

Submission
No 168

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 1 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

I have worked as a midwife for over ten years. The abuse and coercion of women I have witnessed in the maternity setting on an everyday basis is abhorrent. Women making choices is seen as an opportunity for healthcare providers to 'talk her round'. Women who make choices that are not the providers preferred are labelled as non-compliant. The disrespect and disregard for women, their babies and their families has left me so disillusioned. I have witnessed healthcare providers performing invasive and painful procedures while women scream at them to stop. Which they don't, even when myself or others also tell them to stop. This is arguably sexual assault - obstetric violence at a minimum.

When I have complained to management I have been told 'it's not my place'. The blame culture and abject disrespect of midwives by many medical staff makes for an even more hostile and unsafe environment for both midwives and women. Not to mention the hugely limited choices women have in terms of actually being able to access evidenced based care options (ie. continuity of midwifery care). This is even more limited in rural areas. I was too scared to give birth myself 'in the system' and chose to birth at home with a private midwife, 700km away from my home as I had no choices in the regional town I lived in. I feel lucky to have had such a life changing, amazing experience but it has made me feel even worse about the care women receive everyday as 'the norm'. I feel guilty all women may not be supported or have the information to make the choices I was able to. I feel guilty for any trauma I have been part of during my career.

Maternity services need to be restructured so women can access individualised relationship based care - regardless of their risk level. Maternity care needs to be viewed holistically - not just as care during pregnancy and birth but postnatally (for at least six weeks) including lactation support, mental health care and women's health physiotherapy.

Birth is transformative. Women deserve to feel safe and powerful in that process - even (especially) when complications arise.