

**Submission
No 971**

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Mrs Alice Herisson

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Subject: Submission on Birth Trauma

AUGUST 10 2023

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am writing to share my personal experiences and perspectives on behalf of women who have encountered birth trauma. As a woman who has personally experienced birth trauma I hope to shed light on the impact it can have on individuals and families.

I, Alice Herisson, have experienced birth trauma firsthand.

The specifics of my own encounter with birth trauma are as follows:

In June 2021, I was pregnant with my first child. I was 32 years old, and am a healthy person. The whole pregnancy went very smoothly and I felt very good. My birth plan was to have a natural birth and I was part of the midwifery program at a NSW Hospital.

At 37 weeks pregnant, my midwife was concerned about the size of my baby, being small.

My partner and I weren't concerned about the small size of our baby, as it seemed obvious, given our genes. My mother is Indonesian, and I was born small, as so were all my brothers.

My husband is Chilean, and is also small built.

I felt that this wasn't taken into consideration, when our baby was being compared to an "average" western baby.

I was sent for an ultrasound at 37weeks+1, then again at 37w+6. I'm not entirely sure what exactly the Dr's/midwife were "looking for".

On the same day of the last ultra-sound, I was informed that I would need to be induced. And that I also had to stay in the hospital for the night until the induction the next day.

This of course came as a shock, as I wanted my baby to come when they were ready. But I also didn't feel at all prepared to stay the night at the hospital as I didn't have any of my belongings. In my mind, I was only going to the hospital for a regular check-up.

As the Dr. was going through the induction process, they receive a phone call from a laboratory with results of blood tests that had been done, indicating I was positive to Herpes Simplex Virus.

The Dr. then proceeds to tell me that I would need to have a cesarean instead, planned for the next afternoon. I cried the whole night, I couldn't comprehend what was happening.

I had done all the blood tests that had been recommended, and I had not once heard of the HSV. I didn't have any symptoms or lesions of it. And it was only just by "chance" that one of the Dr's at the hospital had decided to do an extra blood test.

The cesarean operation felt very hostile. The lights very bright, the room very cold. One of my friends had told me how during her cesarean, she was offered to play her favorite playlist.

Of course, I too had prepared a playlist to listen to during labour, but I wasn't offered music during the operation.

My baby was born a perfectly healthy baby. Yes she was small (2,3kg) but proportionally small (the ultrasounds might have suggested IUGR ?)

The whole experience was traumatising. I couldn't talk about my birth experience without tearing up, even a year later.

Having reflected upon my experience, I believe that several factors contributed to my birth trauma. These factors may include :

- Not having clear information on why induction/cesarean was necessary. To this day, I still have doubts whether the cesarean operation was necessary.
- Why was HSV not brought to my attention before ? Knowing from the start I was planning a vaginal birth. I could have been tested for this earlier and have taken the antibiotics for 3 weeks.
- No support / follow-up care after birth regarding the traumatising experience.
- Throughout the whole process, whether it was additional scans, blood tests, cesarean, etc. I felt that I was never given a choice of whether I agreed to it or not and "kept in the dark" (no clear information).

Drawing from my personal journey, I would like to propose specific solutions and changes to enhance maternity care in Australia, with the aim of preventing future instances of birth trauma. The following are the changes I advocate for:

- Less systematic medical intervention, and help mothers feel empowered and trust their bodies.
- Clear communication every step of the way
- Making mothers feel more involved in the whole process instead of "being told what to do"
- Recognise different ethnicities will make bigger/smaller babies.

Thank you for considering my submission. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute my experiences and viewpoints to the committee's ongoing inquiry. If necessary, I am willing to provide additional evidence during a hearing to further support my perspective.

With sincere appreciation,

Alice