoms	4
Withdrawal	5	Withdrawal	4
Aggressive behaviour – verbal	4	Aggressive behaviour – physical	3
Post-traumatic effect	4	Eating disorder	3
Unable to settle	4	Fear of failure	3
Issues of self-blame	3	Feelings related to being powerless	3
Feelings related to being powerless	2	Aggressive behaviour – verbal	2
Overly compliant behaviour	2	Issues of self-blame	2
Somatic symptoms	2	Overprotective of children	2
Unable to show feelings to children	2	Unable to show feelings to children	2
Unable to show feelings to partner	2	Aggressive behaviour – psychological	1
Aggressive behaviour – psychological	1	Over harsh with children	1
Find others with similar experiences	1	Sexual problems	1
Overprotective of children	1	Unable to settle	1
Substance abuse	1	Unable to show feelings to partner	1

Source: Confidential Committee of CICA, 2009

n = 32 male and 17 female

*Witnesses could report more than one effect and female witnesses reported a wider variety of effects

13.129 Twenty one (21) of the 49 witnesses who provided information about their adult life circumstances described an ongoing sense of isolation and inability to trust others. Fourteen (14) of those witnesses reported life-long difficulties as a result of the sexual abuse they experienced, particularly in terms of their ability to trust people. Other witnesses reported that separation from their families in childhood has contributed to their sense of feeling isolated and different from others. For some witnesses the relationships with their brothers and sisters have never been properly restored, depriving them of practical and emotional support networks in their adult lives.

No contact whatsoever ... (with siblings) ... I've tried, the only thing I can say is I've tried to get in contact with each and every one,... but they have their own...(difficulties).

13.130 In addition to feeling isolated, between 12 and 17 witnesses also described feeling angry, at times having suicidal thoughts and experiencing sleep disturbance. Fifteen (15) witnesses reported that they abused alcohol to the extent that it had a negative effect on their lives.

