

**Submission
No 812**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

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I am a 28 year old first-time mother, who gave birth to my son in February 2023. I entered into my birth as well prepared as I felt I possibly could be. I took birthing classes, saw a womens physiotherapist, ensured I was well informed of my options and felt prepared going into my son's birth. The truth is, nothing can quite prepare you for giving birth.

During my labour, I had 3 different midwives who all provided very different levels of care - the first, simply told me I wasn't in enough pain to require any medications and that I should go home, which I felt immediately changed my mindset heading into my birth. If this isn't bad enough pain to require medication or acknowledgement, then however was I supposed to be able to endure whatever the remainder of my labour entailed?

The next midwife simply left me to my devices. I saw her roughly every 4 hours when she came to check on me, I was given gas and air but that was about it.

At 9pm the anaesthetist came in to see how I was progressing, apparently she was leaving and if I wanted an epidural I needed to say so now. I had been in labour at the hospital for close to 12 hours now, and the midwives assured me that the baby would be out within an hour and I was doing great, there was no point for an epidural. I took their advice.

By 2.45am the following morning when my son was born, I had spent close to 3 hours actively pushing. I was exhausted, defeated and in pain like had never imagined. As I begged, for hours, for an epidural or cesarean I was repeatedly told it was too late and that I didn't need it. Maybe they were right, I gave birth to my son without an epidural and without a cesarean, however, once he was born I was traumatised. I couldn't even turn to look at him at first.

After he was handed to me, I laid on the bed in copious amounts of my own blood and bodily fluids waiting 45 minutes for the on call obstetrician. He entered the room, saying nothing, lifted my legs into stirrups and reach his hand inside of me, pulling out blood clots the size of kidneys. He then proceeded to spend close to an hour stitching me, without so much as a "Congratulations".

Only a few hours later, my son was taken to special care due to low sugars. I recall spending most of the day crying - I was physically and emotionally traumatised and exhausted. I recall a conversation with my mother where I said "I don't even want to see if he is okay, I just want to sleep. Am I a bad mum?"

Within 24 hours my son was transferred to a hospital close to an hour away, I was swiftly discharged so that I could be with my son without so much as having my stitches checked. I spent the next week in hospital with him, going back and forth between his hospital bed and my parents room, dealing with a tear, my milk coming in, the trauma of birth and the trauma of a sick baby.

Now that close to 6 months has passed, the trauma of my birth story seems a little hazy and I no longer have the nightmares or anxiety that appeared in the weeks following my birth.

However, that doesn't mean it has gone away and I am scared for how it might affect my next pregnancy.

I believe increased care for mothers post partum, is essential. So much care is centred around the new life we have created, we are often seen as nothing more than the breast that feeds them. An increase in birth trauma counselling and it's availability would provide vital care for mothers struggling with their birth experience.