

Submission
No 1152

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

To whom it may concern,

I am providing this submission in order to recount my traumatic birth experienced as a part of the Midwifery Group at the _____, in September 2021.

I want to share my story because of the severe repercussions that the negligence and lack of proper care I encountered had on my mental, physical, and emotional health for over 18 months post-birth. The experience also impacted my family, including my newborn and my partner, and caused substantial financial strain.

The main contributor to my experience of traumatic birth was the negligence by one particular midwife involved in my birth. However, several other experiences with midwives in the midwifery group during my antenatal and post-natal care compounded this trauma.

ANTENATAL CARE CONTRIBUTORS

- During my third trimester, I raised concerns with the lead midwife of my group about the size of my baby given my narrow hips, how big I was carrying and the physical debilitation I was experiencing due to the weight of the pregnancy. The midwife waved off these concerns and dismissed my request for an ultrasound. Her logic was that there wasn't much "size difference" between my partner and I. She said, "If your partner was a big massive tall Aussie guy and you were a small Asian woman, then I would measure the baby."

The logic seemed odd at the time and the answer was confusing. I left the appointment feeling even more anxious and somewhat gaslit (my partner is a 90kg, 6ft man of African heritage and I'm a 5'6ft woman with Northern and Southern European heritage who weighs 60kg - there is quite a size difference!).

I felt like I didn't have a voice in the decision. I had never been through childbirth before and she was the person in authority.

When I gave birth, finally through emergency C-section, the first thing the surgeon said to me when he retrieved the baby was that I was always too physically small to give birth to the baby — validating my original concerns raised with the midwife. My baby was 4.02kg at birth.

- In my third trimester of pregnancy, I was concerned about the position of the baby which was slightly posterior. I had two family members who had posterior births and had extremely painful experiences. I expressed my concern to my head midwife. She said not to worry that he will "probably turn" close to the birth. I asked her if there was anything I could do about it. She said "you could try some acupuncture or something."

I felt my concerns were disregarded and discarded. She didn't help and didn't really seem to care. It was another confusing experience where I felt gaslit but also not completely aware of it at the time as I didn't feel like the person with the knowledge or the power.

At birth, my baby was posterior. He never turned. The posterior position led to him being stuck and unable to be birthed naturally.

DURING BIRTH CARE CONTRIBUTORS

My labour was highly traumatic. It was over 20 hours long. 17 hours was spent labouring a posterior, 4.02kg baby who was stuck. I laboured without an epidural for 15 hours of that time - even though an epidural was requested multiple times throughout the duration of this 15 hours. It resulted an emergency C-section.

I went into spontaneous labour at 39 weeks and 5 days. Labour contractions started extremely strong. They were so strong that it felt abnormal immediately, nothing like what the midwives told me it would be. My contractions progressed quickly. Within 3 hours of going into labour, I headed into the hospital.

My partner and I were met by one of the midwives in the Midwifery Group who had just begun her shift. We were taken to the birthing suite. She assessed me - I was dilated (I can't remember by how much) but she told me I could probably go home. I said that wasn't a good idea as I was in such an incredible amount of pain, it felt very scary to do so. She allowed us to stay.

After about 2-3 hours of labouring in that room with the support of gas and morphine which were not doing anything to relieve the pain, I requested an epidural.

The midwife refused me the epidural.

I want to pause here and provide some context - I was told pre-birth by the midwives that it was "my birth", that the midwives were all there to support me in making whatever decisions I wanted to make and that if I requested an epidural, they would give me one.

I asked the midwife again for an epidural, she said she wouldn't give it to me as she thought the baby would be coming soon. There was no medical reason for this, her decision came down to her intuition and judgement which was extremely flawed.

Throughout the next 6 to 7 hours, I requested an epidural multiple times. My request was denied each time. The midwife was convinced I was having the baby naturally. It also seemed she wanted me to have the birth naturally - my water's hadn't broken and she seemed excited at the possibility of an 'en caul' birth while I howled non stop like a wild animal being tortured.

I was in so much pain I didn't even have the strength to advocate for myself in a powerful way. All I could do was keep asking for the epidural but the request was never heard.

It felt like I was being tortured. No one else came into the room in the duration of her shift. I was at the mercy of this one person who was denying my requests for adequate pain relief and shutting down my concerns of my baby's health. My body kept on telling me there was something wrong - yet my body and my experience did not have authority in that room - a stranger did who was telling me my experience was invalid and my concerns were wrong.

A number of hours into this harrowing experience, I asked her to break my water as it still hadn't broken. I felt that by doing this it would either progress the labour or provide answers as to what may be going on, as I expressed that there was something not right. She denied to break my water at each request - there was no reason why.

It wasn't until the next midwife on shift walked into the room that my needs were responded to. This midwife took action. She broke my waters and thank god she did as there was meconium in the water. She also could now see that there was an issue as in the vaginal examination she could feel that my son was stuck high up in a posterior position.

I was moved into the other room under the care of the doctors and was given an epidural. Even though the birth ended in an emergency C-section as my son was stuck, this part was not traumatic for me for the reason that I felt heard, safe and cared for. It was a completely different experience to the horribly traumatic one I endured for 13 hours during that one particular midwife's care.

Ultimately, for the most part of my labour, until I was in the hands of the doctors, my experience giving birth with the midwife felt like an abuse.

POST-NATAL CONTRIBUTORS

- The post-natal care ward contributed to the trauma experienced in that the nurses didn't listen to my requests for help particularly in regards to the physical trauma impacted on my body, specifically my hip and neck. After 20 hours of my posterior 4.02 kg baby smashing against my right hip, I felt like I could hardly walk and even the painkillers from the c-section didn't help with the hip pain. I also had injured my neck during the labour and the painkillers had no effect on diminishing the pain. I asked one of the nurse's to send a doctor or physio to look at my body and assess what had happened, she said no and to "get your hubby to rub your neck." It was another experience of not being heard or listened to. It took 12 months of rehabilitation on my hip and neck, and tens of thousands of dollars, before they felt back to normal again.
- The midwives made me come back into the hospital to weigh the baby instead of them coming to me. They said they were too busy. When i came back in, the midwife who had provided the negligent care saw me. She took me into exactly the same birthing suite where I had experienced the trauma. She also told me that it was "ok" if I experienced a

traumatic birth which was a very triggering comment for her to make and didn't come with any other context. That day broke me. I was shaking when I went back to the car. My partner couldn't be with me in that appointment because of COVID rules. I brokedown when I got back to him. I was so anxious, so traumatised that I couldn't even hold the baby.

- The midwives only came to see me once after the birth - in this instance it was the head midwife of the group. She came in for 10 minutes, checked if I was breastfeeding ok and left. It was so fleeting and so the opposite of care. I felt disposed of and discarded, my inner being felt like it had shattered and been shattered in the hands of another following the birth, but no one seemed to care and I was the only one who was left to pick up the pieces.
- I'd like to also bring attention to a sign that was plastered on the walls of the postnatal ward in during my stay there. It is a sign that is supposed to bring attention to Day 3 post-birth whe your milk is supposed to come in. The sign referred to this night as "the night of terror" explaining that you will be up for most of it breastfeeding. I am still so shocked that a birth ward would refer to any part of the post-partum period as the 'night of terror'. Do they know how potentially triggering, anxiety-inducing and damaging this is? What about the night of nurturing? The night of blossoming as a mother? The night of milk and honey? Anything, but the night of terror.

THE RESULT OF THIS BIRTH TRAUMA

- Diagnosed with post-partum anxiety disorder
- An experience that severely impacted my mental, emotional and physical health
- Admission into
- 18 month recovery period - emotionally and physically
- Over \$30k spent on recovery services (doctors, therapists, alternative medicines, physio, rehab, etc.)
- An experience that impacted the wellbeing of my child and my partner
- Fear of having another birth and what could happen

I'd like to also note that I lodged a formal complaint with the hospital many months after giving birth, as it took many months for me to even be able to talk about it. The hospital gave a formal apology but I don't think this was enough as the harm had already been done.

I'd also like to note that I chose to go with the Midwifery group after hearing that this is the best option for continuity of care within the public system. If I become pregnant again, I don't think I could ever participate in midwifery group care after this experience.

Thank you for reading my submission.