

Submission
No 108

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

As a midwifery student currently in my second year of study, I have been profoundly impacted by the witnessing of disrespectful, coercive, highly medicalised and disempowering care in our current maternity care system. I felt heading in this degree that I had a good basic understanding of the system and what I was heading into, but nothing could prepare me for the way that women are treated. From the moment women enter the system, they are infantilised, disempowered and taught that health care providers are the experts.

During my first year of study, I recall countless experiences where women walked away reporting feeling traumatised by the medicalised birth that had ensued (namely forceps births or emergency caesarean's following induction of labours), or actions at the hands of supposed care providers. I witness things like unconsented vaginal examinations and episiotomies regularly, and as a student midwife you feel powerless to stop things like this.

Practices which are not evidence-based but policy directives in hospitals like 4 hourly vaginal examinations to assess progress are absolutely inhumane, and a student so often women disclose to you how they actually feel about these things - but that they feel like they have no voice to speak up to the 'experts'. There are serious power imbalances between midwives/doctors and women. The over medicalisation of birth and the disrespectful care I am witnessing has a serious toll also on me as a student midwife, with some of things I have witnessed keeping me up at night, replaying over and over what I saw, why it happened and there is really very little support.

The current system is so far from serving women and their babies it isn't funny.