

**Submission
No 158**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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I gave birth to my son in February 2022. Prior to his arrival, I had spoken to a friend of mine who is a midwife who had voiced her concern regarding the care provided to mothers within the maternity care system. I work as a Registered Nurse and understand the patriarchal systems that exist in the medical system, which whilst these have a purpose, can serve to disadvantage patients and in this case – mothers and their babies. I sought the care of a private midwife which I was privileged enough to engage for the duration of my pregnancy. My birth, and the pre- and post-natal care I received, was completely free of trauma. I felt heard, acknowledged, and supported throughout this time.

My birth was not free of complication totally however I was supported throughout this and would not report this as trauma. I birthed my son at home and did not require further medical assistance outside of some stitches from my midwife and psychology follow up post-partum. Things I did find traumatic throughout this process were the hurdles placed by other primary healthcare providers, such as at least 2 GPs who refused to provide a referral for my care, as well as making inappropriate personal comments regarding their "disbelief" in midwifery led care. As a health professional, not only was this demeaning but also distressing knowing others who may not have this background may be discouraged from their choices due to this.

My other reason for writing is to say I do not always feel comfortable discussing how trauma free - or even joyful my birth was with other mothers. Many women I talk to express their hatred of their birth, or even the choice to avoid future pregnancies because of their birth experiences. Of note is a friend of mine who gave birth shortly after me. We experienced pregnancy together, me under the care of a private midwife and her within a midwifery group practice model at a large tertiary hospital. I will not share the intimate details of her birth as that is her place to do so, however she attests that the medicalisation of her birth and not being heard were major features that contribute to her feeling of trauma.

I am a part of two mother's groups: one consists of women who gave birth at home and those who gave birth at hospital. At the homebirth group, all women report positive birth experiences. Even though not everything went to plan in each birth, no one reports a traumatic birth. At the hospital home birth group – to have had a positive birth is rare, with all participants comparing who had the worst birth and post-partum experience.

I am happy my birth experience is positive. I am angry that I feel like I am amongst a minority. Women are not listened to, coerced, and assaulted and it is tolerated. Birth trauma is real, and we need to address the culture present in the maternity system.