

Submission
No 297

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 15 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing to share my personal experiences and perspectives on behalf of women who have encountered birth trauma. As a woman who has personally experienced birth trauma I hope to shed light on the impact it can have on individuals and families.

I, _____, have experienced birth trauma firsthand.

The context of my distressing experience are as follows:

I birthed my first child at a highly regarded private Sydney hospital. I made my intention to birth naturally very clear (both verbally and in writing) to all care providers including my private obstetrician and the midwives on duty in the birthing ward. I was harassed constantly throughout labour to agree to “voluntary” observations which based on my research and the low risk birth I was having, I considered in most cases to be unnecessary. It was my observation that the notion of consent does not seem to apply to birthing women as it does in every other field of medicine. It was in the process of doing something you might be asked if you’d like it done. The attitude towards my desire to have minimal intervention was hostile. The nurses spoke aggressively towards me and used tactics such creating fear surrounding the safety of my baby (which I can confirm there were no clinical grounds for).

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

After labouring independently for several hours I advised the team that my baby’s arrival was imminent. I was a first time mum and had laboured quietly in the bathroom for hours without any requested support or intervention. The obstetrician actually scoffed at the suggestion I was about to deliver the baby and sarcastically said something in the way “oh I’m sure you are”. At the insistence of midwives and the doctor I agreed to get on the bed to deliver the baby. I heard surprise and commotion as they realised the baby was indeed arriving - now. As my baby was being delivered - crowning and half way earth side - the obstetrician (without my consent) grabbed a towel, and pushed my baby’s head back inside me. I understand from my doula this seems to have been done because the doctor was not gloved or prepared to assist with the delivery. I can confirm that this was excruciating and I believe, based on the sensation the action caused, gave rise to the second degree tear I experienced.

I had worked very hard to labour naturally and made my wishes very clear - do not intervene without discussing it with me unless clinically necessary - and I felt disrespected, violated and betrayed by the system I had on standby to support me.

I might add that as a consequence of this experience I elected to birth my second child at home and it was everything low risk birth should be - guided by me, with the experienced support of two midwives and two doulas for support.

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 education/cultural change for practitioners on low /unassisted birth and consent in birth, greater range of alternative models of care — specifically funding of birth doulas, better birth centres, and funding for the home birth model of care and a publicly funded system of post partum care and support - the nurse health centres are so outdated. The range of services for new families is so lacking.

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,