

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

My name is _____, I am 30 years old, and I have a two-year old son. I experienced zero complications during my pregnancy aside from severe anxiety which led to the development tokophobia (the clinical fear of childbirth) and I made the difficult decision to birth my son via planned c-section. I was supported with continuity of care by my private obstetrician who did not coerce me into making the decision to birth via c-section, if anything she encouraged me to birth vaginally but was supportive of my decisions either way. She also respected my hesitations around internal examinations and would not proceed with any examinations since I did not explicitly provide consent.

My obstetrician was aware of my anxiety and linked me in with the hospital's obstetric social worker and with the Gidget Foundation. I had a textbook c-section with zero complications, and yet due to the tokophobia I experienced an immediate acute mental health crisis within days of my son's birth. PTSD and distress led me to being admitted to a mother-and-baby psychiatric hospital until my son was 6 weeks old, thanks to the advocacy of the mentioned social worker. I am submitting my story to show that there are many causes of birth trauma, but the long-lasting effects are sadly the same: there is a lot of shame that comes with psychological birth trauma, it is debilitating and has impacted all facets of my life in terms of my relationship, parenting, ability to work full-time, and has cost a lot of money to continue therapy with my perinatal psychologist following the ending of the 10 Medicare subsidised sessions.

Birth trauma also brings a lot of additional fear about the future that no amount of reassurance can assuage. I don't have the answers to preventing psychological birth trauma, especially in instances like mine where the cause isn't clear or tangible, but I am also submitting my story to show what bare minimum care should be like: all mothers should be treated with the respect and genuine concern by their care providers that my obstetrician showed me throughout my time in her care, and I truly wish every at-risk mother had the privilege of being linked in with an obstetric or perinatal social worker, or similar, to ensure they can receive the right care immediately.

I cannot imagine how much harder my birth or postpartum experience would have been if I had to deal with the added layers of disrespect or mistreatment on top. Thank you for considering this submission. Kindest,