



MIXED RACE IRISH **Presentation**

TO

THE OIREACHTAS JOINT COMMITTEE

ON

JUSTICE, DEFENCE AND EQUALITY

Our collective voice can be strong. Together we can get the recognition this issue deserves.



Topic

The experience of Mixed Race Irish (MRI) while in the care of State institutions detailing any inequality in treatment based on Race.

1. Introduction

We would first of all like to thank the Committee for this opportunity to come before you today to **discuss the experience of our members while in the care of State institutions detailing any inequality in treatment based on Race.**

1.2. Who are we?

We are a campaign group called Mixed Race Irish (MRI).

We wish to raise awareness of the experience of Mixed Race Irish children who were in the Irish institutional care system during the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s. These children were mostly of African fathers and Irish mothers.

We want to highlight the "racism" and the damaging impacts/ legacy experienced by these children while under the care of the Irish State.

Pause.....

1.3. Why Mixed Race Irish?

This is a very important question as it reflects the importance to us as group of our "Irish heritage" which we believe was stolen and denied to us. We grew up in Ireland, and to all intent and purposes are Irish yet, we believe we were treated differently resulting in, inequalities in treatment in these institutions because of one simple factor the "Colour of our Skin".

1.4. When were we set up?

We were **formally** set up in September 2013 by Yvonne Brennan, Rosemary Adaser and Carole Brennan.

1.5. How did we come together?

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Pause

We came together at Industrial Abuse groups gatherings. At these group meetings we realised that there was no understanding/ room for debate or support for the colour-specific 'racial' suffering that was imposed on us as children and the impact that this has had on our lives.

Pause**1.6. Unique experience**

Our existence and experiences are unique and we believe have been airbrushed from Irish Survivor Abuse history. (Please see points 1 and 1.2 in our submission paper for further detail)s.

1.7. How many Mixed Race Irish were in Irish institutions?

We have identified over 70 mixed-race survivors of institutions. We now know that there are 7 suicides in our community. We believe there could be over 100 people who are unidentified, missing or deceased.(Please Submission point 5.5.2 p6-7).

We are continuing to search for these individuals which is a difficult task given no records of mixed race children are apparently available.

1.8. How many members in MRI Group?

Our group has over 40 members to date and growing. We are located in Ireland, Britain, America and China. Members of the group are now all over 50 years of age. Our membership is approximately 40% male and 60% female. (some are here today in the public gallery).

There is strong evidence that some members of this community have had serious mental health problems, substance abuse-ie, drug and alcoholism, social isolation and trans-generational issues relating to racial abuse and poverty which we will come back to later. (For a more detailed breakdown of these statistics, please see our Position and Research paper, point 4. p13).

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2. What are the aims of our Campaign?

1. Raise Awareness of the **colour specific abuses** (slow down), of MRI, by reaching out to others and sharing our stories personally and also publicly like we are doing here today, where appropriate.
2. Recognition and **Acknowledgement** of how the State failed mixed race children in institutional care
3. Justice through Accountability and Redress (and how the state should provide for its failure to protect mixed race children in its care.
4. Assurances that the issues of Racism be prioritized as a State initiative to ensure these kinds of abuses do not happen again in state run institutions.

3. Collective Statement on behalf of the Mixed Race Irish.

"It has taken us many years to have the courage to reveal the depth of our inner pain and suffering which has been internalised. This has only been made possible by us standing together as a collective group. The sharing of our horrific past has given us the strength to bring forth a long and well overdue past which we feel needs to be exposed.

Many Mixed Race Irish carry deep scars of trauma and continue to suffer as a direct result of these past experiences which have left huge and everlasting wounds that may never heal".

Pause

4. As highlighted in our Submission, (point number 1).- The Constitution of Ireland states that all children of the nation are to be cherished equally. Our submission will reveal how the state failed mixed race Irish children through inequality and discrimination.

Our suffering manifested for example in the following:

1. Mental health
2. Identity
3. Opportunity/ Intergenerational
4. Poverty/ Income

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4.1. Mental Health.

Many of our members present with mental health issues, which have had devastating impacts on their lives that are ongoing.

We will also like to now include further examples of painful disclosures from our members in this regard.

“Forced to clean blocked toilets on the grounds that my colour was the same”

“Bath time as a means to inflict degrading racist sexual inspections”

Being doused in talcum powder,..... “Now you know what it is like to be white.”

4.2. Identity

Many of our members have lived with a lack of identity which has huge impact on their sense of self and belonging. An unconscious hatred of our black heritage that was ingrained in us by the institutions, matched by exclusion, we were made to feel unwelcome, unwanted by Irish Society.

The failure to accept mixed race Irish as part of Irish society, with no recognition nor ethnic protection is devastating.

Indeed, how can children protect themselves from discrimination in the absence of race policies and legislation?

“Wanting so much to be Irish, to belong, yet this constant questioning of my identity was so traumatising - no one attempted to explain my dual heritage.

A white survivor observed that he knew his mixed Race Irish friend was being treated unfairly and very badly and didn't understand why, until years later.... He believes his friend to now be deceased.

4.3. Opportunity/ Intergenerational

A study from Howard University in Washington DC points out, that parents' responses to their own experiences of racial discrimination may **influence their parenting** and how they teach their children to successfully negotiate racism

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One member recalls being told by their *psychiatrist* ***“that despite being highly intelligent, only using 10% of their mental capability due to trauma of racism and lack of identity.*** This is a devastating realisation given, many MRI children’s father’s as outlined previously in our submission, were educated to high standards as student doctors, engineers etc.

In secondary school the parish priest would single out mixed-race irish children and racially abuse them in front of their peers. Telling them for example:

“You have two drawbacks in life, one is the colour of your skin, and the second is you are illegitimate.”

“There was some kind of pecking order and coloured girls were in the lower ranks”

“No career planning or work experience because of stereotype that we would become prostitutes” .

Resulting in many not living up to their full potential.

4.4. Poverty and Income.

“The lack of a trade was extremely damaging to my survival post institution”.

“Employers told me outright that they could not employ a nigger because I would scare people”.

Without protection, guidance and support regarding identity, we entered adulthood feel inferior resulting low self-confidence which affects job prospects and Lower educational outcomes .

For further detailed insight into these issues please see our Research and Position Paper.

And finally, I would like to refer to this

5. Inequality in Status and Outcomes.

” A certain amount of colored children were seen in several schools their future presents a problem difficult of any satisfactory solution. Their prospects of marriage in this country

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are practically nil and their future happiness and welfare can only be assured in a country with a fair multi racial population, since they are not received by either black or white..... they are also at a disadvantage in relation to adoption..... these unfortunate children who are frequently found hot-tempered and difficult to control” (Report sent to the Department of Education in 1966).

As highlighted in our Submission paper (point 3.1 p4) and I quote”

We recognise the language in the above statement to the Minister of Education. We consider this language deeply offensive. This is the language that made Mixed Race Irish children the ‘Other’ in Irish Industrial Schools and encapsulates the racist labelling that ensured our childhoods were filled with terror, abuse and pain”.

It is our hope, that we commence the process of **grieving** for a lost identity, youth and *heritage* that can only truly begin, through **Recognition, Acknowledgement** and **Justice** for the suffering of our members (Mixed Race Irish), whilst under the care of the Irish State.

Thank you for listening!

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