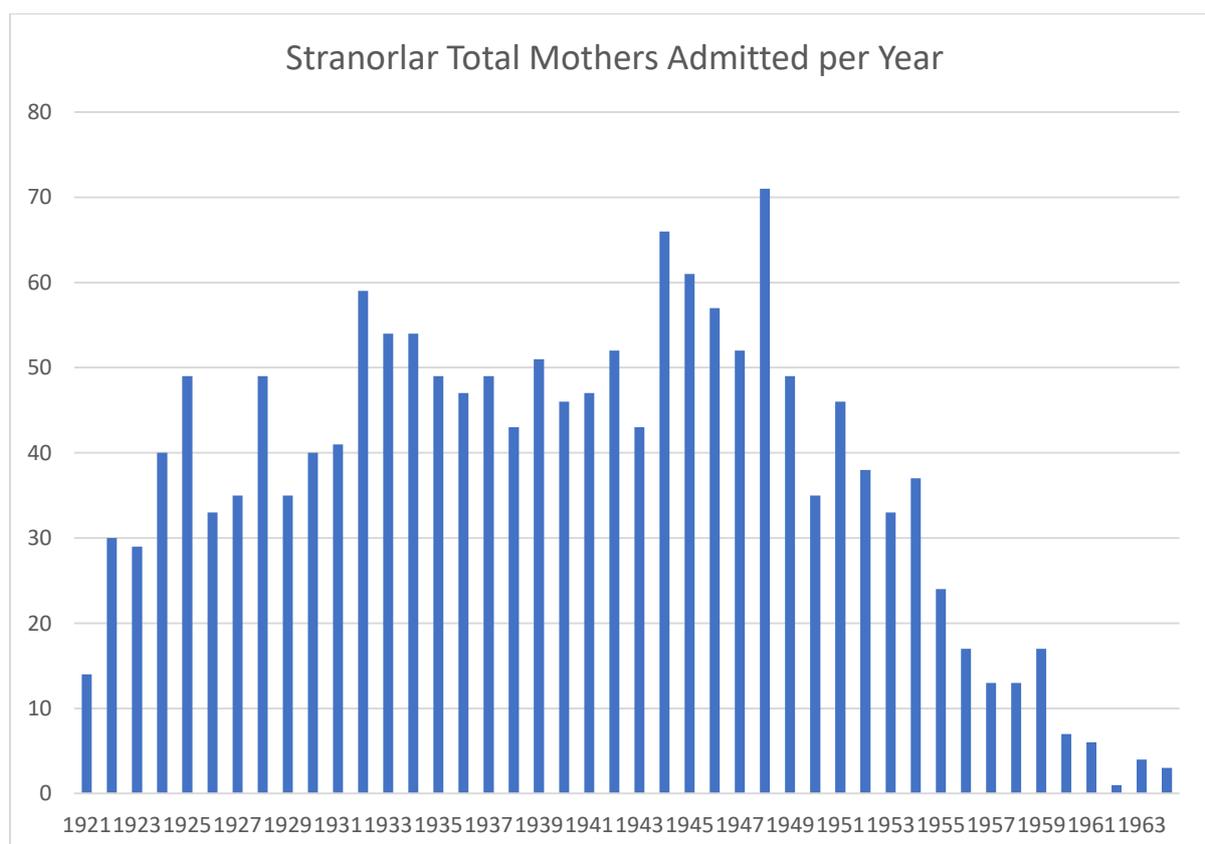


## Chapter 29 A: Stranorlar Statistical analysis

*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

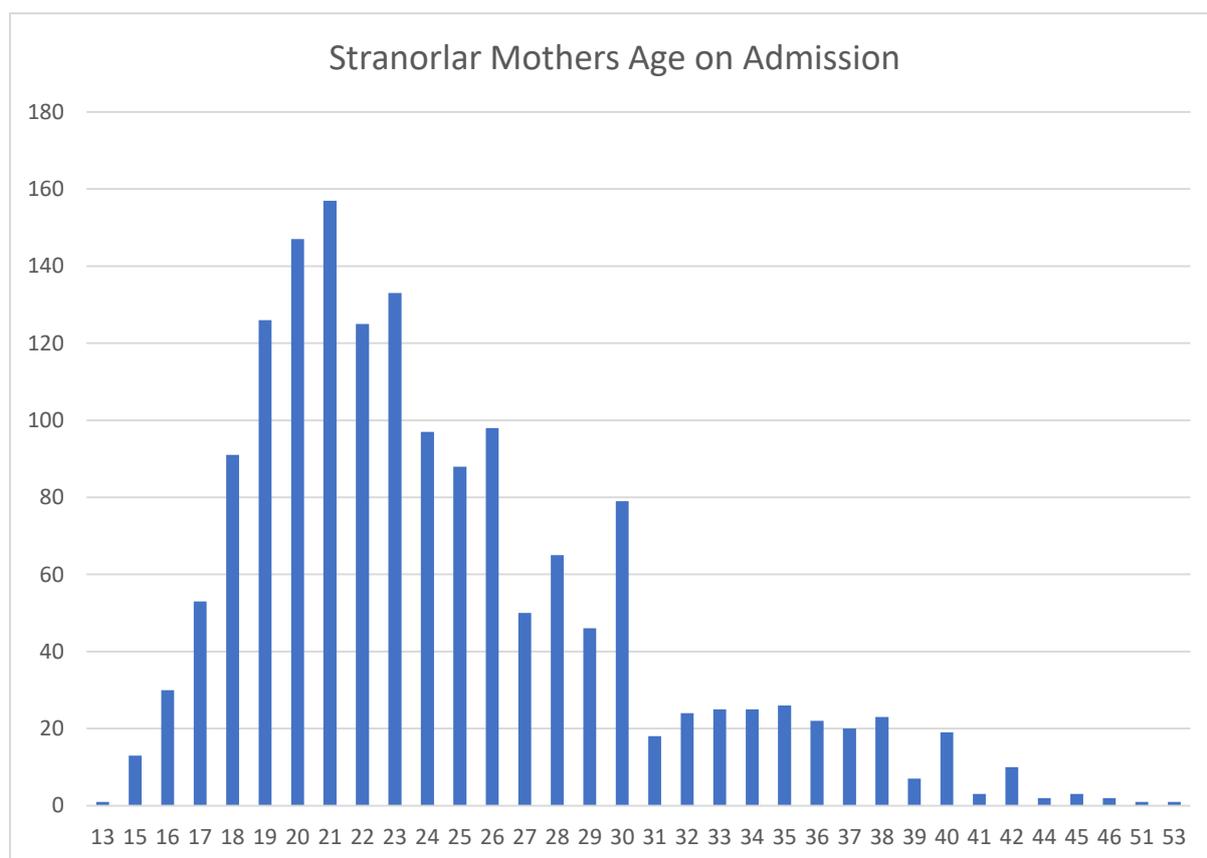


Through the institutional records, the Commission identified 1,646 single expectant women and unmarried mothers who were admitted to Stranorlar County home in the years 1921 to 1964. Information relating to date of admission was available for 1,639 women (99.6% of admissions). In the period 1921 to 1931, 36 women on average were admitted annually.

However, admissions increased from 41 in 1931 to 59 in 1932 and for the intervening decade 50 women on average entered the home annually. The busiest period was between 1942 and 1948; 402 women (one in four of all admissions) entered the home in those seven years. Admissions peaked in 1948 when 71 women entered the home. Admissions began a fairly steady decline thereafter, falling from 49 admissions in 1949 to seven in 1960. In 1950, the Department of Health had directed that unmarried mothers should not be maintained in county homes. In Stranorlar, however, it is clear that relatively large numbers of women continued to be admitted throughout the 1950s and some women were still being admitted there as late as 1964.

Analysis by decade shows that more unmarried mothers (33.19%) were admitted to Stranorlar in the 1940s than any other decade followed by the 1930s (29.71%); 1920s (19.16%); 1950s (16.66%) and the 1960s (1.28%).

**Age on admission**



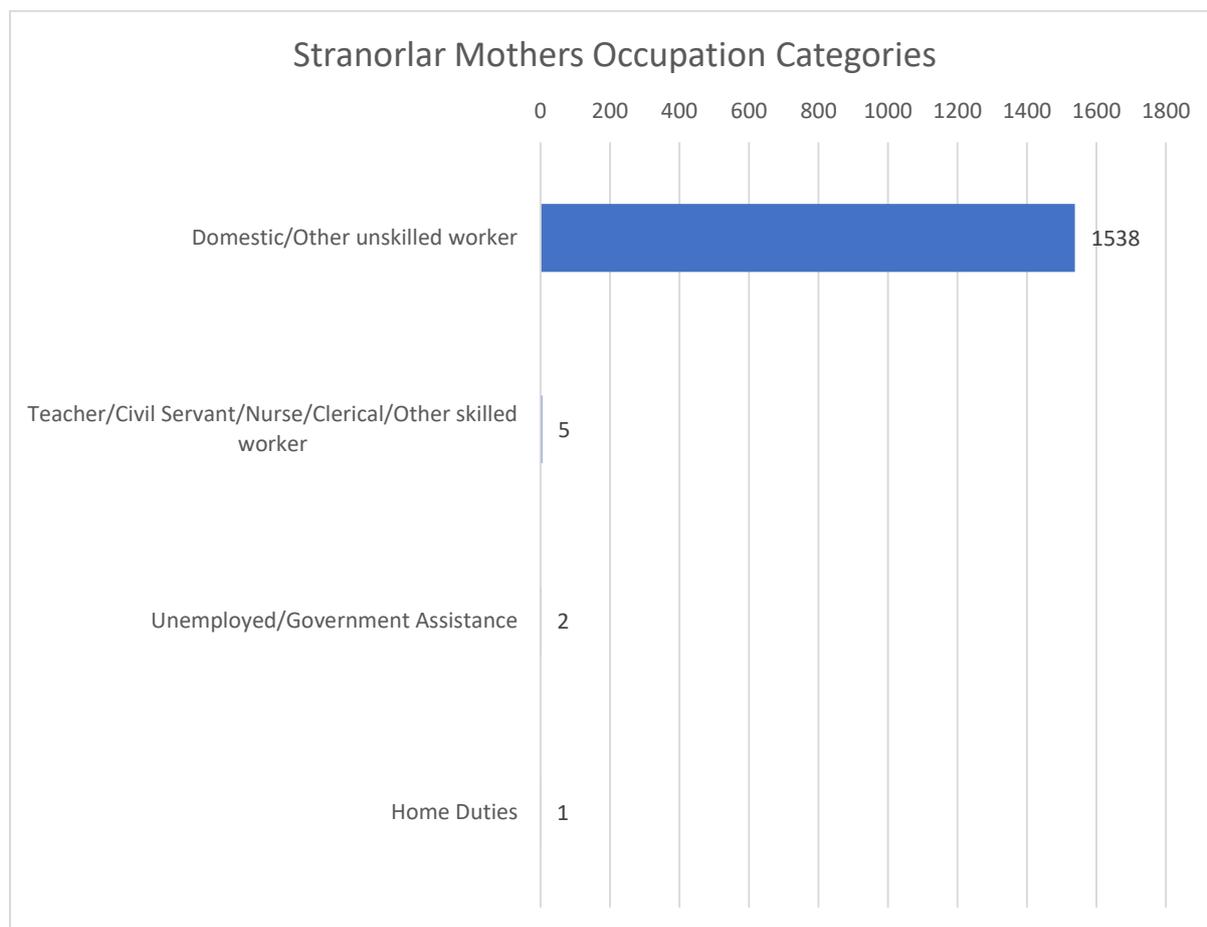
Information relating to age on admission was available for 1,630 women (92% of admissions). Ages ranged from 13 to 53 years. Most women (75%) were between 18 and 29 years old; 19% were 30 years and older and 6% were 17 years and younger; 2.7% of

admissions were between 13 and 16 years old. The mode of age on admission was 21 years although this varied from 20 years in the 1920s to 22 years in the 1960s. Average age on admission was 24 years although this increased to 25 years in the 1940s and 1950s.

**Previous pregnancy**

Information relating to previous pregnancy was available for 242 (14.7% of admissions). The Commission considered this sample to be too small from which to draw any conclusions.

**Occupation**

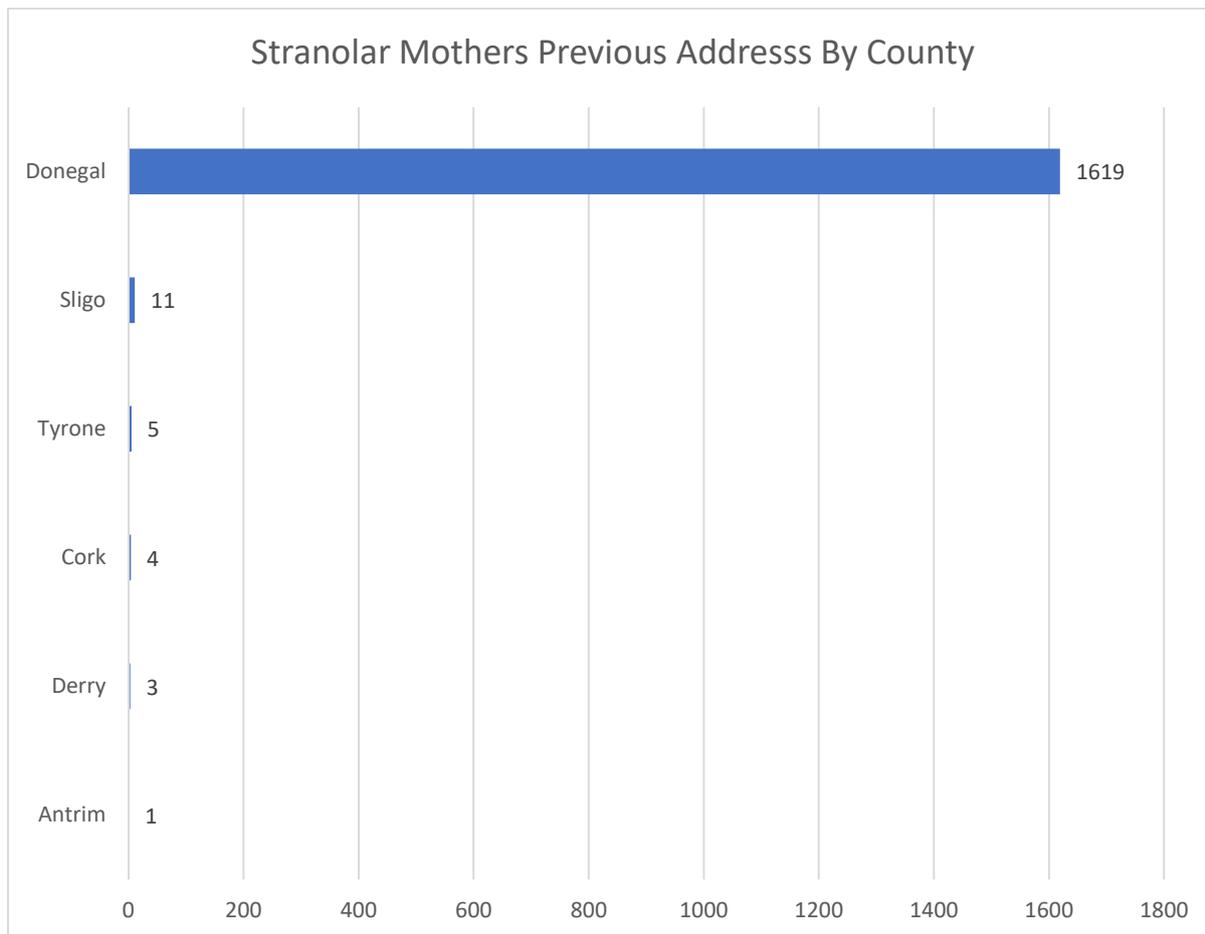


Information relating to occupation was available for 1,546 women (93.9% of admissions). Most women (99.48%) were recorded as a domestic servant or other unskilled worker; five women were recorded as a teacher/nurse/civil servant or other skilled worker; two were unemployed and one was working in the family home.

**Marital status**

Information relating to marital status was available for 1,642 women (99.8% of admissions). Most women (97.9%) were single women and the remaining women were either separated or widowed.

**Previous address by county**

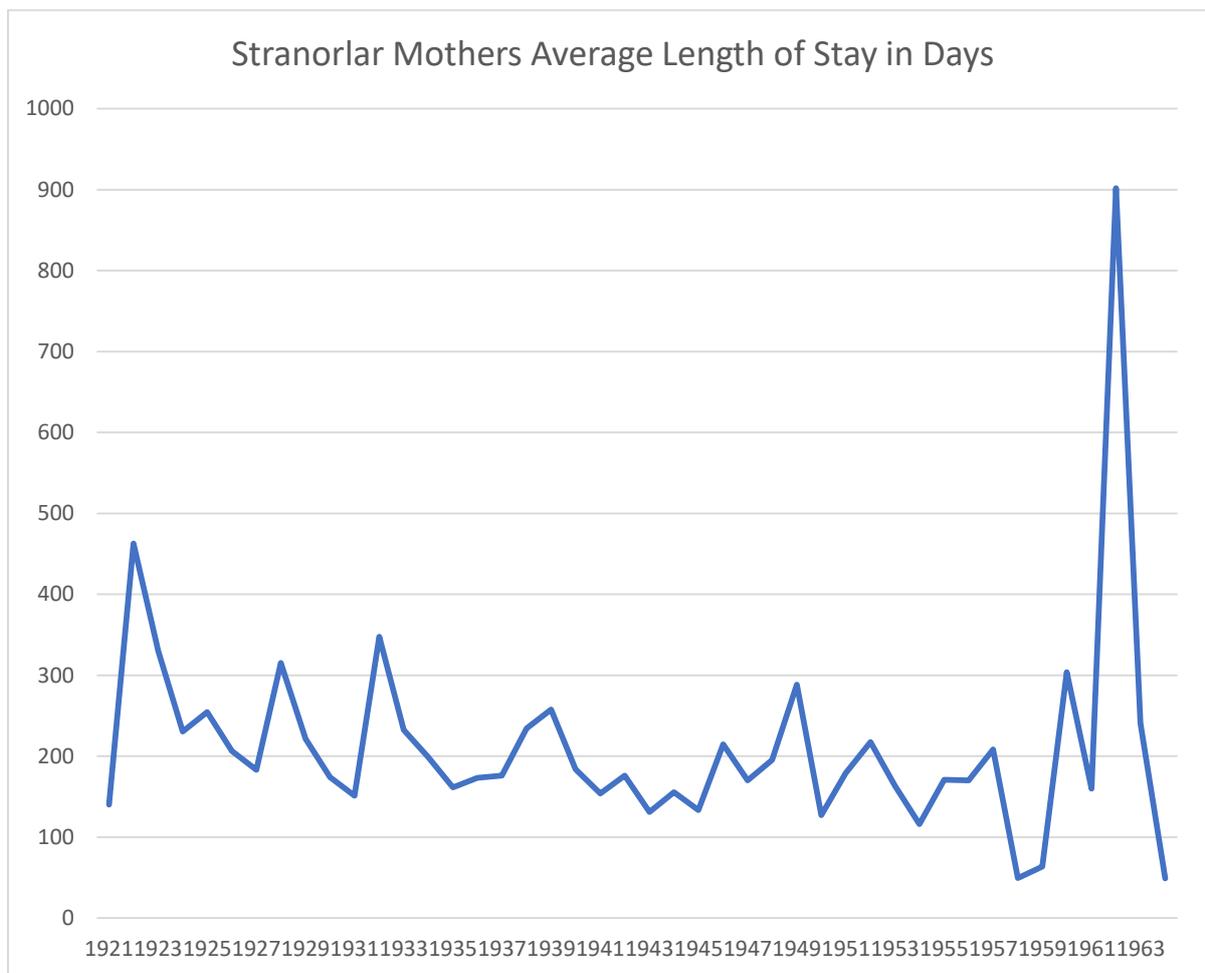


Information relating to previous address by county was available for 1,643 women (99.8% of admissions). The institutional records show that most women (98.5%) gave an address in Donegal as their previous residence. Small numbers of women gave addresses in Sligo (11); Tyrone (5); Cork (4); Derry (3) and Antrim (1).

**Religion**

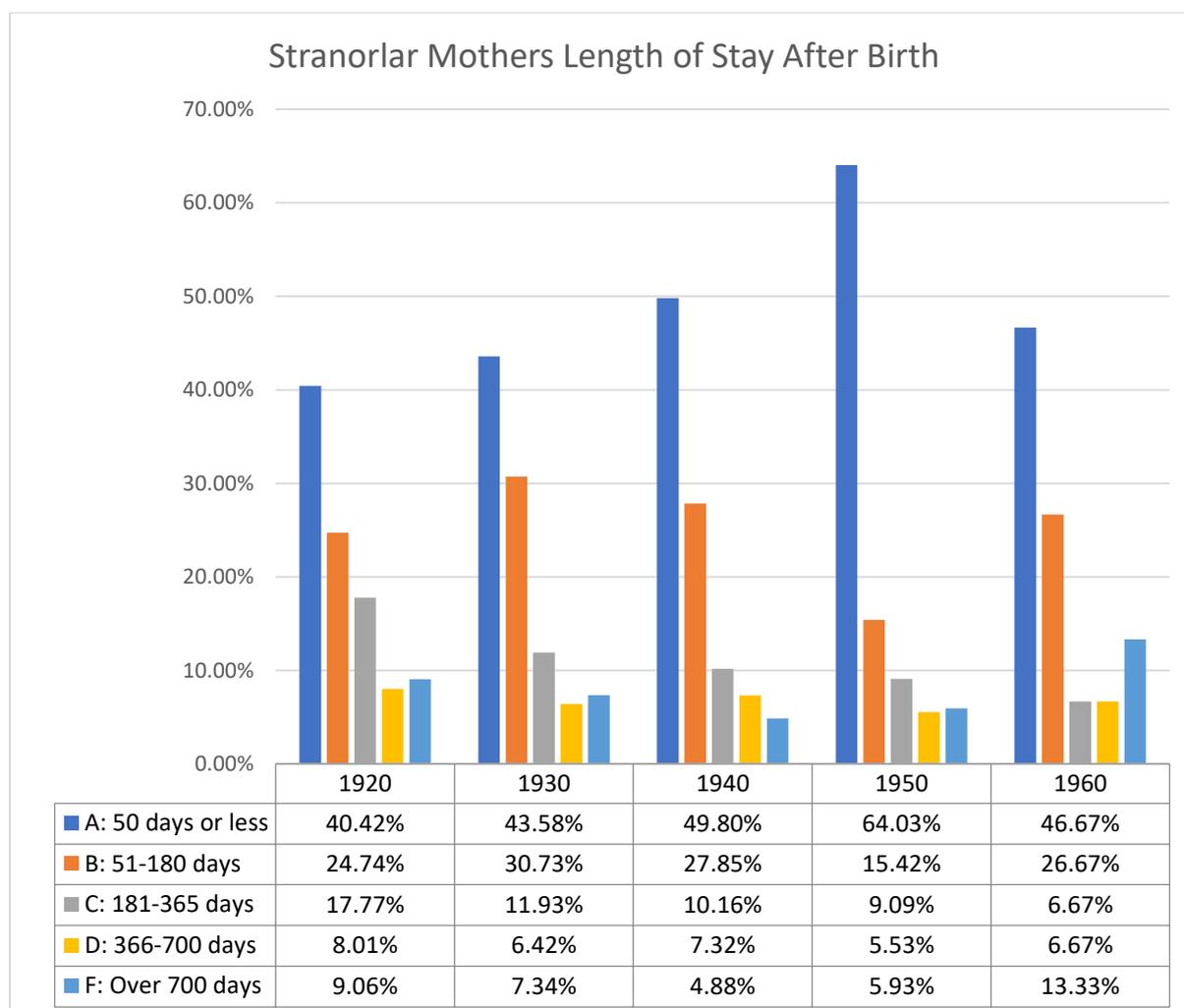
Information relating to religious denomination was available for 1,577 women (95.8% of admissions). Most women (98%) are recorded as Roman Catholic and the remaining 2% as either Church of Ireland or Presbyterian.

**Length of stay**



Information relating to length of stay was available for 1,627 women (98.8% of admissions). Women admitted to Stranorlar in the years 1922 to 1932 spent the longest periods in the home. This ranged between 463 days on average for women admitted in 1922 to 151 days for those admitted in 1931. Average length of stay decreased steadily from 266 days on average in the 1920s to 215 in the 1930s, 180 in the 1940s and 154 days in the 1950s. The apparent increase in length of stay in the 1960s is skewed by the very small number of admissions - the spike in 1962 relates to one woman admitted with her child that year (the only admission) and who stayed in the institution for 902 days.

The institutional records show that in the 1920s, single expectant women generally entered Stranorlar 47 days before giving birth; by the 1950s women generally entered 33 days before giving birth.



The available information shows that, in the 1920s, the majority of women (65.16%) left Stranorlar within six months of giving birth - over one in four had left within 50 days; 17.77% remained in the home for between six and 12 months and 8.01% for between 13 and 24 months. The remaining 9.06% of women remained in Stranorlar for periods of between two and four years. In the 1930s, the proportion of women who left Stranorlar within six months of giving birth increased to 74.23% - close to one in three had left within 50 days; the proportion who remained for between six and 12 months increased slightly to 11.93% and the proportion who remained between 13 and 24 months declined slightly to 6.42%. The proportion of women who remained in Stranorlar for more than two years after giving birth declined slightly to 7.34% - these women remained in the home for between two and five years. In the 1940s, the proportion of women who left Stranorlar within six months of giving birth increased to 77.65%, the proportion who left within 50 days, however, had decreased to 27.85%; around one in ten women remained for between six and 12 months; 7.32% for between 13 and 24 months and 4.88% remained for between two and three years. In the 1950s, most women (79.46%) left within six months of giving birth although the proportion of women who left within 50 days had further reduced to 15.42%; around one in ten remained

for between 13 and 24 months and 5.93% remained for between two and three years. In the 1960s all women bar four left Stranorlar within six months of giving birth - one in four left within 50 days. One woman left after seven months, one after 22 months and two women remained for more than two years.

### **Outcome**

Information relating to outcome was available for 1,610 women (97.8% of admissions). The majority of single expectant women (79.6%) admitted to Stranorlar stayed and gave birth there; 13.3% were admitted with their babies having given birth elsewhere and 7.1% left before the birth and did not return.

### **Birth details**

Information relating to birth details was available for 1,502 women (91.3% of women). The available records show that 98.07% of single women admitted to Stranorlar delivered living infants; 1.86% delivered stillborn infants and one woman suffered a miscarriage.

### **Exit pathways**

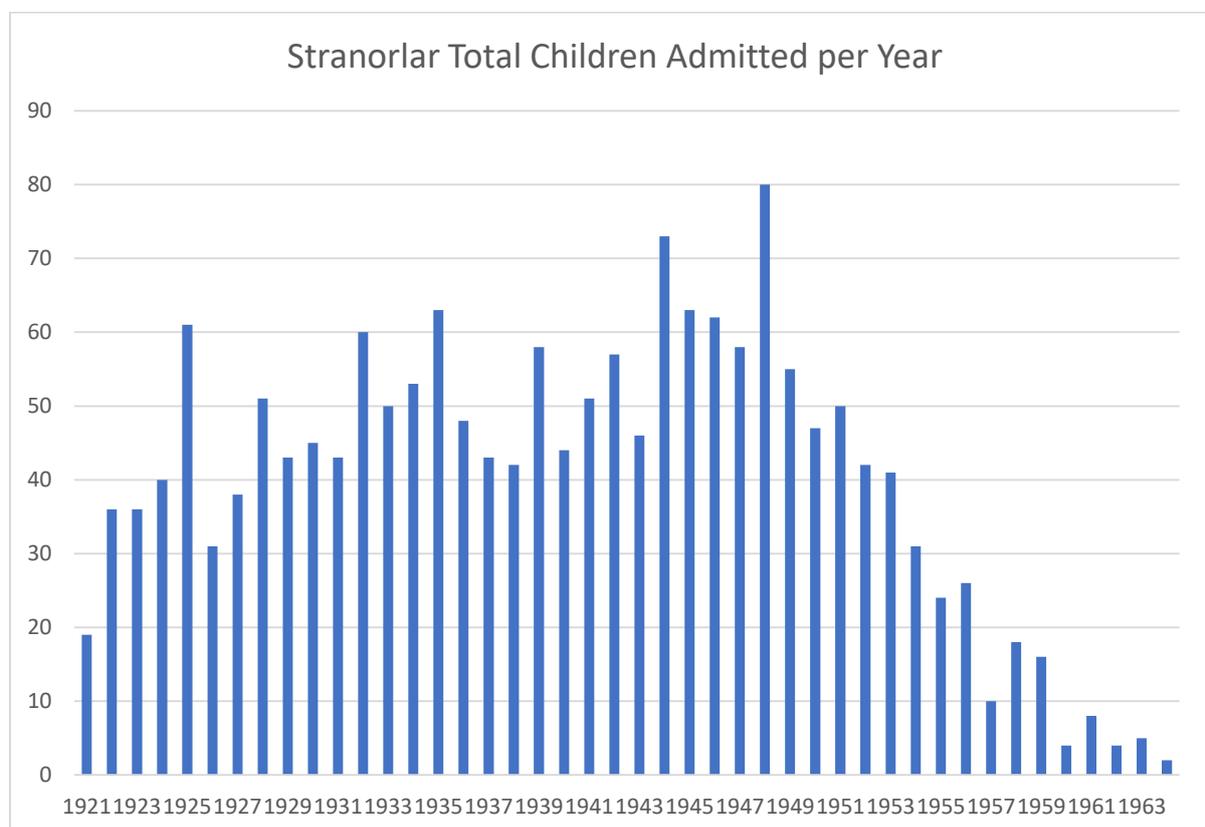
Information relating to exit pathways was available for 259 women (15.7% of admissions). The available information shows that most women were discharged to the family home/other private address (52.12%) or transferred to hospital (36.29%). The institutional registers record 20 instances where women were transferred to a Good Shepherd Convent, mostly Derry - most were recorded as having had multiple pregnancies.

### **Maternal deaths**

Through the institutional records, the Commission identified 20 deaths among women admitted to Stranorlar county home: representing a mortality rate of 1.2%. The majority of deaths occurred in Stranorlar - five occurred in external hospitals. Twelve deaths were not associated with pregnancy or childbirth - they were, in the main, due to tuberculosis and typhoid. Two deaths were indirect obstetric deaths in the sense that they were conditions that developed during pregnancy, were aggravated by the physiological effects of pregnancy - both resulted in cardiac failure. Six deaths were directly associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Direct obstetric deaths were due to puerperal sepsis, eclampsia, phlebitis and

peritonitis. Adhering to WHO guidelines the maternal mortality rate in Stranorlar county home was 0.48%.<sup>1</sup>

### Children: Admissions



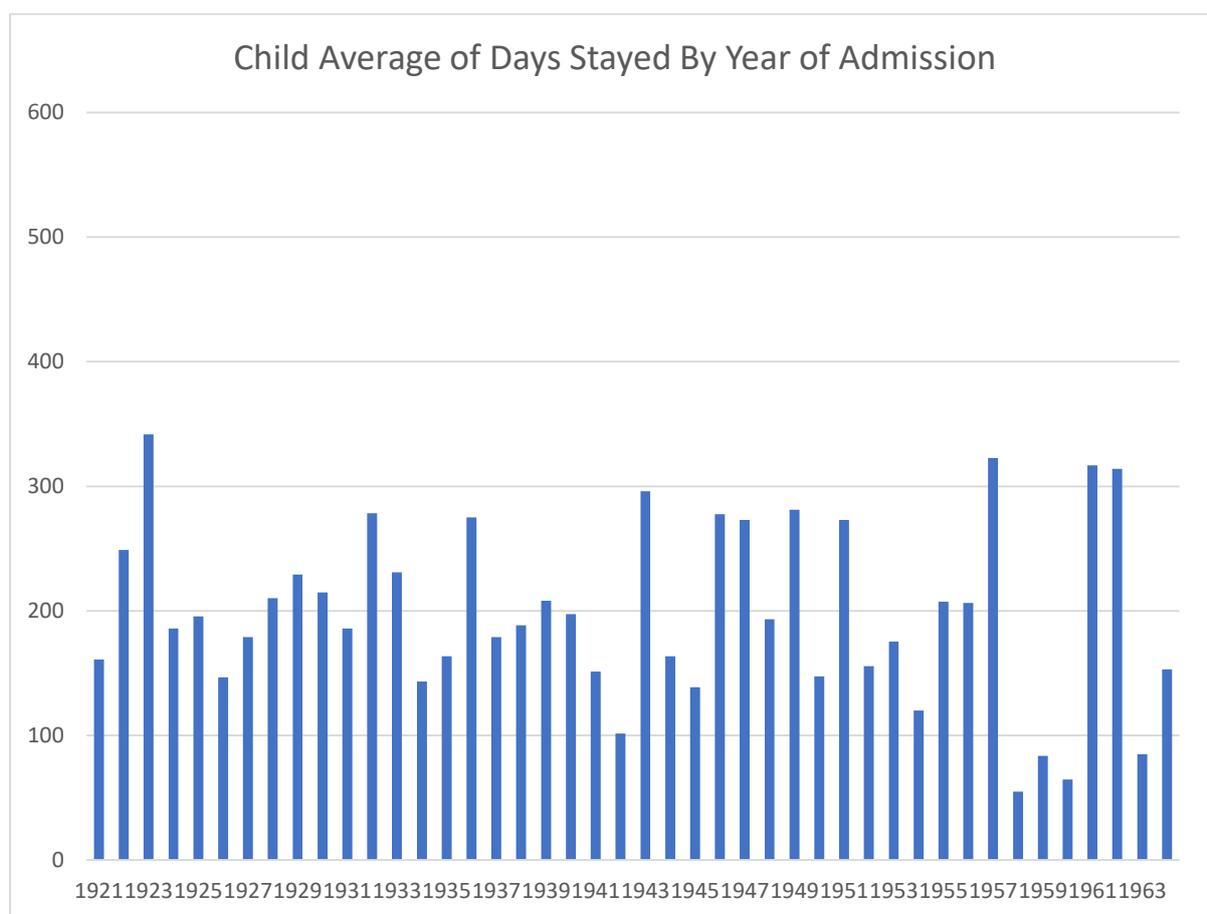
Through the institutional records, the Commission identified 1,777 ‘illegitimate’ children who were either born in or admitted to Stranorlar. Information relating to date of birth/admission was available for all children. Births/admissions increased from 19 in 1921 to 61 in 1925 and generally remained within the 40-60 range from 1925 to 1943; an average of 49 births/admissions were recorded annually in this period. The busiest period for child births/admissions was in the years 1944 to 1948. Almost one in five of all births/admissions were recorded in those five years and peaked in 1948 when 80 births/admissions were recorded. Births/admissions declined steadily from a high of 80 in 1948 to just four in 1960. Although the Department of Health had advised against maintaining ‘illegitimate’ children in county homes in 1950 they were still being admitted to Stranorlar in 1964. Most ‘illegitimate’ children admitted after 1960 had physical disabilities and were subsequently transferred to

<sup>1</sup> 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/>

specialist institutions. Analysis by decade shows that more children (33.15%) were admitted to Stranorlar in the 1940s than any other decade followed by the 1930s (28.42%); the 1920s (19.98%) and the 1950s (17.16%) - 23 children were born/admitted in the 1960s.

The institutional records show that the majority of children (82.9%) were either born in the home or admitted accompanied by their mother; 10.2% were admitted unaccompanied and 6.9% were accompanying children admitted with their mother.

**Length of stay**

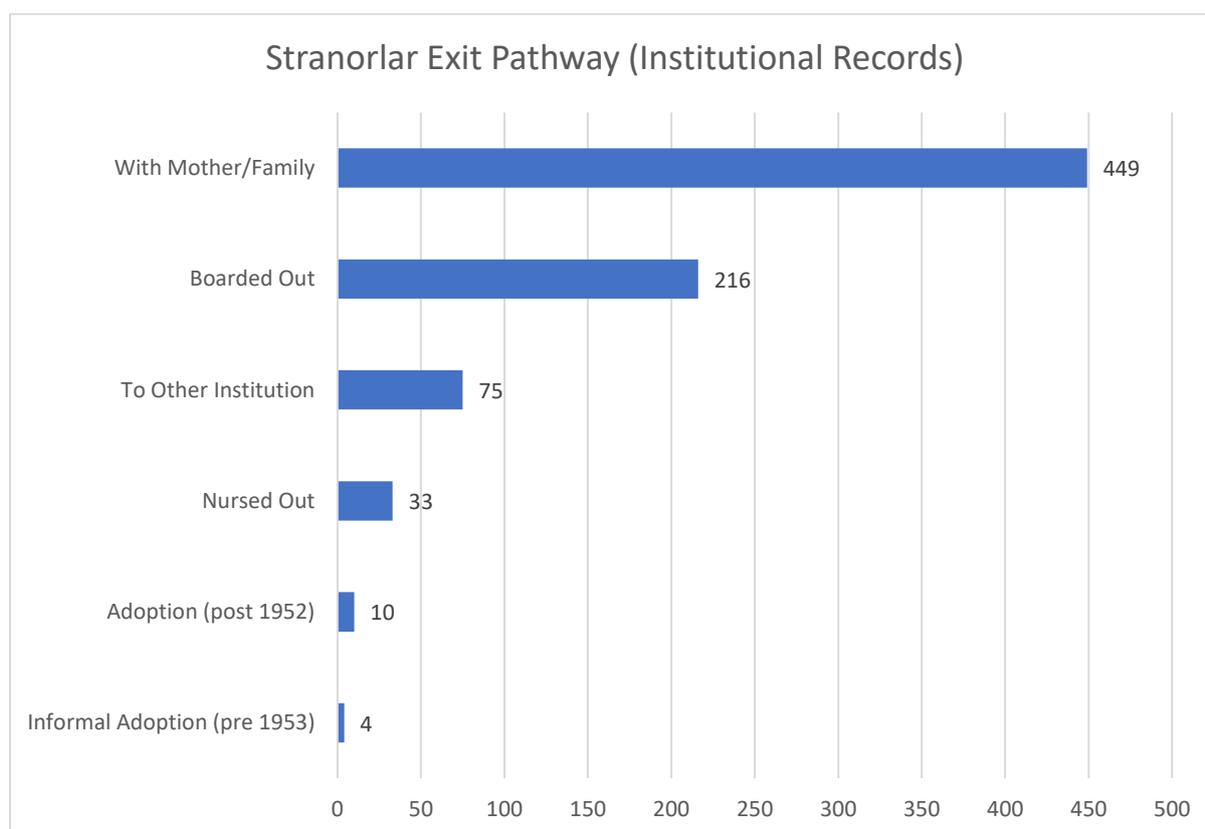


Information relating to length of stay was available for 1,646 children (92.6% of births/admissions). Average length of stay was longest for children born/admitted in 1923 (342 days); 1957 (323 days); 1961 (317 days) and 1962 (314 days). A small number of children were admitted in Stranorlar in the years 1957, 1961 and 1962 and the average length of stay in those years may be distorted by the presence of long-stay children with physical disabilities. Length of stay varied widely from an average of 342 days for children born/admitted in 1923 to 101 days for those born/admitted in 1942. Length of stay for children born/admitted in the years 1943 to 1951 appear to have been particularly long - children born/admitted in those years could expect to spent 227 days on average in the

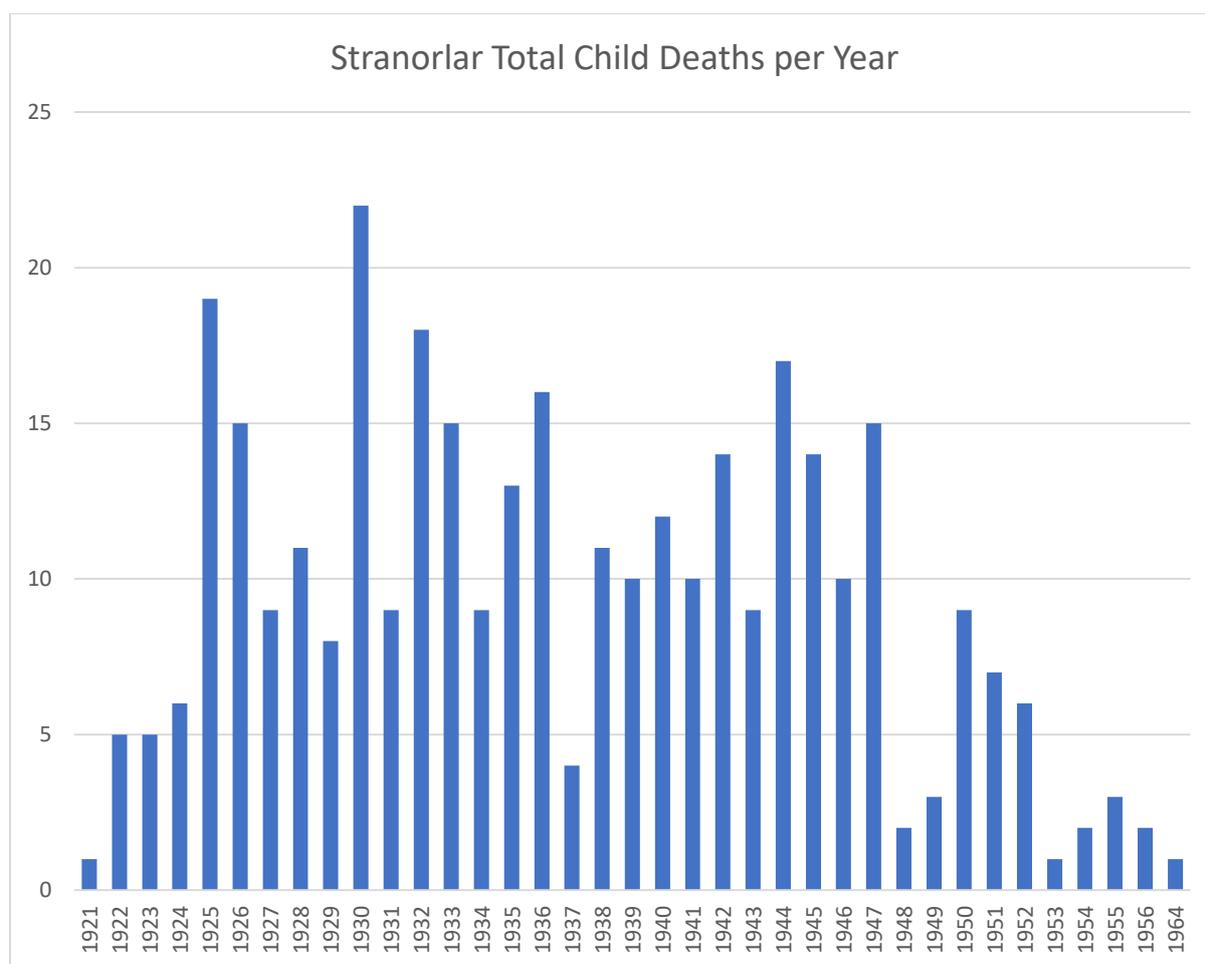
home, which was longer than the average stay for children born/admitted in the 1920s and 1930s.

The available records show that the majority of children (62.89%) left Stranorlar on the same day as their mother; 24.4% were discharged before their mother and 12.71% remained in Stranorlar for a period unaccompanied after their mothers had left.

### Exit pathways



Information relating to exit pathways was available for 787 children (44.3% of births/admissions). The available information shows that the majority of children (57.05%) left Stranorlar with their mother or another family member; 27.45% were boarded out; 9.53% transferred to other institutions - mostly to a Nazareth House in Derry, Belfast or Donegal; 4.19% were placed at nurse; 1.27% were legally adopted (post 1952) and 0.51% were informally adopted (pre 1953). The most common exit pathway among unaccompanied children was boarding out followed by transfer to a specialist hospital, industrial school or Nazareth House. One child was placed for foreign adoption in the USA.

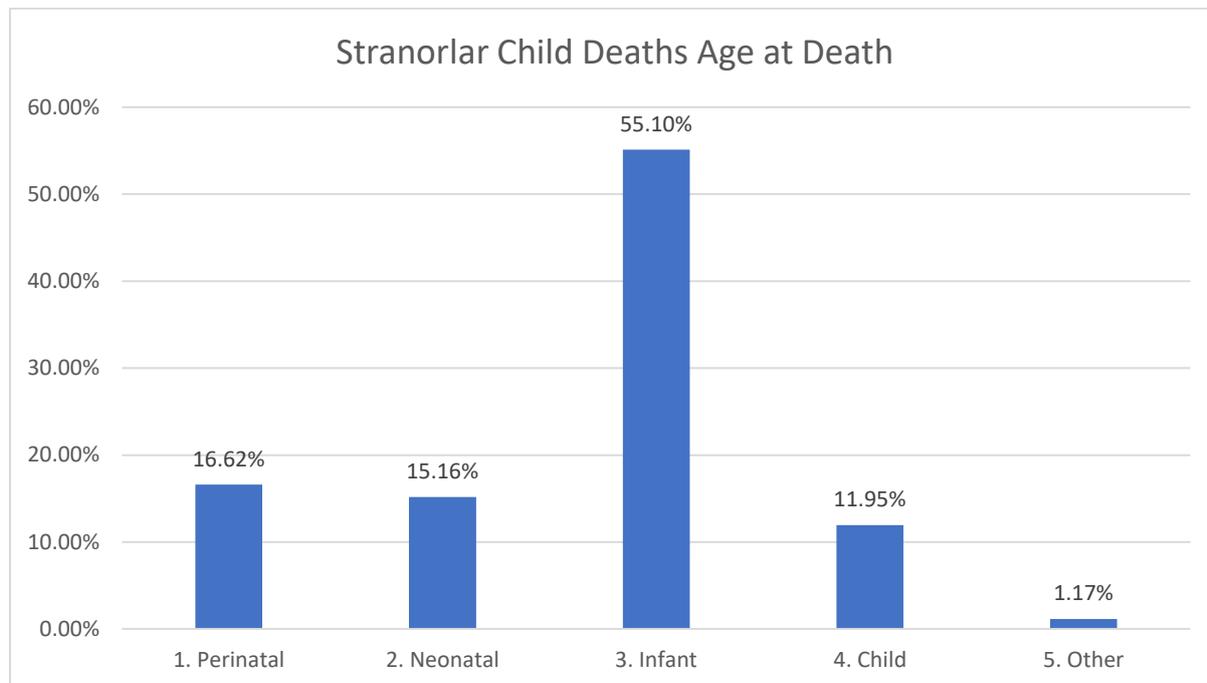
**Child deaths**

Through the institutional records, the Commission identified 343 child deaths associated with Stranorlar county home. This includes children who died in the institution, children who were born/admitted to the institution but died elsewhere and children who were never admitted to the institution but whose mothers were resident there prior to their birth. The Commission located GRO death records for 339 children (98.8% of child deaths). Although child mortality in Stranorlar was relatively low in the early 1920s, child deaths increased from five in 1922 and 1923 to 19 in 1925. Mortality decreased in the late 1920s but peaked in 1930 when 22 deaths were notified. The 1930s was the worst decade for child deaths in Stranorlar - annual child deaths were highest on two occasions in that decade, in 1930 (22) and 1932 (18) but had decreased to four in 1937. Mortality began a staggered increase from 1938 and peaked in 1944 and 1947 when 17 and 15 deaths were notified respectively; 89.5% of child deaths in Stranorlar occurred before 1948. Mortality decreased significantly from 15 deaths in 1947 to two deaths in 1948. After a small spike in the years 1950-52, mortality fell to an average of two deaths annually and no child deaths were notified in the years 1957-63.

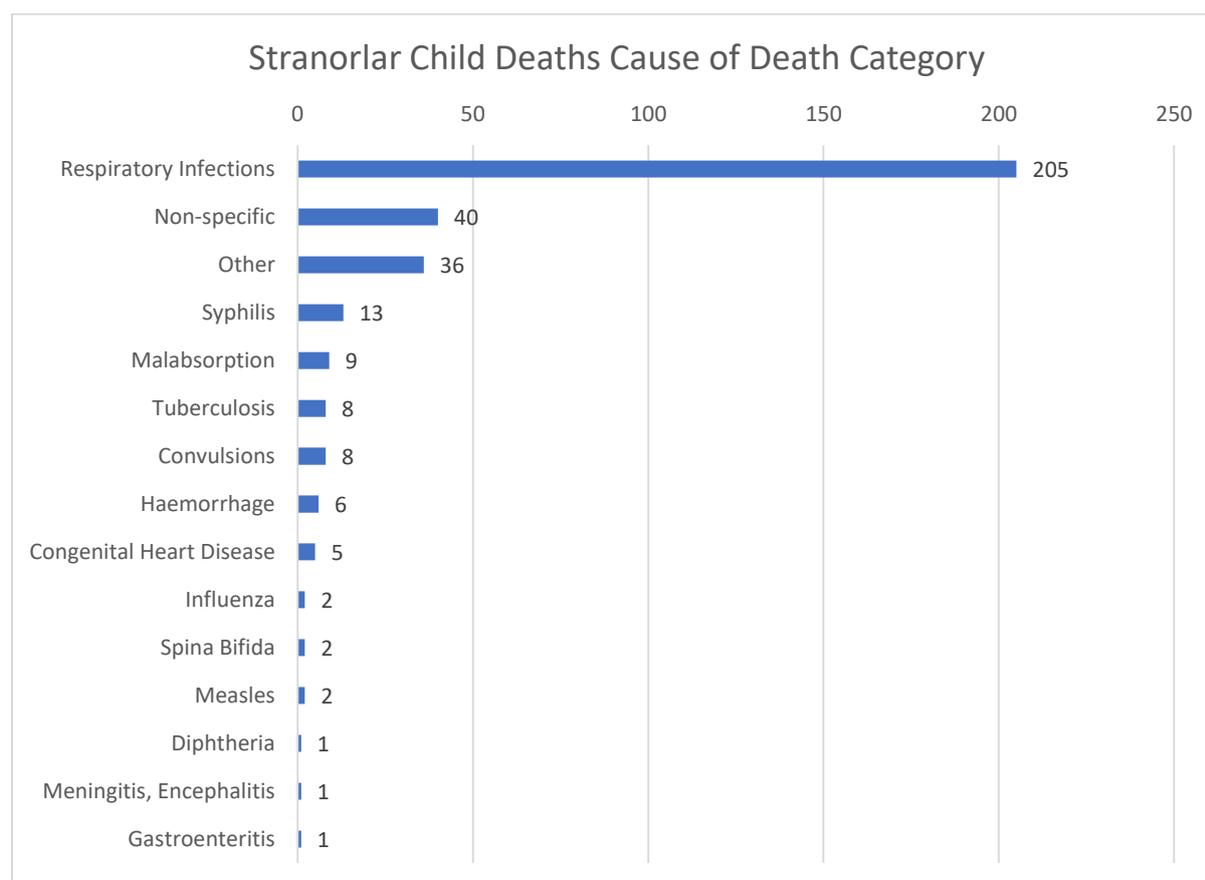
**Place of death**

Information relating to place of death was available for 339 children (98.8% of child deaths). The available records show that the majority of child deaths (98.23%) occurred in Stranorlar county home; four children died after transfer to hospital and two died in private residences.

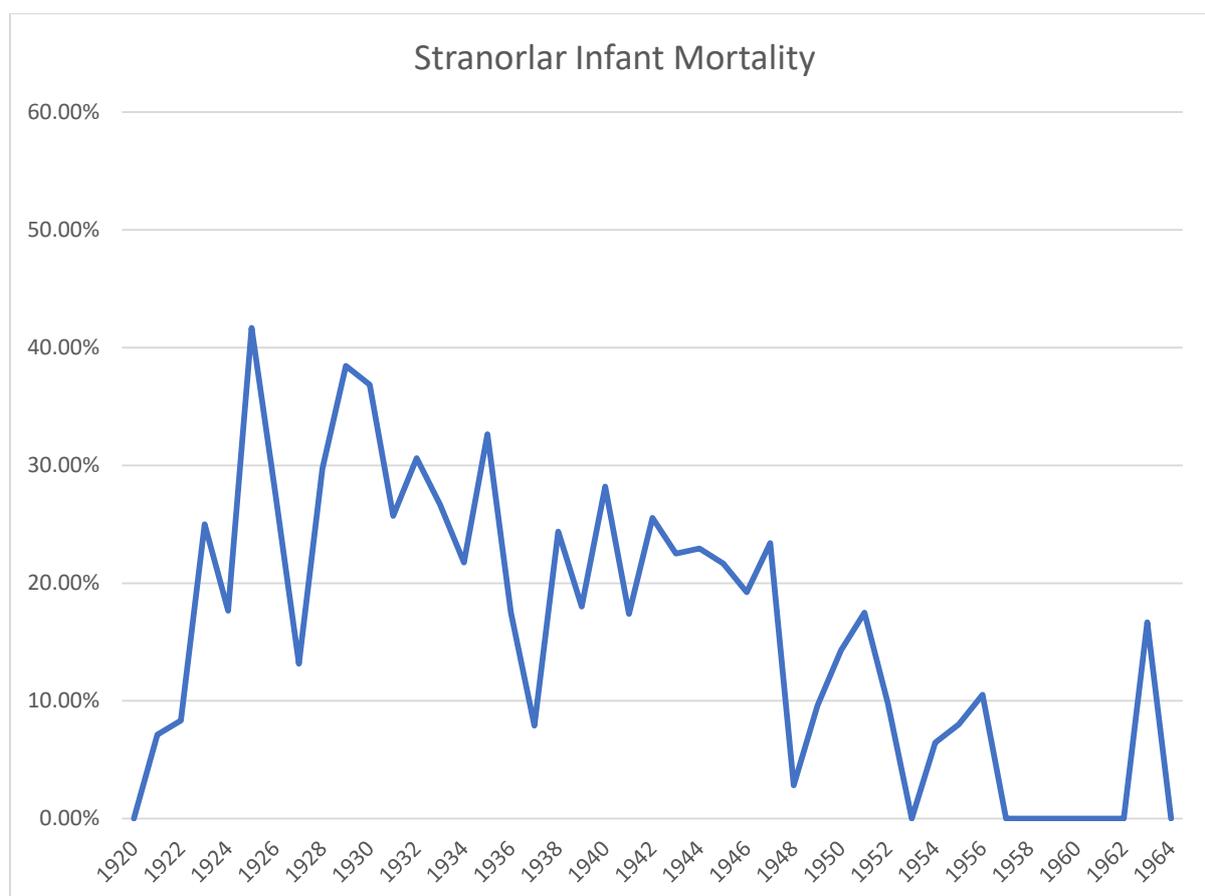
**Age at death**



Information relating to age at death was available for all children. The institutional records show that most children (86.8%) died in infancy as follows: perinatal (0-7 days) 16.62%; neonatal (8-28 days) 15.16% and infant (29-365 days) 55.1%; 11.95% of deaths occurred in children aged between one and four years and 1.17% were aged five years and older. The available information shows that 75% of children were accompanied by their mother at the time of death and 25% were unaccompanied.

**Cause of death**

Information relating to cause of death was available for 339 children (98.8% of child deaths). The leading cause of death (60.47%) was respiratory infections - mainly acute bronchitis, bronchopneumonia and capillary bronchitis; 11.8% were notified as being due to non-specific causes such as congenital debility and prematurity; 10.62% were notified as icterus neonatorum and a range of other, mainly one off, causes including whooping cough and injury at birth; 3.83% were notified as congenital syphilis; 2.65% as malabsorption - mainly marasmus; 2.36% as tuberculosis; 2.36% as convulsions; 1.77% as haemorrhage and 1.47% as congenital heart disease. Small numbers of deaths were notified as influenza (2); spina bifida (2); measles (2); diphtheria (1); meningitis/encephalitis (1) and gastroenteritis (1).

**Infant mortality<sup>2</sup>**

The infant mortality rate in Stranorlar was highest in the period 1925 to 1935. The peak rate of infant mortality was in 1925 when a rate of 41.67% was recorded. It should be noted that relatively low infant mortality rates were recorded in this period also - the rate was 13.16% in 1927. The infant mortality rate decreased from 32.65% in 1935 to 7.89% in 1937, the rate increased, however, from 1938 (24.39%) and remained relatively high until 1947 (23.4%) - close to one in four infants born in those years died in infancy. The infant mortality rate fell dramatically from 23.4% in 1947 to 2.82% in 1948. From 1948 to 1956, the infant mortality rate fluctuated between 17.5% in 1951 to 0% in 1953. From 1957 to 1964 just one infant death was recorded - that infant died following transfer to another hospital.

<sup>2</sup> Infant mortality was calculated as follows: (Living children born in the year who died before the age of one)/(All living children born that year).