

Submission
No 750

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Sarah Roberts
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Partially
Confidential

Hello, my name is Sarah Roberts, I am 30 years old and live in the _____ region of Sydney. I have two children, _____ 3yrs and _____ 2yrs, plus pregnant with a third child due this month.

I wish to share about a number of events during the prenatal care and birth experience of my children that affected me deeply and eroded my faith in the public maternity care model.

In 2019 during the birth of my first child, I felt pressured to have an episiotomy and vacuum assisted birth. I had refused one earlier, but felt threatened to have one if I didn't want a C-section. After having an episiotomy I experienced pain from the scar during sex for the next few years.

In 2020 and 2021 during prenatal care, I was told I could not have a water birth because not all midwives wanted to kneel on the floor. I was told I could not bring my breastfeeding son (12 months old) to prenatal appointments due to restrictions, despite me having no alternative care options for him. When it came to birth (2021), I was airlifted out of a flooded area to access the hospital. The midwives wanted to send me away because I did not want a vaginal exam and they felt I was not in true labour. Having been evacuated from floods with no home to easily return to, I felt coerced into a vaginal exam in order to be allowed to stay at hospital. I felt as if I had no other choice as I could not return home, and had been frightened by the flood situation and did not feel safe in the hospital. This experience has left me with psychological trauma and feeling like I had no voice or autonomy in hospital settings.

During the final stage of labour with my second son, while in the birth pool, the midwife pressured me to remain in a certain position that caused me discomfort, simply so she could examine me while I was pushing. She again conducted a vaginal exam despite me assuring her I did not want or need one. I was pushing my baby out and her fingers were inside me so she could confirm what I already knew, that the head was descending. At the time this felt annoying. On reflection later, I feel mistreated and ignored. It is not some small measure to have a strangers fingers feeling inside of your most intimate places. It is not some small measure to say no but have someone dismiss your words and assert themselves as needing to in order to 'allow' you something like giving birth.

I have struggled to express my wishes and autonomy confidently after these experiences. The emotional affect this has had on me has been huge, and I am working with a professional to move forward. I have doubts in the hospital system to provide me with care I deem safe as I prepare to birth my third baby. I am saddened that private midwifery is inaccessible to me for financial reasons. I am forced to choose between birthing my baby in a hospital setting, likely placing myself in a position to receive potential abuse by strangers who ignore my wishes, or choose an unassisted home birth, without access to the medical care our country is apparently so esteemed for.

I believe the following measures need to be implemented immediately so that all women in Australia can experience birth without trauma.

- Legislation on informed consent

- Access to public funded homebirth
- More funding for postpartum, especially women's health physio
- More funding for continuity of care models

Thank you for reading my submissions. I strongly hope this inquiry brings about change.

Sarah Roberts