

Submission  
No 1039

## INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

**Name:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

In April 2022 I gave birth at \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital in Sydney. What I envisaged to be a calm, happy event meeting our baby turned out to be a traumatic experience. In the lead up to birth, during birth and after birth I experienced various instances of being dismissed, disrespected and coerced.

Please know I write my experiences in the context of being a mother but also working with mothers as a social worker. I want to advocate for these experiences to be heard.

### **Lead up to birth**

The problems started when my daughter started measuring 'too small' and I had to interact with the wider labour and delivery setting. I was told multiple times by doctors that "small babies don't do well in labour".

I was strongly encouraged to be induced due to risk of my daughter being unwell at birth because of her weight, how could I say no? I was vulnerable, highly anxious and medical professionals were telling me this was the way. I still don't know what the risks were for continuing the pregnancy and waiting for labour to start on its own.

### **Labour and birth**

The induction process was the traumatic part of my birth experience. I was told when I verbalised finding the insertion of an induction tape painful that I should "get used to it because I'm about to give birth". The amount of different peoples hands and instruments that were inserted into me was extremely uncomfortable. I have counted that I had 10 different occasions where different people were inside me inserting something, checking something or removing something. The majority of which was on my own because my husband wasn't allowed to be with me overnight during the induction (when most of the 'procedures' occurred). My husband reminded me that I was allowed to tell these people to stop or slow down and that helped me have some power back in the situation.

Fast forward 48 hours, by the time I actually started contracting I was so emotionally and physically drained that I couldn't face dealing with the pain but somehow I did it. Everything happened extremely quick, I didn't have time to call my student midwife. I eventually reached what I believe to be transition and all of a sudden the room was filled with doctors and nurses because of an emergency- my daughters heart rate had dropped. I was asked to sign consent for a caesarean in the middle of all this and off I went to birth my baby in an operating theatre, scared and shaking the whole time from the meds (or is it shock? - who knows). If I had known the induction would be this way I would have preferred to just go straight to a caesarean because at least I wouldn't start motherhood being so broken.

### **Post birth**

Because of my experience giving birth, the health of my baby (who was very small) and the fact it was a public holiday weekend, I felt forced to stay in hospital for almost a week. I didn't receive any lactation support until 3 days in. It affected my breastfeeding journey because I was advised by a midwife to feed, pump and then syringe feed which basically left me with no time to do anything else (including rest) and lead to my decision to stop breastfeeding as I felt so overwhelmed on top of everything else.

I was desperate to get home where I knew I'd be able to sleep, get the support of my family, eat proper food, learn to breastfeed my baby. I was only allowed to leave because I was registered in the birth centre which meant I could have midwife care from the birth centre at home. Once I returned to the safety of my home I finally started to heal and enjoy the newborn bubble of love and cuddles.

My birth experience continued to impact me, I spent many hours replaying images of various experiences, some nights I couldn't fall asleep thinking about what had happened. Even writing this still brings tears of sadness to my eyes.

## **My baby's experience**

I know it's important to talk about mothers but I also want to have my daughters experience heard here. She was born into a world of masked faces after feeling her mum scared, the first person to hold her was a surgeon and her first experiences of life were being pricked for blood sugars. She eventually got to experience her mums cuddles and feeds and meet her loving family. I wish she got to experience a calmer introduction to this world.

## **What worked well**

These are the things that stood out as supportive during my experience

- *Respecting my body:* a midwife who was on overnight shift when I was being induced who was beautifully supportive and respectful of me knowing I was finding the process hard, she slowed down when I asked and held my hand when my husband wasn't there and I was having procedures done to me
- *Explanation:* a lactation consultant who I eventually met in hospital who made me sleep (stopped people from coming into my room for a few hours) and told me anything was possible when it comes to breastfeeding. Her words ultimately ran through my mind once I returned home and helped me to feel comfortable to restart breastfeeding
- *Continuity of care:* My student midwife who was the only consistent person throughout my pregnancy, I'm sad she wasn't there for my birth but she reminded me to look after my mental health once my daughter was born. It was so nice seeing a familiar face before and after birth. I was booked in with the birth centre which was a lovely prenatal care experience as I had the same midwife for most of my appointments. It didn't have a hospital feel and it was a lovely calm environment.
- *Emotional Support:* A midwife who I met after the public holiday long weekend who was the first to really check in with me emotionally which made me realise I wasn't doing well and to do something about it
- *Debrief with Doctor:* I debriefed with a doctor afterwards, she was attached to the birth centre and didn't have anything to do with my birth but she helped me understand some events that went on based on the notes. She was very supportive.
- *Planning for postpartum support:* I thankfully spent time building my support networks and planning for my postnatal period and that's what helped me thrive as a new mum despite my traumatic experience. My family who dropped off food, my counsellor who gave me strategies for dealing with the trauma, my friends who messaged, my husband who took time off work to care for us both, my mothers group who I could cry with, my lactation consultant who set me up with a realistic plan for feeding my little baby, my pilates instructor who helped me feel confident in my bodies ability. I can only imagine those without the same resources may not be so lucky.

Thanks for listening to my experiences.