

Submission
No 298

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

I am a birth doula and run a business hiring birth pools. Over the last few years doing this work I've seen so many complex layers of pain, trauma and suffering inflicted upon women and birthing people. It comes in many forms, from subtle to extreme but are usually a bit of both. It is inherent in so many ways I don't even know where to start or how to put it in this submission cohesively.

The hospital system is 15-20 years behind evidence based research, their practice is cultural and weighted by liability and hierarchy, not what is needed for those birthing to feel safe and make the choices that align with them. Home birth is demonised even though it is shown to be a safer choice for most, besides those with actual risk factors and conditions, and that the interventions used in hospitals are unnecessary and risks are never properly explained - leaving women to wonder why their bodies failed when it was the over medicalisation of their birth that often leads to complications.

Besides this culture I have seen obstetricians pointing fingers and standing over partners saying their babies are in distress and a choice for c section needs to be made immediately when it did not, I've seen women scream not to be touched and hushed by both midwives and doctors, I've watched women refuse episiotomies and doctors go ahead and do them anyway. Coercion for vaginal exams, birth pool use being held back until they get consent to do a vaginal exam, pestering to do vaginal exams after being refused several times - even though it is now known dilation is not indicative of labour progress. In any other context this would be considered assault and/or sexual assault, but in birth in the hospital it is glossed over and normalised

Then there is the standard private homebirth midwives are held to. I have seen two beautifully caring, compassionate and experienced midwives suspended from practice for reasons a hospital midwife or OB could continue working in the same situation, with no notice leaving clients to find other care in the last weeks of pregnancy. The fall out I saw with this was so awful, a few women I worked with went on to have extremely traumatic births with different providers as they were desperate after losing their chosen practitioner that aligned with their values and respected their choices. Private midwives take on so much risk in this way - yet their statistics and results are above and beyond the hospital system in terms of vaginal/intervention free births and women report the quality of care to be way better - but hospital practitioners who bully patients into unnecessary interventions and traumatise people for life have no recourse.

I have witnessed so much more than these instances, and it is time for an overhaul of the maternity system, we all deserve better and those supposedly caring for women in such a vulnerable and life changing time need to be held to much higher standards, and more privilege and funding given to private midwives to make the choice to birth at home more normalised and affordable as it is in Europe and New Zealand.