

Submission  
No 638

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

Thank you for listening to my story. I must admit that I nearly didn't put forward this submission, as it causes me to relive some very difficult experiences for me, that still make me anxious, even after 16 years.

In 2007 I gave birth to my son at [REDACTED] Hospital. After my waters broke at home, I came into the hospital at 4:30am on Sat 29 September. This was my first child. The contractions continued to increase as the day wore on, the staff kept changing shifts, and in total I had 5 different midwives during the birth. I laboured all day until after midnight at which time I was exhausted and was given an epidural to get some rest. The next morning, I was pushing again but was told I needed to have intervention as the baby was at risk of not making it - he had become stuck. My legs were put up in stirrups and a doctor entered the room who I had not seen before. The midwives and the doctor began arguing over the top of me about why he hadn't been called sooner, why they had let me go on so long, he said he was worried about losing the baby, and I could see that he was anxious.

He performed two unsuccessful suction attempts that were extremely painful. The doctor looked directly at me after these attempts, I remember clearly how afraid he was, his face was shaken, and he said to me. 'This never should have happened'. (It is not only women that suffer from birth trauma but the nurses and doctors attending also). After the second attempt at suction failed, the doctor tried to get the baby out with forceps. They asked my husband to help hold me down onto the bed, which he did. I felt as if I would break in two. I was terrified, and I could hear that the staff were worried too. The baby was stuck, Then the doctor had another try with the forceps, it was very violent, and I then had to be given an episiotomy with scissors. My son was finally born on 30 September 10:29am. They held him to me to see briefly before rushing him off to intensive care. He was so badly injured and misshapen from the force of the birth, being in the birth canal for so long, and the interventions I had to have that he spent the next 10 days in intensive care while they determined the extent of his injuries. They couldn't measure his length as his head was too swollen.

From the birth I ended up with a 3rd degree tear to the anus muscle but am grateful that my bowel health is today ok. And that my son is healthy. He is almost 16 now, which brings me to the affect that the birth trauma has had on my life after the birth.

As a result of the trauma, I suffered from PTSD and post-natal depression. Before the birth I was a dance teacher, and afterwards I was so disassociated from my body that I couldn't continue dancing, I didn't feel my body was mine when I moved it. I also found myself uncontrollably descending into panic attacks at random times that I could not predict. I would also have phantom birthing pains and frequent nightmares. I also couldn't drive past the hospital or see a pregnant woman without panicking. My heart was racing, sweating, rapid breathing and flashbacks of memories of the birth. This was intense and very debilitating for 3 years, and then it gradually became more manageable after I had professional help and counselling. The trauma had a profound effect on my relationship to my body. I could not lie on my back or do yoga without getting a severe panic attack. I would suddenly flash back to it being as if I was back there in the stirrups with the baby stuck. My husband and I found

being intimate and having sex very difficult as I would often cry uncontrollably or scream out as if in pain and feel afraid. It was irrational, but I could not seem to control it, it was like my body remembered the trauma every time I lay down with my legs in an open position. I had a lot of nightmares.

The years passing and professional help with the PTSD have helped me to cope, but even now after 16 years, I am sometimes still caught unawares by women's group conversation, an unexpected part in a film, having a GP examination, that brings these feelings and sensations back to me as if they were yesterday.

I also want to mention that birth trauma is not widely enough understood in the community. I have many times been told by other women that it doesn't exist! That it's not a real thing.

I do also feel that my husband suffered from the trauma too and was not offered any support. He turned to alcohol to cope.

The most common thing that was said to me as a new mum was 'but your baby is ok, so what's wrong with you, you should be grateful?'

Yes, I am grateful that my son survived, but I lost a lot of sharing those happy first few years in the haze of PTSD, and it continues to affect my life.