

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I gave birth to my first child in 2019 at _____ Hospital through birth suits. I had no continuity of care but completed my own birth education. I was excited to give birth. After labouring very well at home with my partner for 16 hours we arrived at the hospital and I was 7cm dilated. I was feeling positive and ready to have our baby.

When I look back on this experience the word that comes to mind is 'alone.' I had naively thought that I would be supported by a midwife while I continued to labour in hospital. Instead I was left in a room, checked on every half hour. And despite declining continuous monitoring was told it was necessary because there were not enough staff on to come check with a Doppler regularly. As a first time birthing woman I hoped for more. I hoped for presence and support.

Because I felt alone I ended up opting for an epidural. In hindsight all I really needed was a helping hand and emotional support. I was almost fully dilated when I received my epidural. A cascade of intervention followed and I ended up needing an episiotomy and vacuum delivery. It was rushed and chaotic and overwhelming. My son was then taken to NICU and I was left, again alone, for several hours in the birthing suites. For the longest time I blamed myself for asking for that epidural, seeing that as the turning point where my labour experience changed from positive to negative. I felt like I had failed. I also had fears that I wouldn't bond with my baby because I was separated from him at birth.

It's hard to describe, but the absence of care was my trauma. Not necessarily things done to me, but things not done. In the way that absence of love and care is neglect and abuse to children, so I also felt that lack of support while birthing was abusive.

For my second birth I was cared for by the most loving, supportive and caring midwife through a continuity of care model. It is no exaggeration to say that this midwife and the care I received from her changed my life. I was held through pregnancy, birth and postpartum by this wonderful woman. I went on to have a redemptive second birth thanks to her care. It was perfect, and I required some intervention again, but the difference was that I was supported through the whole experience. A totally different experience.

I am writing this with my second baby asleep on my chest, happy and in love. I only wish that all women got to receive the kind of care I did second time around.... Including myself for my first birth.