

Submission  
No 424

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 13 August 2023

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Partially  
Confidential

I was diagnosed with PTSD because of the traumatic birth of my son five years ago. Despite ongoing psychological support, the birth experience continues to haunt me. The support I received leading up to the birth was inconsistent and rushed, as I did not have the option for continuity of care with a midwife. I believe wholeheartedly in continuity of midwifery led care for birthing women and obstetric care limited to high-risk pregnancy.

As my pregnancy approached 40 weeks, I was coerced into considering induction. Despite repeatedly asking for information to support my decisions, I was dismissed and made to feel irresponsible and uncaring for my child. I underwent two stretch and sweep procedures despite not wanting them, leaving me feeling ashamed and powerless. I never felt like I had an advocate on my side, someone who could explain things to me and help me understand.

When I went into labour naturally, the medical staff talked over me and never to me. There were concerns about my baby's heart rate, but the level of concern varied. A category 1 emergency c-section was called, rushing me into surgery. In the midst of transitioning, a new midwife recognised that I was about to give birth (in transition) and convinced the doctor on duty to let me continue. However, I was placed on my back on a surgical table, a position I knew I couldn't birth in. Without anyone who knew my wishes, I felt my bodily autonomy slip away. The doctor proceeded to use forceps without my consent, causing immense pain and violating me in a way I can never forget. I was wailing from the contractions, trying to push my baby out in a position that was completely unnatural for me. Meanwhile, my husband was outside, unaware of what was happening and fearing for our baby's safety.

Hours later, I woke up in a room without my baby or my husband. The doctor stood over me, and I asked if I had been given an episiotomy in addition to the c-section. Thankfully, the answer was no, and I cried tears of relief. Meeting my baby hours after his birth is a moment etched in my memory forever.

My baby had a perfect Apgar score and was not distressed. The decisions made by the hospital system were made without my input or consent. This fuelled my anger for many years. In response, I became a birth doula to support women in avoiding similar experiences. Out of the 12 women I have supported, all but one had positive birth experiences, but they still faced varying levels of coercion and disrespect.

If I were to have a third baby, I would never choose to birth in a hospital again. I have lost faith in the system and its lack of evidence-based practices. Instead, I would opt for a private midwife and a home birth. I would never attempt a VBAC in a hospital setting. These potential decisions are not made lightly; as someone with two degrees, a masters, and nearly two decades of experience in data and evidence-based roles in the technology sector, I base my choices on extensive research and facts.

The financial toll of my trauma has been significant. I am out of pocket more than \$9,000 on therapy to help me cope and heal. I am privileged to be able to afford such care, and I will continue to prioritise my mental well-being.

It is crucial that we address the issue of birth trauma and advocate for better support and respect for birthing individuals. No one should have to endure the physical and emotional violations that I experienced. It is my hope that by sharing my story, we can bring about change and ensure that every person giving birth is treated with dignity, autonomy, and compassion.