

Submission
No 386

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 14 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

I vividly remember the first birth I was present for where I realised I just played a role in someone's birth trauma. I was a student midwife looking after a woman who had planned a caesarean with her private obstetrician. She had come in contracting but the plan was still for a caesarean so as a student I was assisting with the preparation for theatres. During this time the woman was becoming more distressed with contractions but had been checked recently and was 3cm. The woman was becoming more and more distressed but had minimal English so was not able to completely explain what she was feeling and the midwife kept brushing it off as well she's only 3cm. The obstetrician came in and it was found that she was in fact fully dilated ready to push but she was desperate for the caesarean she wanted all along. I then witnessed the obstetrician waving the episiotomy scissors in front of the woman's face insinuating that if she did not push she would cut her.

The obstetrician told me and the midwife to hold the woman's legs open. The baby's head was visible at this point and I remember thinking this feels so wrong but trying to justify it to myself that the baby is coming out either way so I'm just helping that process. But the woman was trying so hard to close her legs shut. I can't even remember if the obstetrician ended up cutting her or not because as I held her leg up all I could think was - I am assaulting this woman. I felt sick and disgusted. They placed the baby on her chest and I remember the new mum looked flat and emotionless. The light was gone from her eyes. And everyone else's day continued like it was just another day at work.

I went into midwifery after I was diagnosed with PTSD from the birth of my first child. I ended up medicated, experiencing vivid flashbacks, delaying future children. I thought I would become a midwife and make sure no woman would ever experience trauma in my hands and if they had experienced trauma at the hands of someone else I would help them through it.

And while I do not practice in a violent way the small acts slowly contribute to the trauma. To the woman I offer a bottle of formula knowing it could impact their whole BF journey after I've been trying to help them breastfeed for 30 minutes and I could keep trying but I have 10 other women to get to.

To the woman who I start an induction on who think this is going to be the best day of their lives until the cascade of interventions start - start the oxytocin on a cervix that isn't ready, place the epidural because the contractions are too much, the baby starts having decelerations so we rush to theatres for an emergency caesarean and the family think we saved the mother & baby but the truth is we caused the emergency.

To all the women that information is withheld from. Who are lied to. I NEVER see informed consent. I see doctors and midwives who are so scared of being taken to court that they tell one sided information to get the women to do what they want. I have heard of women being inappropriately touched by male doctors.

When I fell pregnant again I cried for hours because I was so scared to walk through those hospital doors. If I didn't have such a high risk pregnancy I would have taken out a loan to have a private midwife at home. That is the only way to get care tailored to you and respectful. But it is unaffordable and inaccessible for majority of women. This needs to change.

Doctors and midwives need to be held accountable. There needs to be more awareness about women's rights in pregnancy. Did you know most women do not know that they can say no to tests and interventions? Every day I have a woman say something along the lines of "oh I thought that was compulsory"

I wouldn't have made this submission if I couldn't have remained anonymous. There are midwives who witness the most disgusting, disrespectful care everyday but are too scared to speak up in fear of losing their jobs or being bullied at work.