



**Magdalene Institutions:
Recording an Archival and Oral History
A project funded by the**



Topic Guide for Key Informants

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Please give your name

Consent to participate: Before starting the interview, I would like to ask you to confirm that you agree to participate in this interview voluntarily and that you are familiar with the information and consent forms that I provided to you.

Background

1. Can you tell me about yourself?
2. Did you hear about Magdalene Institutions when you were young? What did you hear?

Personal Experience of the Laundry

1. Can you tell me your connection to the Magdalene Laundries?
2. What laundry/laundries did you have experience of?
3. Between which dates?
4. What work did you do?
5. Did you have much interaction with the women and girls?

Financial

1. Did you have any responsibility for or knowledge of the finances of the institution?
2. Would you consider it to have been a profitable institution?
3. Where did the money go?
4. Was there a bank account to which money was lodged?
5. Do you recall any funds coming from the state?
6. To your knowledge, what proportion of money was spent on food and clothing for the women?
7. What relationship did the Magdalene Laundry have with other local businesses, particularly other laundry businesses? Was it in competition with them?

The Type of Work in the Laundry/Contracts

1. Were you aware of regular contracts – did the laundry regularly come from particular clients?
2. Was it possible to tell where the items of clothing which were being laundered or repaired came from?
3. Were any of the items being laundered recognisable as uniforms or work clothes? If so, can you remember which organisations they came from?
4. Did the women and girls ever have any contact with or talk to the people delivering the clothes to the laundry?

How Women and Girls Entered the Laundry

1. How many women and girls were there during the time you worked at the laundry?
2. In your experience, how did women and girls enter the laundry?
3. Do you recall how they reacted on arrival?
4. Were they made aware of their rights?
5. Were they told how long they would be there?
6. Were they told that they were free to leave?
7. Were they told they could leave on a certain date?
8. Were there mostly older women or young girls in the laundry?
9. Do you recall if the women moved from one institution to another?

Regime

1. Were there rules at the Magdalene Laundry? If so, what were they?
2. What happened if someone broke the rules?
3. What do you know about the process to become a 'consecrated' Magdalene/auxiliary?

Living Conditions in the Laundry

1. Did women and girls have a "house name" or number at the Magdalene Laundry?
2. What were living conditions like?
3. Where did the women sleep?
4. What clothes did they wear?
5. What food did they receive? Did the Religious Sisters receive the same food?
6. What (if any) opportunities for recreation or exercise were there?
7. What (if any) opportunities for education were there?
8. Were they happy?
9. Do you think they were there of their own free will?

Relationships (Women and Girls)

1. Were the women and girls allowed to make friends?
2. How would you describe your relationships with the women and girls who worked in the institution?
3. How would you describe the relationships between the women and girls themselves?
4. Were friends or relatives able to visit them?
5. Were there any other visitors to the Magdalene?
6. What (if any) other contact with the world outside the laundry was there (e.g. newspapers or radio; trips outside the laundry)?
7. Did the women and girls have any relationship with friends or family outside the institution?

8. Did the women and girls have any relationship with visitors to the institution?

Relationships (Church/Religious Sisters)

1. How would you describe the relationship between the women and girls and the Religious Sisters?
2. How would you describe your relationships with the Religious Sisters?
3. How would you describe the relationships between the Religious Sisters? Were they always harmonious?
4. What relationship did the Religious Sisters have with the Bishop?

Working Conditions in the Laundry (Women and Girls)

1. How many women and girls were there during the time you were familiar with the laundry?
2. What work did they do?
3. Were they paid?
4. Were they given pocket money?
5. How many days per week did they work?
6. What hours did they work?
7. Was every day the same, or were there any special events or holidays?
8. What were working conditions in the laundry like?
9. Were there any accidents in the laundry? What happened?
10. What happened if the women and girls did not want to or could not work?
11. Was anyone ever ill? What treatment did they receive?
12. Can you remember whether any government officials or employees ever visited the laundry – factory inspectors, Gardaí, doctors? If so, what parts of the laundry did they visit? Did they talk to anyone?
13. In the case of women and girls who entered the laundry from the Industrial School system or on remand/probation/being given a suspended sentence from the Courts or by being referred by the Gardaí/welfare officers/social workers - did anyone from the relevant Government department/agency visit you in the laundry to check how they were? If so, how often? And what did the women and girls say to them?

Possibility of Escape

1. Were the women and girls allowed to leave?
2. Do you know if anyone tried to leave or escape?
3. If so, what happened to them? Did someone bring them back? If so, who?
4. Did you help anyone escape?

5. For those who did not try to escape, to your knowledge, were there any reasons why they decided not to try?
6. How did people leave the Magdalene?
7. Did the women and girls ever ask the nuns when they would be able to leave the laundry? What was the reply?
8. Do you recall family members bringing girls home? If so, what happened?
9. Were the doors to the laundry locked? – From the inside or the outside?
10. What were the windows like? Were they locked? Could you reach them? Could you see outside?

End of Life Issues

1. Do you recall what happened when women died at the Magdalene Laundry?
2. Do you know if the women were buried in coffins?
3. Were other Magdalenes allowed to attend the funerals?
4. Was there a funeral mass? Did a priest attend the burial?

Complaints

1. Was there a process to make a formal complaint?
2. Did the women and girls complain to anyone while you were in the laundry?

Post-Magdalene Institution Experiences

1. Did you speak about the Magdalene Laundry after you left? Who did you speak with? What did you say?
2. How do you now feel about your experiences with the laundry?
3. Has your experience affected you since? If so, please give details?
4. Has it affected how you view institutions?
5. Do you have contact with any of the women and/or do you ever visit any of the women who are living in institutionalised settings?