

Submission  
No 954

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

**Date Received:** 14 August 2023

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Partially  
Confidential

# Submission for Inquiry into Birth Trauma

14 August 2023

I am the mother of three children, two born vaginally, and my last by c-section.

I am needing the support of a friend to transcribe my story and to lodge it as a submission. In spite of how strongly I feel that women's stories like mine need to be shared, were it not for this support, I would not be able to lodge a submission.

As I am still traumatised by this event, and other related events that had happened before and after, I will only discuss here several aspects of what has happened to me, and I cannot go into great detail. Even sitting here, thinking about it all, is heightening my anxiety. It's making my scars ache. After my third child weans, I will have a lot to do to reintegrate my female reproductive physiology to the rest of my body and hopefully restore some sexual function.

In 2019 I went into spontaneous labour with my second child and went to Hospital to birth. I had been labouring in the water and was told I was taking too long. The baby's head was there but kept retracting, as they do. I had pushed a lot and I could feel myself getting tired, but finally I felt a powerful, productive contraction. I really felt I was making progress now and was feeling so close to baby crowning. I look back now and wonder if support with positioning could have made all the difference as I felt so close, but this sort of support was not forthcoming.

Suddenly I was told I had to leave the birth pool and get onto the bed as it was determined I had been too long in the water. I can't remember all the details now, but I had thought that by being in hospital I would get midwifery support. I was given access to a birth pool, but very little else in the way of information. Instead they were paying more attention to hospital policy and monitoring heart rates and filling in data into the computer. Midwife comes from the old English "with woman", but I received none of that. The midwife that ended up attending me was cold and brusque.

Unfortunately in my first birth, I had experienced something similar where I had been ignored by the only midwife attending me. Turns out she had fallen asleep while I was in labour and after hours of trying to work it all out on my own, a doctor was called and I was given my first episiotomy due to slight malpositioning of the baby. I still wonder if assistance with my positioning and the many physiological tricks midwives have would have helped.

Back to my second birth in 2019, and this time I was very keen to give birth without any intervention. I was very prepared with having read lots of information and had prepared a birth plan of what I believed were simple and achievable goals.

Once out of the birth pool and on the bed, a locum was called and the emergency buzzer was accidentally pressed as well, triggering sirens and the arrival of a huge crowd of other staff. All the lights were turned on. It was all very noisy and traumatic.

The locum introduced himself and said he had read my birth plan and he said "You've made some interesting choices, why is that?" I said "I really believe in natural birth." At that moment he was preparing to give me an episiotomy. I don't remember giving consent. I was in a state of shock.

**He looked me in the eyes - as he cut me - and asked "Don't you think that's shaming for women?"** I couldn't believe it.

I have replayed this interaction countless times. Why did he make a political statement like that when we have just met, me in such a vulnerable position, and him cutting the most sensitive part of my body?

This event goes to the heart of my trauma.

No one in the room stepped in to advocate for me. Not the private midwife I had engaged, who also works at that hospital (I realise now that she needed to keep relationships smooth for her continued employment there), not my friend, the main midwife attending me, or any of the other staff present. The doctor has an unearned position of authority in the room.

Our culture has failed birth so badly. The potential is so robbed of us. How many generations does it take to lose knowledge? As quickly as two generations and it can be forgotten forever. With c-sections now at around 40%, physiological childbirth is at this level of risk of disappearance.

I did not heal well from this episiotomy. In the year after this birth, I ended up having surgery to repair the damage. I don't know if it really made any difference - I still have discomfort and sexual dysfunction - but I opted for it because somehow I felt it would release me from the energy of that man who cut me while speaking to me in that way.

I lodged a complaint with . It was arduous driving all the way back there with my baby still so young, but felt it was important. They told me I was brave for making the complaint and asked if I wanted my side of the story told to the doctor concerned. I said yes of course, but have never heard anything back from them about any possible changes. There was a number I could call for future discussion if I wanted, but they were located back in , a long way from me with such a young baby, I never pursued it.

Apparently two of the other staff present said they thought it was weird that he had done that to me, but they never said anything either. The doctor, as disconnected to the woman as he/she is, is all powerful in the hospital birth room.

With my third child, I ended up having a planned c-section for reasons beyond my control, leaving my hopes for an unmedicalised birth permanently dashed. The doctor who performed my perineal repair surgery also performed the c-section. He said "with your degree of perineal trauma, you're a good candidate for c-section." This just reinforces the level of damage I feel there, damage I don't believe really needed to happen. He really didn't need to keep mentioning my "degree of perineal trauma". It wasn't my fault.

The doctor also told me that his wife “just has c-sections”, indicating to me his lack of support for and understanding of normal physiological birth. Why are these people put in charge of women’s maternity care?

I am leaving my friend to write this all out in a coherent form. I just can’t read it or try to make it read well as it’s too stressful for me.

I have lots of mistrust in the birth system now. It’s not about birth, it’s about paying lip service but not really listening to women’s bodies. There’s so much to learn from experienced midwives, there are so many other helpful approaches that continue to be ignored.

To come so close to birthing naturally twice, to have my yearnings dismissed as “shaming to women” has left me with long term trauma that is ongoing and costly to heal.

Somehow these men think they are helping but they really aren’t. They don’t belong in this space. What are they doing there?