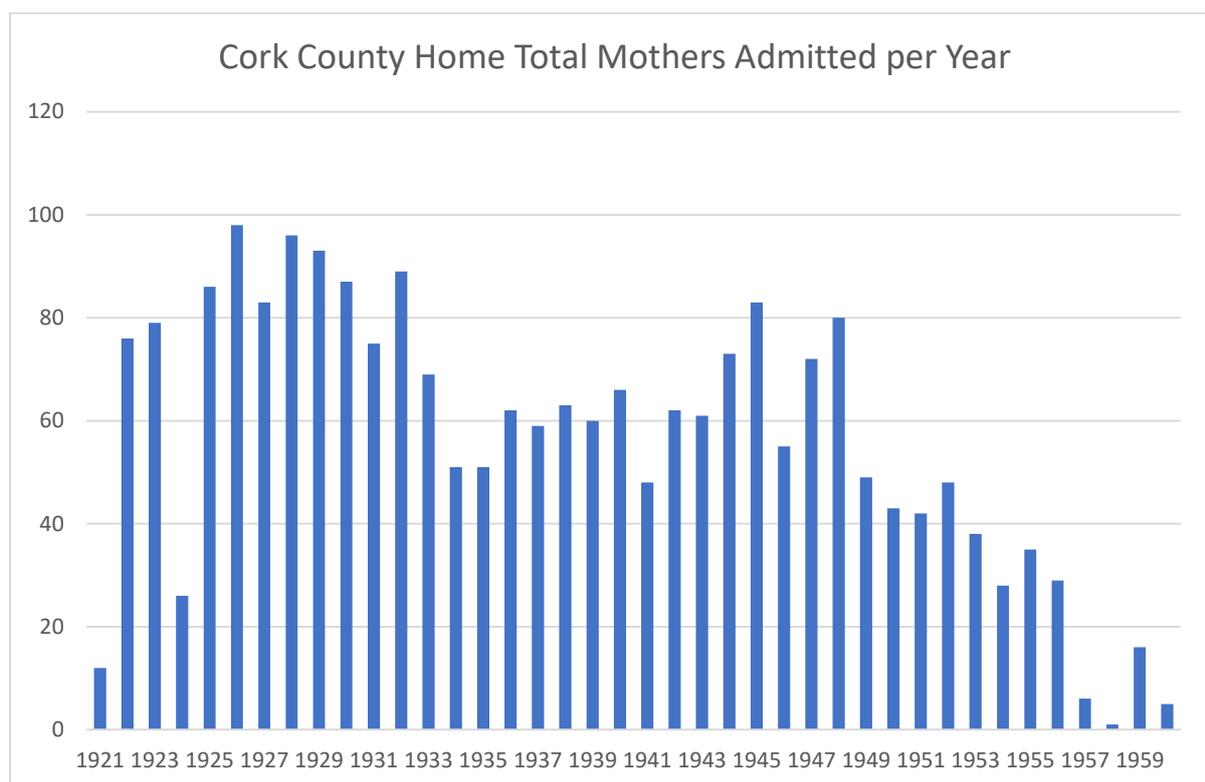


Chapter 28 A: Cork county home Statistical analysis

The statistical analysis provided here is based on the institutional records provided to the Commission. The Commission compiled a database from the institutional records and analysed the information on a calendar year basis. In the narrative chapter, statistical information from other sources is described. These other sources are not directly comparable with the Commission's analysis. For example, almost all the statistical information available from official publications is on an administrative year basis, that is, from 1 April to 31 March. This was the case until about 1980. Statistics from other reports, for example, inspection reports, often relate to a specific day or a non-standard period and so are not directly comparable. In general, the Commission is satisfied that there are no significant differences between its analysis and information from other sources. In a few cases where there are differences, attention is drawn to this in the narrative chapter.

Admissions

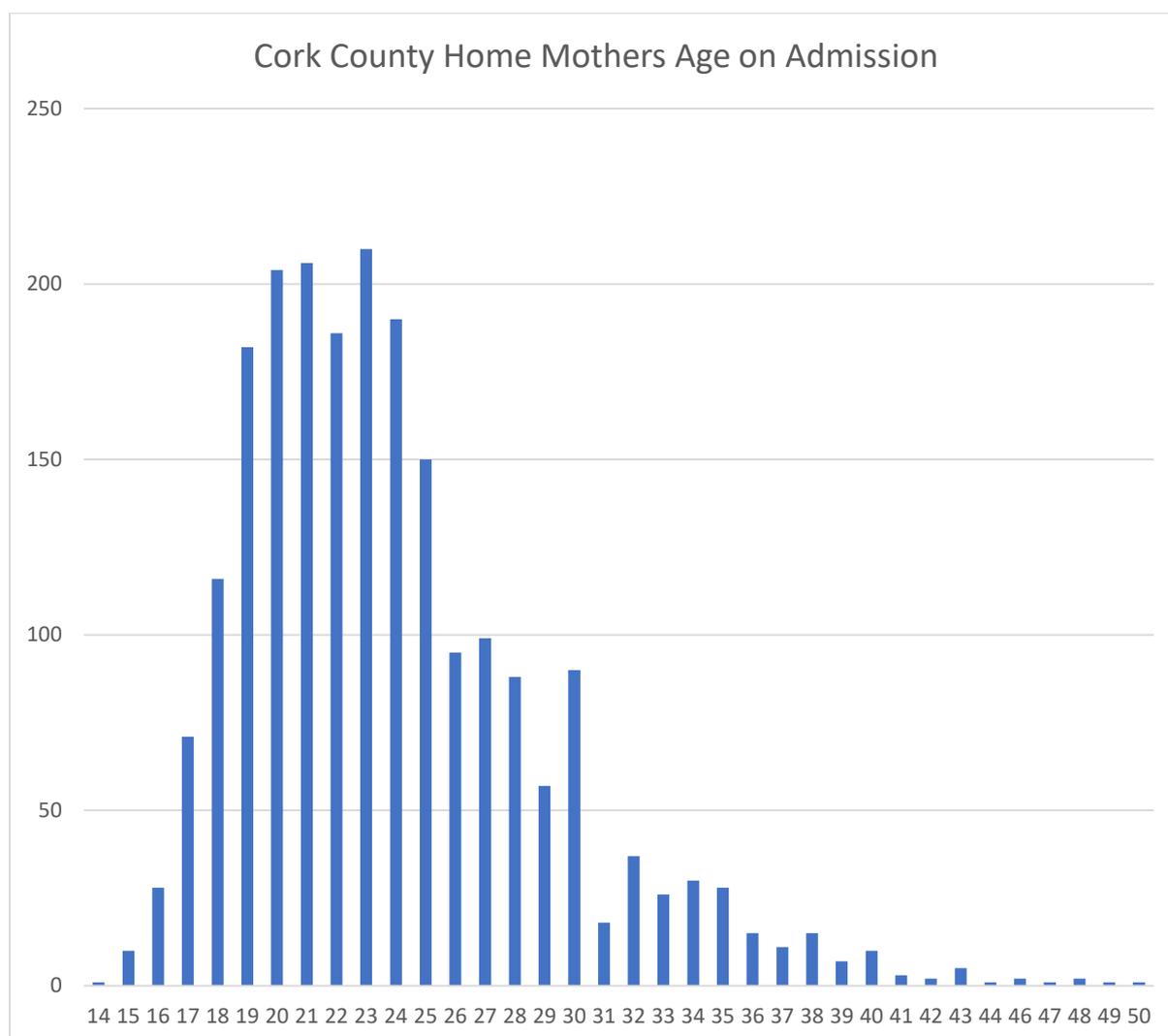


From the institutional records¹, the Commission established that 2,318 single expectant women were admitted to Cork county home in the years 1921 to 1960. Information relating

¹ Indoor registers are missing for Jan-Dec 1924; March 1952; Feb-Mar 1953; Jan-Mar 1954; March 1955 and April 1957-March 1959

to year of admission was available for 2,255 women (97.3% of admissions).² The busiest period was in the years 1922 to 1933; over 42% of women were admitted in that period. Admissions peaked in 1926; 98 women were recorded that year. Although Bessborough opened in 1922 it appears that many women either refused to enter, or were ineligible for admission to, Bessborough and continued to seek admission to Cork county home in this period. Admissions declined in 1934. This corresponds with the opening of a maternity hospital for single expectant women in Bessborough. Between 1934 and 1943, 58 women on average were admitted to the county home annually. However, numbers increased to 73 in 1944 and 83 in 1945. This was most likely due to overcrowding in Bessborough and the closing of that institution to public patients for most of 1945. Admissions remained relatively high in 1947 and 1948; 72 and 80 women were admitted respectively in those years. Admissions declined in a staggered fashion from 80 in 1948 to 29 in 1956. The records for 1957 to 1960 are incomplete; the surviving registers show that seven women on average were admitted annually in those years. Approximately 87% of single expectant women admitted to Cork county home were recorded prior to 1950.

² It was not possible to identify the date of admission for over 900 women. In those cases the date of birth of the child was used to inform data relating to the year of admission.

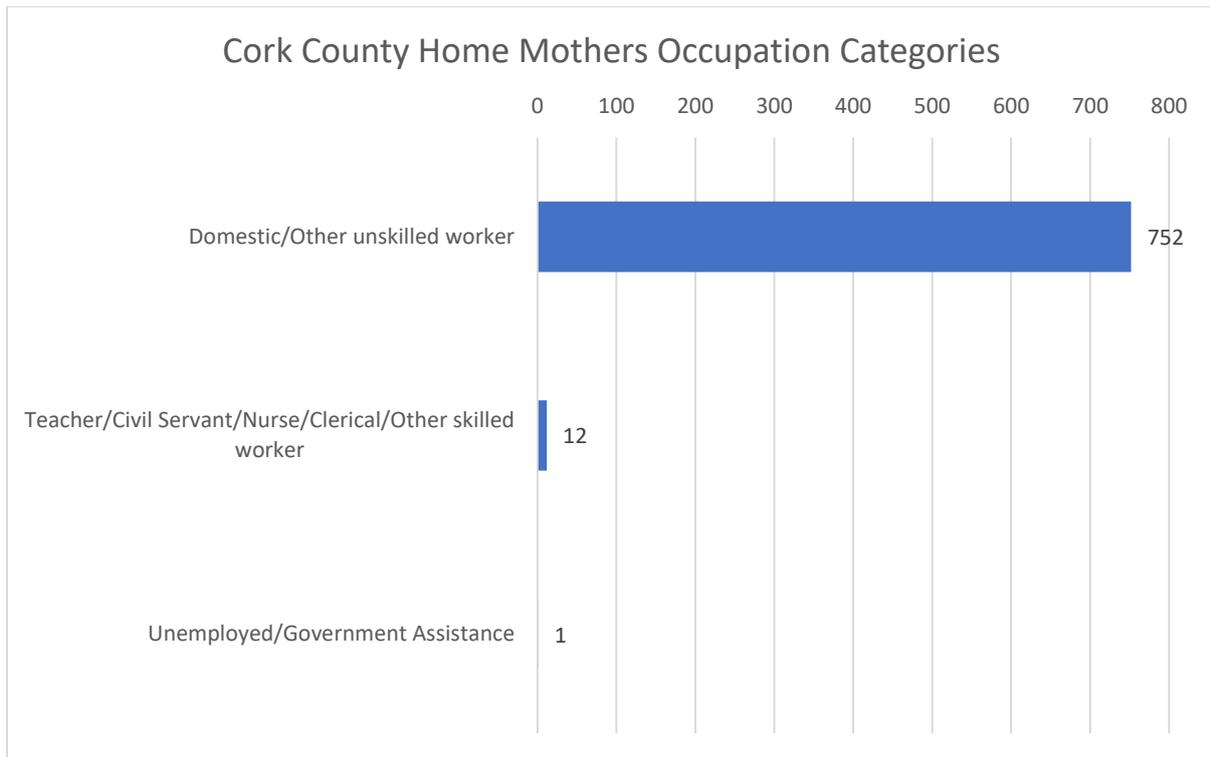
Age on admission

Information relating to age on admission was available for 2,198 women (94.8% of admissions). Age range was between 14 and 50 years. The institutional records show that most women (81%) were aged 18-29 years; 14% were 30 years and older and 5% were aged 17 years and younger; 1.77% of women were aged between 14 and 16 years. The mode of age on admission was 23 years; this varied from 20 years in the 1920s to 21 years in the 1940s and 1950s. Average age on admission increased from 23 years in the 1920s to 25 years in the 1950s.

Previous pregnancy

Information relating to previous pregnancy was available for 77 women; 64 were second pregnancies, ten were third pregnancies and two were fourth pregnancies. One woman was admitted on her fifth pregnancy. In 2,241 cases information relating to previous pregnancy was not recorded.

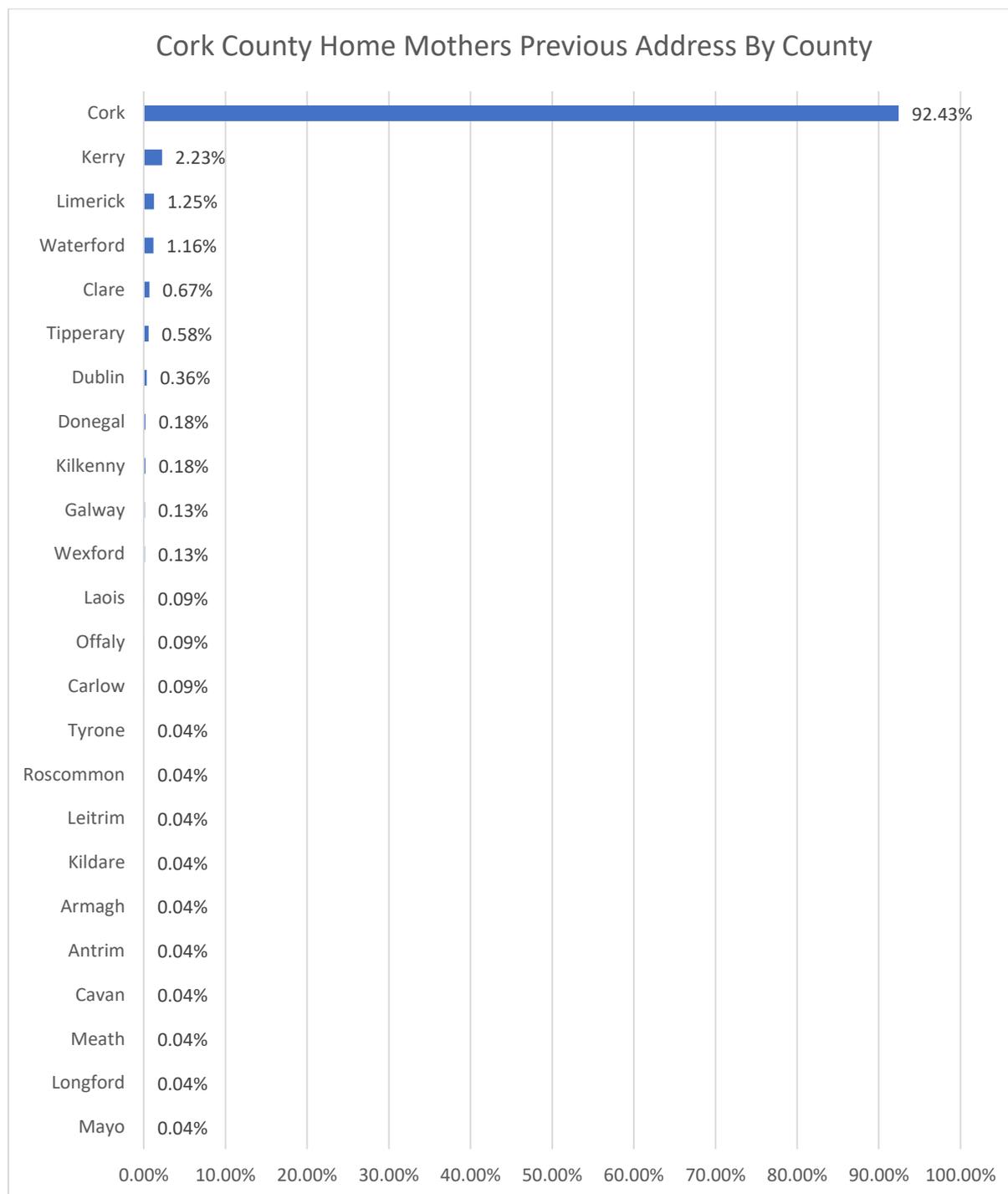
Occupation



Information relating to occupation was available for 765 women (33% of admissions). The available information shows that the majority (98.3%) were recorded as a domestic servant or unskilled worker; 1.57% as a teacher/civil servant/clerk or other skilled worker and one woman was recorded as being unemployed.

Marital status

Information relating to marital status was available for all 2,318 women. The institutional records show that the majority (97.8%) were single and the remaining women were either widowed or separated.

Previous address by county

Information relating to previous address by county was available for 2,245 women (96.9% of admissions). The institutional records show that the majority of women (92.43%) gave an address in Cork city or county as their residence prior to admission followed by Kerry (2.23%); Limerick (1.25%) and Waterford (1.16%). The remaining 2.93% of women combined gave addresses in 20 other counties.

Outcome

Information relating to outcome was available for 2,239 women (96.6% of admissions). The institutional records show that 83.4% of women admitted to Cork county home stayed and gave birth; 8.8% left before the birth - around one in three of whom gave birth in Bessborough following transfer there. The remaining 7.8% of women were admitted with their child having given birth elsewhere.

Place of birth

Information relating to place of birth was available for 1,965 women (84.4% of admissions). The institutional records show that most women (96.7%) gave birth in Cork county home; 2.1% gave birth in Bessborough following transfer there and the remaining 1.2% of women gave birth elsewhere. Of the women who gave birth in Cork county home, 99.89% delivered living infants; two women delivered stillborn infants.

Length of stay

In the institutional records, fields where dates of admission and discharge of unmarried mothers should have been recorded were frequently left empty. The Commission considered that the available information would not determine the typical length of stay with any accuracy. For the same reason, it was not possible to determine occupancy levels with any degree of accuracy.

Exit pathways

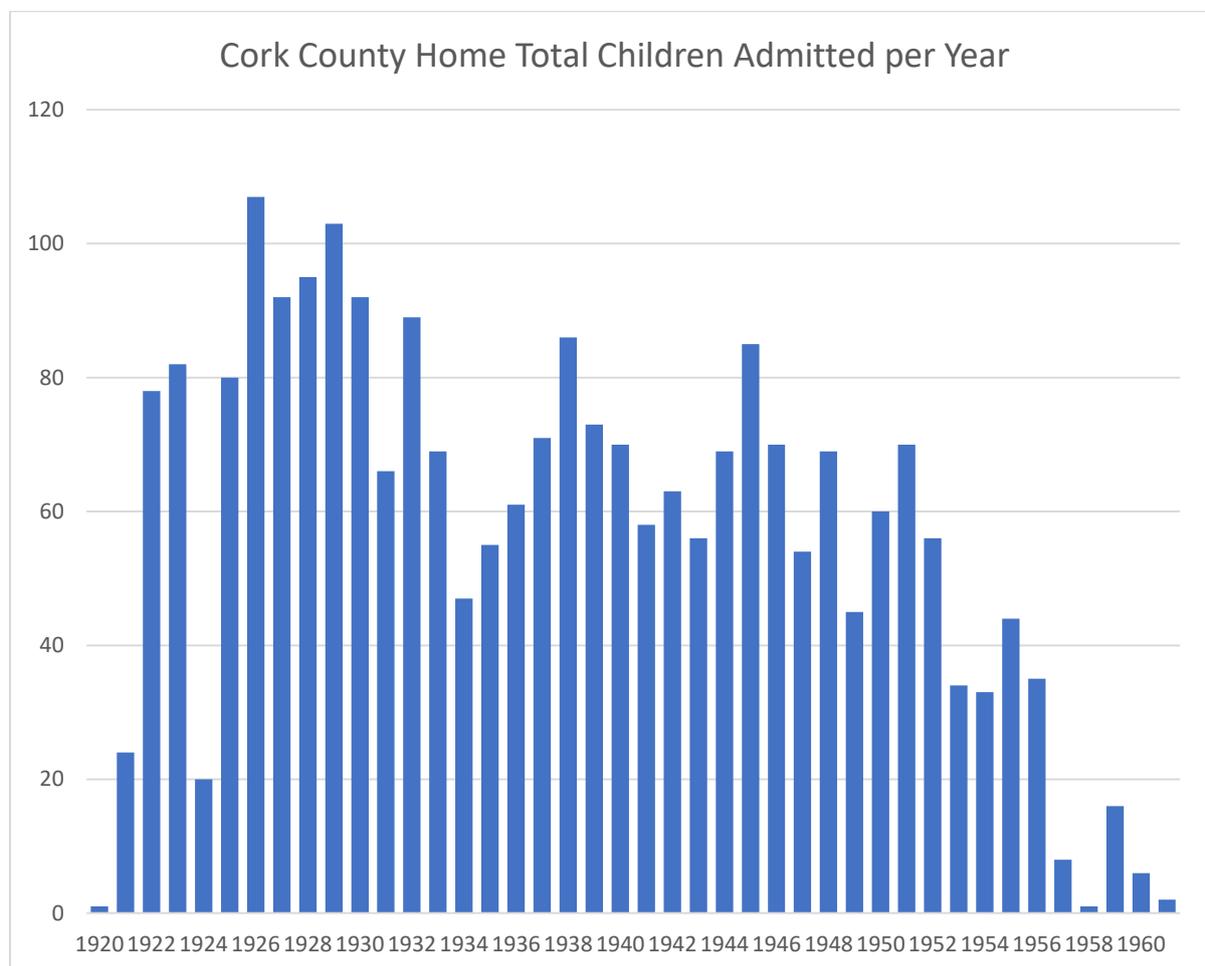
Information relating to exit pathways was available for 372 women (16% of admissions). The available information shows that the majority of the recorded exit pathways relate to women who transferred to Bessborough (340) and women who 'absconded' from the institution without their babies (14).

Maternal deaths

Through the institutional records, the Commission identified 35 deaths among women admitted to Cork county home: representing a mortality rate of 1.5%. The majority of deaths occurred in Cork district hospital - two occurred in Bessborough following transfer there. Eighteen deaths were not associated with pregnancy or childbirth - they were, in the main, due to tuberculosis, kidney disease, cancer, pneumonia and meningitis. Nine deaths were indirect obstetric deaths in the sense that they were conditions that developed during pregnancy, were aggravated by the physiological effects of pregnancy and generally resulted in cardiac failure. Sixteen deaths were directly associated with pregnancy and

childbirth. Direct obstetric deaths were mainly due to puerperal septicaemia/sepsis, toxæmia eclampsia and obstruction of labour. Adhering to WHO guidelines the maternal mortality rate in Cork county home was 1.12%.³

Children: admissions



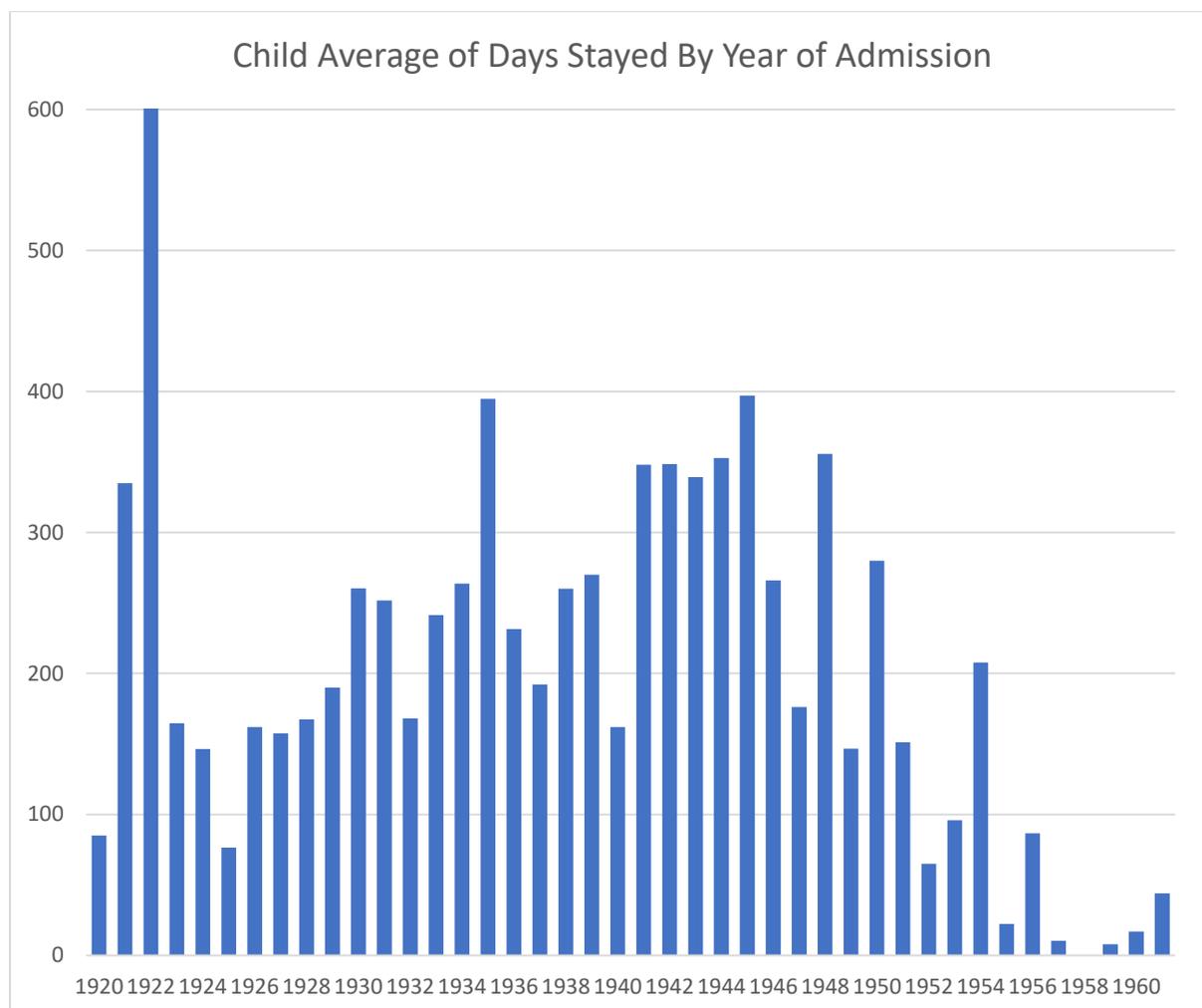
From the institutional records, the Commission identified 2,408 'illegitimate' children who were born in or admitted to Cork county home in the years 1920 to 1960. Information relating to date of birth/admission was available for 2,395 children (99.5% of admissions). Births and admissions were highest in the 1920s and 1930s and peaked in 1926 when 107 children were recorded. Reduced births/admissions were recorded in 1934 - 47 children were recorded that year - but increased to 86 in 1938. In the 1940s, births/admissions peaked in 1945 when 85 children were recorded (Bessborough was closed to public patients for most of that year) but had decreased to 45 by 1949. Despite a slight increase in 1951, for the remainder of the 1950s births/admissions declined - just eight children were recorded

³ Maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management but not from accidental or incidental causes. <https://www.who.int/healthinfo/statistics/indmaternalmortality/en/>

in 1957. More children were born in or admitted to Cork county home in the 1930s than any other decade (29.6%) followed by the 1920s (28.5%); 1940s (26.7%) and the 1950s (14.9%).

The institutional records show that the majority of children (83.6%) were born in the home or were admitted there with their mother; 16.2% were admitted unaccompanied and a small number were admitted as accompanying siblings.

Length of stay



Information relating to length of stay was available for 1,518 children (63% of births/admissions). The institutional records show that length of stay was longest for children admitted during 1922 and averaged 653 days. An average stay of over one year appears to have applied to children born/admitted in 1935 and 1945 only. Although average length of stay fluctuated wildly from 653 days in 1922, to 77 days in 1925 and 397 days in 1945, average lengths of stay from 1941 to 1945 were consistently high - children born or

admitted in those years spent 357 days on average in the home. In the 1950s, average length of stay varied from 208 days for children born/admitted in 1954 to 22 days for those born/admitted in 1955 and 87 days for those born/admitted in 1956. Analysis by decade shows that children born/admitted in the 1940s spent an average of 279 days in the home - by the 1950s this had decreased to 125 days.

Discharge re mother

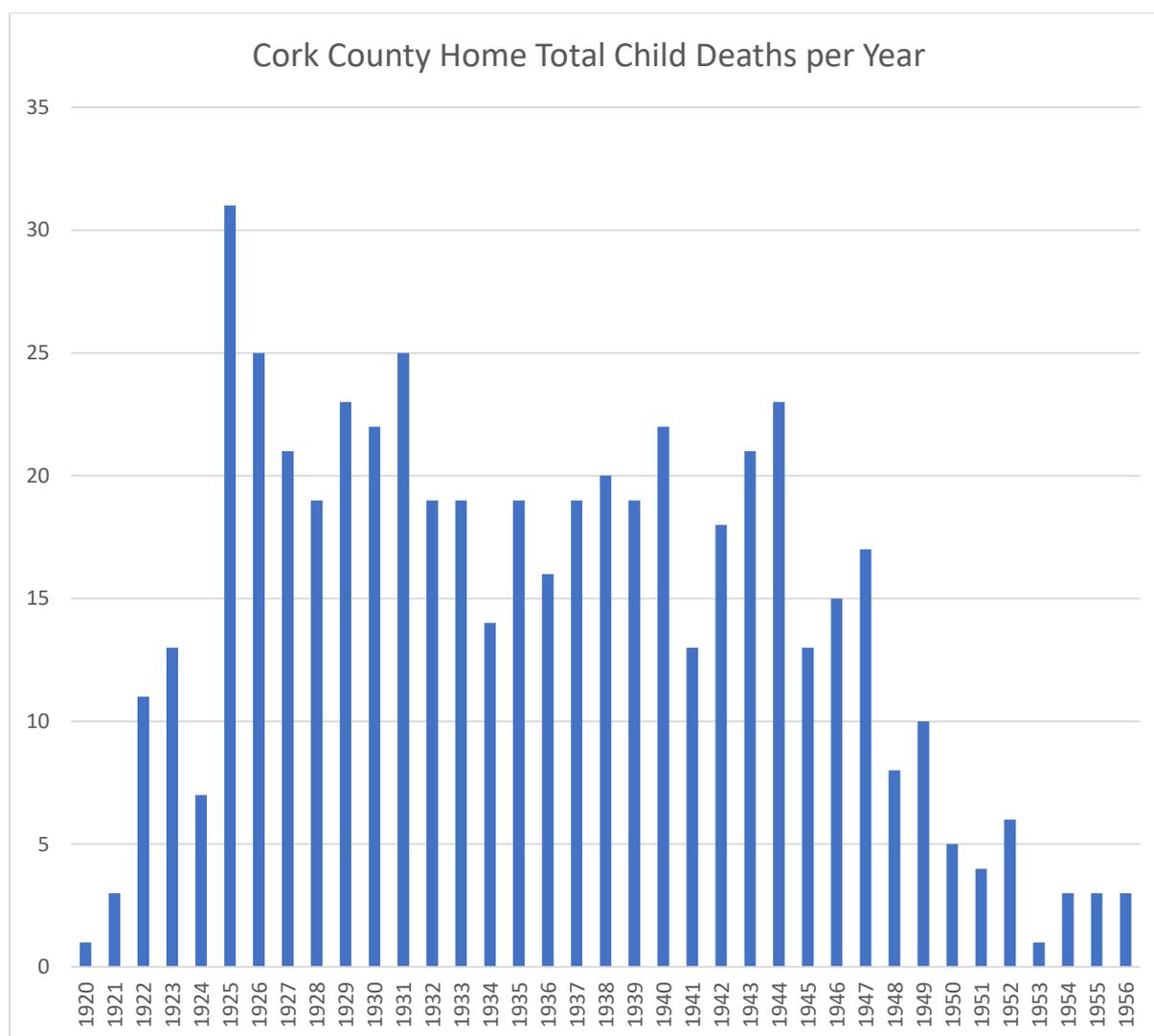
The available information relating to a child's discharge in relation to the mother shows that 65% left Cork county home on the same day as their mothers; 25.5% were discharged on dates before their mothers and 9.5% remained in the home unaccompanied for a period after their mothers had been discharged.

Exit pathways

Information relating to exit pathways was available for 577 children (24% of births/admissions). The available information shows that 38.82% of children transferred to other institutions - the majority to Bessborough and a small number to the Braemar Home for Protestant Girls; 38.47% were boarded out and 16.29% were placed at nurse; 5.2% left the home with the mother or other family member; 1.04% were legally adopted (post 1952) and 0.17% were informally adopted (pre 1953). Analysis of exit pathways for unaccompanied children shows that the majority (66.9%) were boarded out.

Foreign adoption

The available records show that four children born in Cork county home were placed for foreign adoption in the USA. Two were born to protestant women and were placed for adoption after their discharge to the Braemar Home for Protestant Girls. At least one of the other two children were placed for adoption through the Catholic Women's Aid Society (CWAS) - the fourth child was placed for adoption after being placed at nurse, most likely through CWAS also.

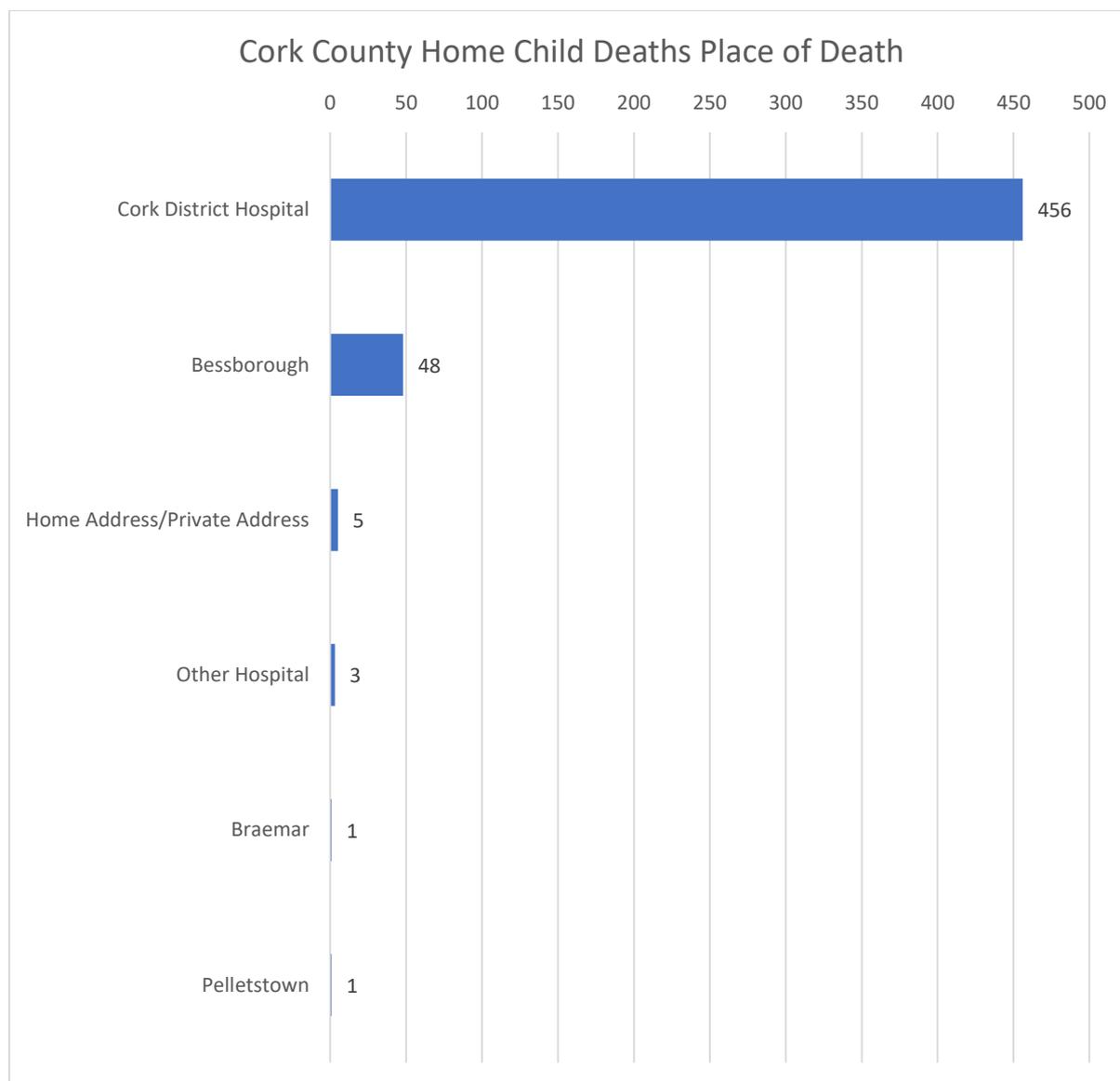
Child deaths

The institutional records show that 545 ‘illegitimate’ children died in Cork county home in the years 1920-60.⁴ The Commission located GRO death records for 512 children (93.9% of child deaths). Information relating to date of death was available for 531 children (97.4% of child deaths). In the early 1920s child mortality in Cork county home was relatively low but increased substantially from 13 deaths in 1923 to 31 deaths in 1925 and remained high until 1931; one in three of all child deaths were recorded during those seven years. Between 1932 and 1947, an average of 18 child deaths were reported annually - ranging from 13 deaths in 1941 to 23 deaths in 1944. The introduction of antibiotics in 1945 appears to have influenced a downward trend in child mortality and the opening of a dedicated paediatric unit in the home (then St Finbarr’s Hospital) in 1951 saw just four deaths being notified that year.

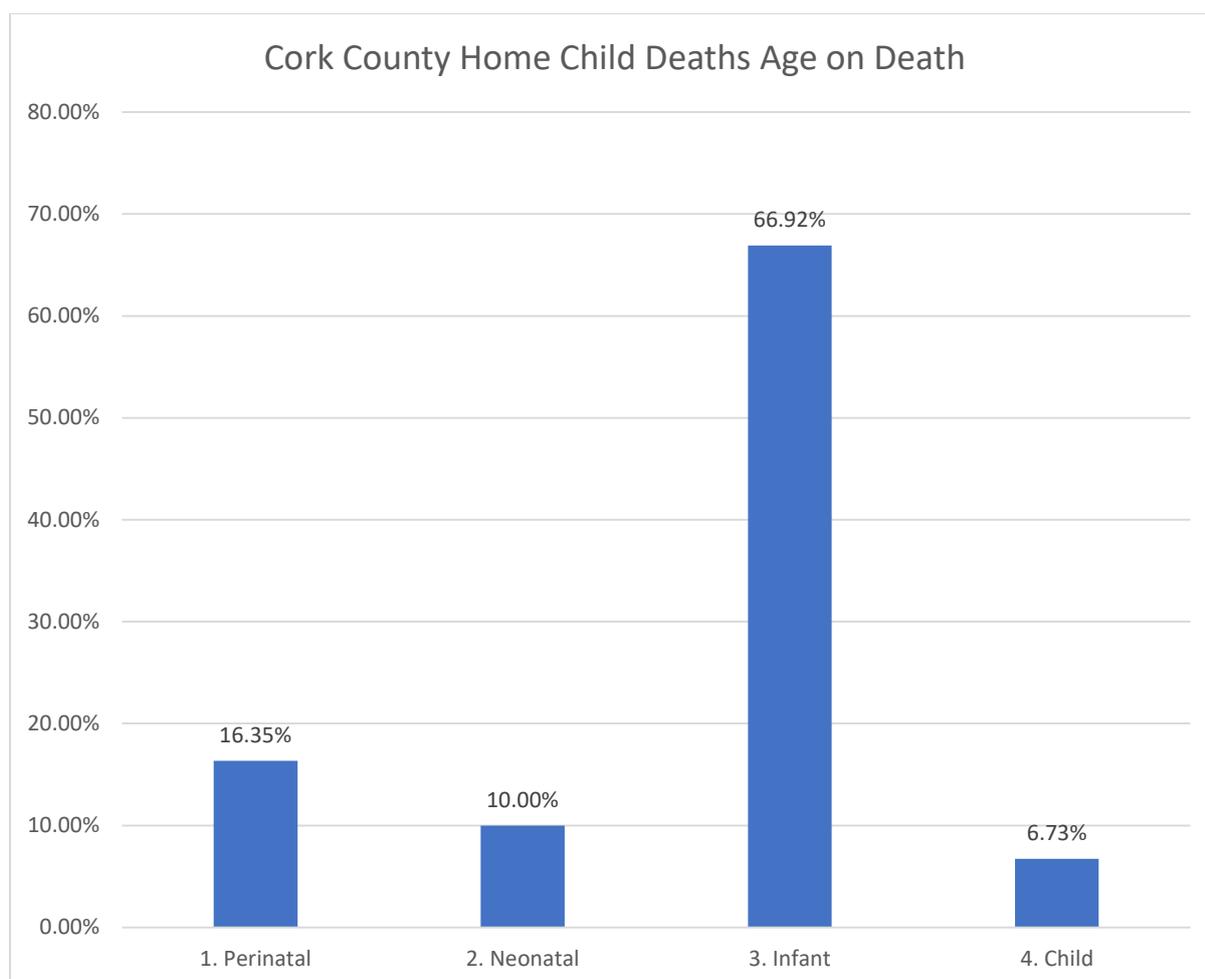
⁴ Many children were associated with both Cork county home and Bessborough and may appear in records relating to both institutions. The Commission identified a combined total of 1,401 individual child deaths in both institutions.

For the remainder of the 1950s, three child deaths on average were notified annually. 95% of child deaths in Cork county home occurred before 1950.

Place of death

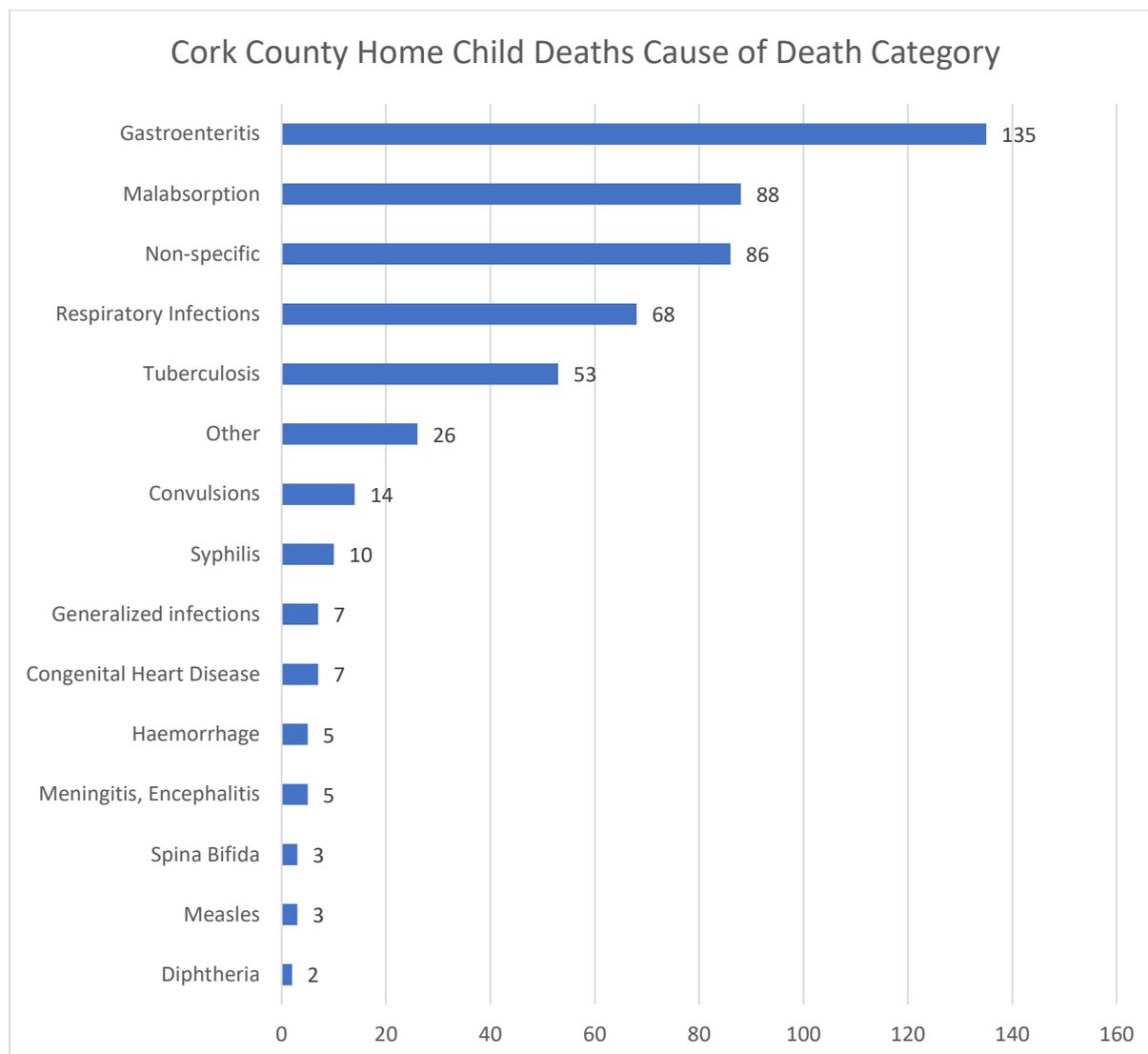


Information relating to place of death was available for 514 children (94.3% of suspected child deaths). The majority of child deaths (88.7%) occurred in Cork county home and district hospital; 9.3% occurred in Bessborough following transfer there; five children died in private residences - most after being placed at nurse; two died in the South Infirmary hospital and one in the Victoria hospital; one died in the Braemar Home and one died in Pelletstown having transferred there with mother.

Age on death

Information relating to age at death was available for 526 children (96.5% of child deaths). The available records show that 93.27% of deaths occurred in infants as follows: perinatal (0-7 days) 16.35%; neonatal (8-28 days) 10%; infant (29-365 days) 66.92%. The remaining deaths occurred in children aged between 366 days and just under five years.

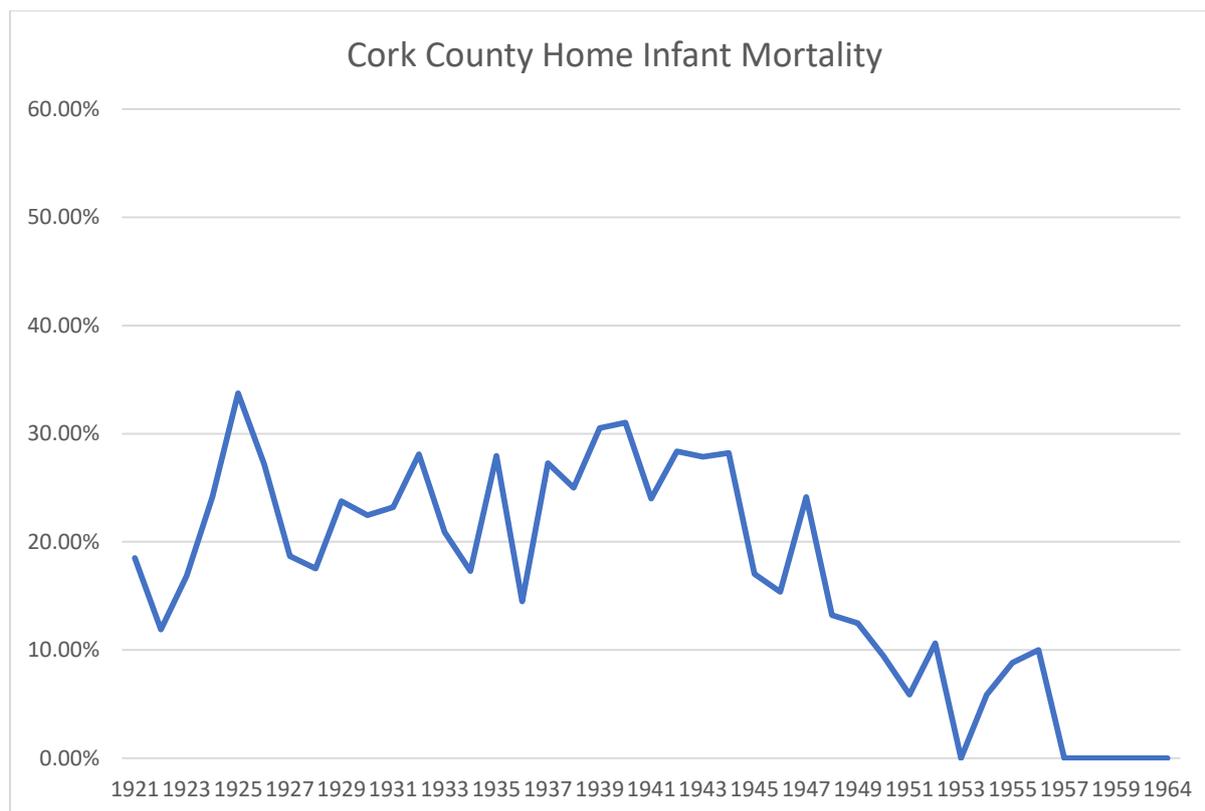
The available records show that just under 55.5% of children were accompanied by their mother at the time of death; 44.5% were unaccompanied.

Cause of death

Information relating to cause of death was available for 512 children (93.9% of child deaths). The available records show that the leading cause of death - gastroenteritis - was responsible for 26.37% of child deaths; 17.19% were attributable to malabsorption - mainly marasmus; 16.8% were due to non-specific cause such as prematurity and congenital debility; 13.28% were recorded as due to respiratory infections - mainly bronchopneumonia; 10.35% were notified as tuberculosis - mainly general tuberculosis and tubercular marasmus; 5.08% were notified as being due to a range of other, mostly one off, causes such as asphyxia, pertussis (whooping cough) and icterus neonatorum; 2.73% as infantile convulsions; 1.95% as congenital syphilis; 1.37% as being due to generalised infections - mostly toxæmia; 1.37% were due to congenital heart disease; 0.98% to haemorrhage; 0.98% to meningitis/encephalitis; 0.59% were notified as spina bifida; 0.59% as being due to measles and 0.39% were notified as deaths due to diphtheria. In the 1920s, malabsorption

(marasmus) was the leading cause of death; by the 1940s, however, marasmus hardly featured as a cause of death and by the 1950s no death was notified as such. From the 1930s to the 1950s, gastroenteritis and respiratory infections were the most cited cause of death. Although tuberculosis featured as a leading cause of child mortality in the 1920s and 1930s, in the 1940s, just one child death was notified as being due to tuberculosis.

Infant mortality⁵



The available records show that infant mortality in Cork county home peaked in 1925; a mortality rate of 33.7% was recorded that year. From 1926 to 1947 the average infant mortality rate was 23.7% and ranged between a low of 14.5% (1936) to a high of 31% (1940) in that period. The first real reduction was seen in 1948 - a rate of 13.2% was recorded that year - and by 1953 a rate of 0% was recorded. In the years 1954 to 1956 the infant mortality rate increased from 5.9% to 10%, which represented two infant deaths in 1954 and three each in 1955 and 1956.

⁵ Infant mortality was calculated as follows: (Living children born in the year who died before the age of 1)/(All living children born in the year).