

**Submission  
No 736**

## **INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA**

**Name:** Mrs Lauren Brenton

**Date Received:** 11 August 2023

---

I personally have experienced trauma in my own birth and I have been witness to birth trauma in my role as a midwife.

In 2013, I was 18 years old and pregnant with my first baby - I was young, naive and very uneducated. I was told to have an elective caesarean in a Private Hospital by the obstetrician looking after me without much of a discussion on benefits VS risks and what this would mean for my health and the health of my baby. After the caesarean I had a quick cuddle in theatre and then was immediately separated from my baby. I was taken to recovery and my husband was taken back to the postnatal ward where he got to do my precious skin to skin with our baby. I asked if my husband and baby could stay with me, but the answer was no "the baby will get cold". Because of this I missed out on a vital bonding moment by being separated from my baby and allowing my husband and family members who were free to go into the postnatal ward and hold my baby all before I could.

After my caesarean section, I was left lying in my dirty, bloody bed with an epidural catheter in place for 2 days. I remember sitting there, with my dirty blueys not having been changed for hours and sweating because I was so uncomfortable. When I asked the midwife if I could get out of bed and have a shower the response was no, that I had to wait until the next day as per policy. I wanted nothing more than to get up out of the bed, have a shower and put on clean clothes.

When it came to breastfeeding my baby, a midwife came into the room and I was eating my lunch. She proceeded to yell at me asking why the baby was swaddled and not on my chest (skin to skin). There was no education as to why I should be doing skin to skin in those first 24 hours and what the benefits were. Instead she grabbed my breast with her hands, with no consent. She then very forcefully pushed my baby onto the breast with her other hand, waited until the baby started sucking and then walked out of the room. I immediately felt violated and did not want to breastfeed after that. I however persevered and went on to have a good breastfeeding journey, however I have never got that feeling of being violated out of my mind. I asked the same midwife if I could see my mum, as I had not seen her since the operation.

Being a teenage mum myself, all I wanted was a hug and some guidance from my mum. The midwife said no, that visiting hours were over and I could not have my mum there. She insinuated that I had to grow up now that I had had a baby of my own. I balled my eyes out stating I needed my mum there and offered to swap out my husband as support person and have my mum there instead. Again she stated no I was not allowed and had to wait until it was visiting hours again. I will never ever forget the way that I was made to feel in this moment. Made to feel that I had done something wrong and that I was not good enough for my baby, because I was young. This experience has stuck with me so vividly for my entire life and I carried around her comments ruining my confidence for my early parenting journey.

Aside from my own traumatic birth, I have as a midwife witnessed many instances of birth trauma. I have witnessed Obstetricians blatantly lying to their patients to get them to have the birth that the Obstetrician wants. I have been told by women about how they so desperately want to try for a vaginal birth but that their "Obstetrician wont let them". I have witnessed formula being given to babies by midwives and lying to parents about how much the baby was given, for example -

one shift a midwife gave the baby 30ml of formula and told the parents she had given 5ml as per the protocol. I have witnessed obstetricians apply forceps by coercing patients into allowing them to use them. I have witnessed Obstetricians continuing to persist with vaginal examinations and breaking women's waters despite them in visible distress (with screaming and crying) and pain. I have witnessed midwives intentionally separate mothers and babies because it is easier for them rather than facilitating the mother and the baby stay together (especially after caesarean sections).

I have witnessed midwives intentionally not wanting to bring mothers back from recovery, back to their babies because it was "too close" to the end of their shift. I have witnessed many midwives, including myself trying their best to fight the system and being completely ignored. I have witnessed these things and I have been in situations where as the midwife in a private hospital I have been too scared to speak up and ask them to stop for fear of my own job. I am beyond disappointed for not being able to speak up for women in my role as a midwife and I want to do better for our children and for my daughter.