

**Submission
No 67**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Stephanie Thompson

Date Received: 21 July 2023

Dear Inquiry Committee,

I am writing to share my deeply personal experience of birth trauma, advocate for improved maternity care, and emphasise the importance of early education on pelvic health for young girls. My aim is to contribute to a more comprehensive lived understanding of birth trauma, address its root causes, and advocate for proactive measures that start well before pregnancy.

Introduction:

My name is Stephanie Thompson, and I am a mother who experienced birth trauma during and after childbirth in 2015. My journey through this traumatic event has compelled me to speak up and raise awareness about the challenges faced by some women under the current maternity care system and policies that were in place at that time.

Addressing the Terms of Reference:

My submission directly addresses the terms of reference set by this Inquiry. By sharing my unique perspective, I hope to shed light on the less-talked-about issues surrounding birth trauma and advocate for necessary changes in maternity care practices. Additionally, I strongly believe that the prevention of birth trauma requires us to start much earlier in a woman's life, even before pregnancy becomes a consideration.

Personal Experience of Birth Trauma:

My birthing experience was marked by unexpected complications and a lack of effective communication and support from multiple healthcare providers. Despite trusting in the care I was receiving at that time, I felt disempowered and isolated during and after labor, leading to lasting emotional distress and physical trauma.

Challenges in Maternity Care:

Communication Gaps: There was a lack of clear and compassionate communication between healthcare providers and myself during critical moments, leaving me (and my husband) feeling confused and very lost.

Emotional Support: The emotional well-being of expectant mothers during childbirth should be prioritised via the key professionals that can provide this support as part of a multidisciplinary team. However, I felt that my emotional needs were dismissed, contributing to the intensity of my traumatic experience.

Individualised Care: The importance of individualised care cannot be overstated. Maternity care education should be tailored to each woman's unique needs and preferences, recognising that every birthing experience is different.

Advocacy for Improved Maternity Care:

Trauma-Informed Approach: Implementing trauma-informed care practices within maternity care settings can help healthcare providers better understand and respond to the emotional needs of women experiencing birth trauma.

Empowering Expectant Mothers: Empowering women with information and the ability to make informed decisions about their birthing experiences can help reduce feelings of helplessness and improve overall satisfaction with care.

Emotional Support Services: Ensuring that emotional support services are readily available for expectant mothers before, during, and after childbirth is essential to promote better mental health outcomes.

I have specific working examples for each of these points and would embrace the opportunity to share these via giving evidence. Some include;

Starting Sooner: Early Education on Pelvic Health

In my journey of healing and advocacy, I recognised that the steps to improve birth trauma must begin much sooner than most people might think. It is crucial to provide young girls with comprehensive education on pelvic health and reproductive well-being long before they even consider becoming pregnant. By teaching girls about their bodies, menstrual cycles, and pelvic health at an early age, we empower them to make informed choices and foster a positive relationship with their reproductive health.

The Day My Vagina Broke - What They Don't Tell You About Childbirth:

To further illustrate the challenges faced by women during childbirth and the complexities of birth trauma, I have attached the PDF of my book titled "The Day My Vagina Broke - What They Don't Tell You About Childbirth." This book contains the details and contextual information that I believe cannot be conveyed any better via this short submission. It delves into my personal experience of birth trauma and advocates for improved maternity care that prioritises women's emotional and physical needs. I believe that by sharing my story and insights, we can create a more informed and compassionate birthing environment for all.

Conclusion:

I am grateful for the opportunity to share my personal experience of birth trauma with the Birth Trauma Inquiry Committee. It is my sincere hope that my submission, along with the book I authored, will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by some women during childbirth and the pressing need for improved maternity care practices. Additionally, I strongly advocate for early education on pelvic health for young girls as a proactive measure to reduce birth trauma and promote better maternal care in the future.

I am willing to provide real-life evidence in person and give testimony at a hearing if given the opportunity.

Thank you for considering my submission. Should you require any further information or wish to discuss my experiences, please feel free to contact me.