

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

My name is (32) and I have considered coming forth with my experience of birth trauma. In fact it is a combination of pre birth / birth / post birth and breastfeeding.

I imagine that there are worse stories than mine but I would still like to share from my experience what traumatised me during that time of my having my first baby in the hopes that things change for expecting mothers / new mothers and midwives in general.

I was 26 and 9 days overdue with my firstborn (a girl). So we went with an induction. I didn't know enough about the whole process except what I read briefly online.

I was not prepared for the whole discomfort of being strapped on the bed with a machine that recorded the baby's heart rate and oxygen - and unable to move for what felt like hours / being fingered by several different midwives to find the cervix as it was quite high up. The whole experience was painful and very uncomfortable and a bit violating in the sense I didn't get a chance to bond with anyone before they performed the procedure on me.

Next thing they decided to put some gel inside of me and I didn't know this as no one had told me - the gel burned me! It took a few seconds after they had inserted the gel inside of me that I felt a painful burn. I freaked out and asked what it was. The midwife said it's just the gel.

From that moment on - I was in excruciating pain and it was in the later afternoon (4pm) tossing and turning and unable to sleep at the hospital that night. I had no one coming in to comfort me. To reassure me I was going to be ok .

Instead I had different midwives coming several times in the night - to check the cervix and the drip that I was on. I believe. Whatever it was that they were checking. I remember one girl being very cold towards me. It was maybe midnight or 2am in the morning. I couldn't understand why she was cold. I was in a lot of pain and tried to see if I could have a conversation with her to connect. She was very brief and distanced and left me to it after and I just felt so alone.

The morning came and I was so tired. So hungry. And in a lot of pain. Probably in active labour without even realising it.

Two midwives came to collect me to move me into the birthing suite. I hadn't met them before. They were warm enough and I actually cried with relief knowing I was going to be ok.

But I hadn't had breakfast. I never ate. I thought they would feed me at the hospital. The morning passed and after being 4cm dilated and in a lot more pain. I couldn't take it anymore and asked for the epidural. Quite a while passed and I kept reminding the nurse to please bring in the epidural for me. It was as if she was putting it off.

Finally my husband could see my distress and he tried to move things along and finally the guy came and was able to give me an epidural. It helped so much and I was able to relax.

Bear in mind - I had not slept. I had not eaten. This was my first baby. I pushed and pushed for 1.5 hours. Exhausted and clueless.

Finally the baby came and they put her on my breast. I had no idea how to feed her.

They had to stitch me up as I had a 3rd degree tear and probably lost a fair bit of blood.

Once I got up and showered I came out of the bathroom and I fainted on the floor. Thankfully my husband caught me in time. I had the catheter still in me after the stitches and I fainted straight again after coming to.

When I finally got up after the 2nd time I said I need food. I hadn't eaten.

They brought me toast. Dried toast and lukewarm cup of tea.

And left me to try to sleep in the birthing suite.

I couldn't sleep. I was worried I couldn't attend to my baby as I'm deaf.

I was left alone in the room with just my baby and too scared to sleep.

This was the first not so nice experience I had.

The next day - I was alone in my maternity room. My husband had to go to work and I understood but wished he didn't have to go.

I stayed in the room on my own - figuring out why it hurt so much to breastfeed my daughter. I called in a midwife and a strict lady came in - unsmiling - abrupt with me. First thing she said to me was why are you in the dark??

It was in the afternoon and it was light enough. The only thing is that I drew the blinds down a bit for privacy and also to allow my baby to get some sleep. I had the bed lamp on as well.

She said you can't breastfeed if you can't see. That was not true but before I could say a thing else she walked across the room and yanked the blinds up.

I felt uneasy and when I saw her grab my newborn roughly under her arm - my heart dropped. I was scared / paralysed. The baby was crying - obviously scared. She was also deaf. Just a few hours prior to this I was told that she failed her hearing test.

So all this sudden and rough movement from the midwife scared my newborn girl. She was not very nice towards me or warm at all when trying to teach me how to latch. I felt so exposed. Violated. Afraid. And stupid.

That was my 2nd not so nice experience.

And now this is my last horrible experience. Probably the worst of all.

I struggled with breastfeeding for a couple of weeks - in so much pain and felt more and more hopeless. I had hospital visits / midwife visits / doctors and even no one could tell me what was wrong. It wasn't until I paid someone \$200 (a private breastfeeding specialist) that I knew what the issue was. It turned out my daughter was 90 percent tongue tied. It made sense as my mum was and so was I.

We went to a private hospital and paid \$500 for her tongue tie to be revised.

And even after that I struggled. It wasn't as bad as before but still I couldn't get past the issues and pains.

My baby was losing weight. And for months I had been seeing a local breastfeeding group lady. She was someone that runs a group in the area that shows "support" to women who breastfed.

I saw her every week and tried to learn how I could create a better latch / better let down etc for my baby.

She wasn't very encouraging and towards the end I said to her that I was concerned that my daughter was losing weight and if I should start putting her on formula to try and help. She put me down and said no to formula. I felt hopeless. Discouraged. Alone.

I was unhappy and felt I was failing myself and my daughter. My husband felt sorry for us and didn't know how to help.

Finally one day I decided enough is enough and I started giving my girl a bottle of formula. She downed it so fast. I gave her another bottle and she finished that too.

I felt so bad that she was hungry this whole time and my boobs didn't give her what she needed even though I had exclusively breastfed her for 5 months

I decided to not go back to the lady and to press forward with formula and mixed it with breastfeeding until I was finished with that.

Then I felt happier. Freer. My baby put on weight and was stronger.

My mental health was better.

All I really wanted and needed were kind midwives. Caring helpful people. There were too many people that were unkind and unhelpful towards me at that time.

It hurt me and broke my heart and I feel very traumatised by the whole breastfeeding experience especially and that horrible midwife that manhandled my newborn like that.

So please - show and educate the hospital staff and midwives to remember why they first went into this occupation. Was it to help the women? The new mothers? Remember to be kind. To understand their heart. To ask what it is they needed and to be there for them too.

And please change the whole breastfeeding vs formula stigma. It didn't work for me as much as I wanted it to - but it also brought a lot of shame and guilt that I never asked for.