

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

I am a midwife. I had hoped to remain a full-time midwife when I finished my New Graduate program, however the events I witnessed all too often left me unwilling to remain in the system full-time and I left my full-time position shortly before finishing my New Grad program. In writing this submission, it saddens me to acknowledge that I cannot choose one particular moment I have witnessed that stands out more than another because I have seen too many and they are all significant.

Perhaps it was the day a father and I were yelled at by the obstetrician to hold onto the woman as she was dragged down the bed from the force of the forceps that were pulling her baby out of her as she screamed and cried. Maybe it was a different day when a sister and I were yelled at by the obstetrician to restrain the woman so forceps could be used to expedite the birth. The woman was screaming and crying for the obstetrician to stop. The doctor screamed back at her "YOUR BABY IS GOING TO DIE" before she continued to scream at us to hold her down. I told the doctor the woman had a history of sexual assault and to stop. The doctor did not stop. I do not believe the baby would have died. It was born healthy and crying. I believe the situation could have been managed differently. I will never forget that woman's screams. I encouraged her afterwards to seek support for what she had experienced and to lodge a complaint if she felt she needed to. I can only hope she did.

Maybe it was the day the obstetrician was suturing a woman who was scared of needles and when she vocalized her fear she was told to "stop being so stupid".

Possibly it was the day I supported my own sister in labour as a student midwife and she was forced to hold her baby inside of her despite an overwhelming urge to push. I held her hand as she stared back at me desperate for reassurance and petrified that she would do something wrong if she listened to what her body was telling her to do rather than what the midwife was telling her to do because the midwife said she wasn't ready to push. She was. My nephew was ready to be born, so ready he was involuntarily ejected out (almost onto the floor) and my sister didn't even realize his head had birthed. My sister felt helpless, and I as a third-year student midwife also felt helpless. We both walked away from that experience feeling traumatized and disempowered and it still saddens me to think about it three years later.

In addition to this, women are not being supported to remain with their babies post c-section, they are being separated from their partners and their babies, their partners are told to go home and to leave their new family, women have limited support in the postnatal period to establish breastfeeding, the list of daily accepted practices which are causing trauma to women is endless.

Birth for the most part is a normal physiological event. One that has been erased and replaced by fear mongering and fear of litigation and in its wake, it is leaving women feeling helpless, traumatized and inadequate, as though their bodies have failed them. As clinicians we are forced by the system to intervene in women's pregnancies and births every step of the way "just in case something bad happens", and to prevent the scrutiny we know we will endure if we don't intervene and something bad happens. The system is forcing us to practice in fear. We are forced to complete excessive documentation "just in case something goes wrong",

and this is leaving women vulnerable because we cannot be with them, we are too busy completing administrative duties.

In closing this submission, I will say whilst there may be a perception that healthy babies are leaving hospitals and that is a measure of success, it should be acknowledged that they are leaving with traumatized mothers who are struggling to bond and attach to their babies after being left to navigate their trauma, grief and physical recovery without support. I am certain this can only be detrimental to their child's development long term.

Every day I hear stories from women who say their obstetricians left them traumatized, midwives left them traumatized, paramedics left them traumatized and the system left them traumatized.

Thank you.