

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 28 July 2023

Partially
Confidential

I am writing to share my personal experiences and perspectives on behalf of women who have encountered birth trauma. As a birth worker who has personally witnessed birth trauma and obstetric violence, bullying and coercion as well as someone who has experienced vicarious trauma, I hope to shed light on the impact it can have on individuals and families.

I am writing on behalf of a number of clients of mine (I am a doula).

The specifics of my own encounter with birth trauma are as follows:

- coercion and bullying in pregnancy - pressure to induce, pressure to do unwanted tests, pressure to have unwanted vaginal exams or stretch and sweeps
- unnecessary episiotomies (multiple) where the woman has said NO several times. One particular occasion the OB kept pushing and hassling my client and said "i'm going to cut you now to get your baby out' (no informed consent or request for consent). She responded to say she would prefer to tear and said no repeatedly. He kept repeatedly demanding it. I asked him to back off because she'd clearly said no. He then had a go at me, and said, she needs to be cut. And then proceeded to look at the partner and say to him 'you tell her she needs this or your baby will die' (the baby was absolutely fine by the way'. Then he cut her anyway despite the fact that she had repeatedly said no.

On other occasions I've witnessed midwives telling a woman she's not allowed in the pool unless she has a VE... which is completely unnecessary and should be the woman's choice. I've seen hands and fingers in vaginas yanking babies out, which have not been necessary. Women being told to be quiet, women being told they can't do things, women being told not to push when she has wanted to.

Drawing from my personal journey, I would like to propose specific solutions and changes to enhance maternity care in Australia, with the aim of preventing future instances of birth trauma. The following are the changes I advocate for:

- more access to publicly funded homebirth
- all risk MGPs in each district
- MGP access increased
- better education for Obs and Midwives - mandated yearly professional development training for trauma informed care
- birth debriefing for ALL women at any stage (no time limit)
- debriefing and support for all midwives, obs, care providers so they are not working from a place of compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma and stress
- mandatory training on informed consent and refreshed every year

Thank you for considering my submission. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute my experiences and viewpoints to the committee's ongoing inquiry. If necessary, I am willing to provide additional evidence during a hearing to further support my perspective.

With sincere appreciation,