

**Submission
No 772**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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In 2019 I gave birth to my daughter. I thought it was going to be the most empowering and incredible experience of my life, but instead, I daily grieve the birth I never got the chance to have. I was subject to the current midwifery hospital system which is run by fear based policies that are the furthest thing from women centred care. I didn't know any better, so I blindly trusted what my care team guided me in. An induction for no good reason other than the fact I was at "term". This led to the full cascade of interventions and landed me in theatre, having to have "emergency" and unwanted major surgery in order to meet my baby. I cried for weeks afterwards and even as I was being wheeled to theatre, had thoughts of I'll do it better next time. I felt like a complete and utter failure. But my body didn't fail me. The system did. I understand sometimes birth does require an unplanned caesarean section, but given our current rate of c-section is somewhere around 40%, there is no way close to half of all women have medical reason for one. The feelings of failure and the ongoing battle in future pregnancies is what I find traumatic.

For my consecutive pregnancy I was determined to become educated and reclaim my power. I listened to every birthing podcast I could find, I read a heap of books, and I hired a doula. I tried to get access to continuity of care but because I was deemed "high risk" and will forever have that label in any future pregnancies, there was nowhere I could publicly access any continuity of care where I live. If it was an affordable option, I would have hired a private midwife to get the support I was desperate for. My whole pregnancy felt like a battle to achieve the vaginal birth I wanted. Almost every antenatal appointment would leave me in tears or filled with frustration and anger. Why? Because I never knew my care provider and I never felt as if they believed in me due to the constrictions of the system they operated in. In the end, I ended up succumbing to the system again and having another unwanted induction based on fears that my care providers placed in my mind. I was "overdue" (41+3 weeks) and had a little extra fluid, so was told if my waters were to break, I might have a cord prolapse and there would be minutes to get baby out before they died - this was after being told very early in my pregnancy that my baby might die if I refuse to do the glucose tolerance test - a test that is incredibly controversial and unreliable in diagnosing gestational diabetes. My induction was a more empowering one the second time around because I was more informed and tried to make every decision myself in the moment, but as I reflect on it, there was so much that still was taken away from me or that I had to fight so hard for. Once again, I ended up back in theatre in order to meet my baby. This time, it was genuinely medically necessary which is the only reason I feel less traumatised by my son's birth.

I still struggle to hear of positive birth stories without being filled with deep grief and despair that it isn't my story and probably never will be. I understand that medical intervention is sometimes necessary, but medical intervention for the sake of policy and fear is not good enough. As the birth documentary "Birth Time" asks, "what would it take for women to emerge from their births feeling physically safe and emotionally well?" I don't think the answer is found in a broken system where so many women emerge feeling let down, discouraged, disappointed and traumatised. I don't believe it was my c-sections that caused such feelings in me, but that my care was in a system that is so overmedicalised and far from women centred. I would do anything to have access to a known midwife in future pregnancies.