

Submission  
No 670

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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Partially  
Confidential

## Submission to the NSW Inquiry into Birth Trauma

(Written transcription support by Sharon Settecasse)

My name is Elahe Yazdani, I live in \_\_\_\_\_ with my son Nik and I have a long story to tell but too long for this submission. I had my baby at \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital - it was one of the worst experiences of my life when it should have been the happiest.

I am a refugee from Iran, I came over to Australia in 2020 on a Women at Risk Protection Visa. I have experienced many forms of trauma, mistreatment and abuse. Since coming to Australia I have had a mix of beautiful experiences with new friends and also very traumatic, abusive, dehumanising experiences.

My birth experience was one of the worst. In all of this I feel very alone. Even with the wonderful support I have, I still have flashbacks, I cry a lot, I have anxiety and depression. I do what I can to be the best mum but it is so hard. Sometimes I just want to forget everything that has happened to me including my birth. But I can't.

I never thought that having a baby would be one of the most traumatic and saddest days of my life. I didn't think that after all the trauma I had already experienced that I would be treated so badly, with such little respect and like I was nobody.

I came to Australia without knowing I was pregnant. I took a pregnancy test and it was positive, my baby's dad was still in Turkey, I was alone. I went to the GP and they confirmed I was pregnant. During this time, I was so alone. It was during the lockdown period in 2020 and I had no contact with anybody during my pregnancy except for my GP. This was my first baby and I was very nervous. The only appointments were via telehealth with the antenatal clinic. I never saw one midwife in my pregnancy. I only saw the ultrasound person and my GP. I was given very little information about my options, about anything. I did not know the system here in Australia. The only thing that made me feel confident was that I knew that women have babies all the time and I could do this. Still, I had no family, no friends to support me. I cannot describe how lonely I felt.

When it came to the birth this is where things got worse. I was pressured many times to have an induction. When I reached 41 weeks they put more pressure on me. I kept saying no - why do I need an induction? I am healthy, baby is healthy, why? Give me the reason why. They said that maybe the baby will be too big and will get stuck or there will be complications. They really scared me. I had nightmares about my baby not having arms or legs, that my baby would be born dead. I was terrified, very anxious and so scared.

The last few weeks of this pregnancy with all the pressure and them not giving me the proper information made it so stressful. Towards the end I saw different doctors and midwives at the hospital when I had to go in. This made it so hard, they didn't know me, they didn't respect me.

I knew that it was okay and a good thing to have a natural birth. That is what I wanted, a natural birth because it is best for the baby and for the mum.

I agreed to the induction and that was the worst decision. They made me sign papers but I didn't understand it all, I was stuck on the bed, I couldn't move around, I felt trapped and very alone. After so much pain and intense contractions I begged them to help me. They gave me an epidural that was so painful. During this time, they had an interpreter on the phone before I went in to have a Caesarean. Because I am an ICU Nurse in Iran, I knew that when the interpreter was telling me what the doctor was saying, it was incorrect. I had the knowledge of nursing and understood things that the interpreter didn't.

In the end, I went to the theatre and had my baby via Caesarean Section. By that time I was so distressed and tired that it couldn't be the happy moment I wanted to have. The hospital staff were cold, they were not friendly or caring. I felt like I was nobody and just like a number coming through.

When I was taken to the ward I had excruciating back pain, I could not cope, I could not hold my baby. I was screaming asking for pain relief but I was ignored for many hours, it was so long. In the end they did tests and after the results, they took me to the theatre where they performed surgery on my back. The epidural had leaked out of the site into my back causing a lot of pain.

This meant I was separated from my baby for hours. No skin to skin, no breastfeeding. Since then, I struggled to connect with my baby and I have had to use a nipple shield because breastfeeding was so difficult.

I was so sad that I had all the interventions in my birth. I believe they scared me enough to say yes and they pressured me to do something I didn't want to do but I was weak and scared, anxious and vulnerable. I felt like I had no choice.

The nightmare didn't finish there. In the postnatal ward I was ignored, dismissed and neglected by the staff. I understand there were staff problems during Covid lockdowns but this was not why I was ignored. I spent hours crying, begging for water and no-one came to give me anything. My baby's nappy was completely wet and I needed someone to help change it. The baby was hungry and I couldn't get him. I could not move. I could not go to the toilet and my maternity pad was full. I needed it changed

I could not pick up my baby from the bassinet. I could not help myself and no-one would come to help me.

The woman next to me was getting help from a midwife regularly. I asked that midwife to help me. She said another midwife was assigned to look after me. I couldn't believe it. I asked myself - was it because she was white? Because she was Australian?

I was so distressed and thirsty and felt so angry that my baby was lying with a wet nappy for hours and so hungry that I started to cry and scream louder. I screamed "You don't care about me. You need to help me, you need to help my baby. Why is no one helping me? Is it because my skin is brown? Is it because I have black hair? Is it because I can not speak English?" When I did this, immediately people came and changed the baby's nappy and brought me a cup of water and changed me.

They tried to calm me down but it had been hours of being ignored and treated badly.

The impact this has had on me is something I still feel today, nearly 3 years later.

Having my baby at \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital was traumatic. It added to the trauma I have experienced as a woman who had to flee her country, live in exile in Turkey for 4 years then come to Australia where I thought this was a good country, a progressive country. But the opposite happened, I have never been so mistreated - more than before I came to this country. I believe I was racially discriminated against because I am a refugee. I believe they did not consider the trauma (they knew about) I had experienced to make sure I was treated with care, love and compassion.

I recommend that women, refugees and people from other countries need to have specialised care. We need to have medical interpreters - not just any interpreter to ensure the right information is being communicated.

I wish I had one midwife to support me through the journey, that way she knows my story and I wouldn't have to relive the inhumane treatment at every appointment.

I recommend that doctors and midwives have trauma-informed training that will help people like me and all the other people, Australian, refugee, migrant who come to birth with trauma. It cannot be ignored.

I am seeing psychologists, I am in therapy, I still have very low periods and have suffered from PTSD and post natal depression and I am still working on dealing with the memories.

I do not want any woman to go through what I went through.

I want every woman and baby to have a positive, happy birth.

I would like to be part of any of the public hearings to share my story. Refugee and migrant voices need to be heard in this Inquiry.