News

by The Associated Press

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London — October 7, 2021
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Police in Northern Ireland announced Oct. 6 an investigation into allegations of physical and sexual abuse at church-run institutions that housed unmarried women and their children.

The announcement came a day after an independent panel recommended a public inquiry to examine human rights abuses in the homes, so-called Magdalene laundries and workhouses.

Detective Chief Superintendent Anthony McNally said the force has set up dedicated reporting channels to make it easier for people to come forward.

"Specially trained officers within our Historical Child Abuse Team will be investigating all allegations of non-recent physical and sexual abuse against residents of these homes," he said. "All reports we receive will be examined thoroughly and any criminality detected will be robustly investigated."

A major study by Queen's University and Ulster University published earlier this year found that more than 14,000 girls and women spent time at nun-run laundries and mother-and-baby homes, which were run by the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and housed women and girls who became pregnant outside marriage.

The study found that women were mistreated, held against their will and many were forced to give up children for adoption. The youngest at a mother-and-baby home was a 12-year-old girl; the oldest was 44.

The institutions operated from the 1920s to 1990. The study said that while stigma and shame attached to unmarried mothers tailed off in the second half of the 20th century, the culture was still significant up until the 1980s.

The reports of abuse mirrored those in Ireland, where an inquiry found that 9,000 children died in 18 mother-and-baby homes during the 20th century.

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