

Submission
No 934

INQUIRY INTO BIRTH TRAUMA

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 10 August 2023

Partially
Confidential

Birth Trauma – Our everyday nightmare

My name is _____ I am writing this submission to share my voice as someone who lives the nightmare of birth trauma every day as a junior registered midwife in a tertiary hospital birth unit in NSW.

Part of me feels inadequate to share my stories of birth trauma as I feel I am merely a witness to these events and yet I still suffer with the long lasting effects; it is harrowing to think of how the women and families involved in these incidents felt and still feel today.

Another part of me is filled with anxiety about whether or not I should include my name, offer to give evidence or even make a submission at all, for fear of how my job may be impacted, or how I will be ostracised by those I work with who actively contribute to the epidemic of birth trauma daily. This anxiety alone speaks volumes about how deep this issue runs within the obstetric community and culture.

The prevalence of birth trauma is astonishing. Often, I am leaving my shift with a shaking head and heavy heart after witnessing the very moment a woman's life changes for the worst.

Sometimes I have nightmares that I am at work and I am hearing women scream stop, over and over again while a care provider attends a "vaginal examination" and when I wake up, I am hit with the daunting reality that I have witnessed these nightmares come true many times.

I grew up as the type of person who would always stand up for my friends, call out wrong behaviour and not let people get away with hurting others. Yet, I find myself powerless when witnessing health care providers, obstetricians, midwives and nurses, so easily physically and mentally abusing women and continue on with their lives like nothing happened. I am dumbfounded that there is no legislation to protect women and newborns from barbaric acts that have life-long impacts.

I can only speak from my own experience regarding the physical, emotional, psychological, and economic impacts that birth trauma has had on me as a midwife. I have experienced heart palpitations when seeing particular perpetrators. I have needed to attend replacement days as a student and use sick leave as a midwife to take time off to recover from the psychological injury after being part of a traumatic event. I experience generalised anxiety symptoms because of the unknown of the shift ahead and I have nightmares about actual or made up scenarios involving people and behaviours that are seen as normal and acceptable in my profession.

Long term, I fail to see how I can sustain this career and maintain the passion that I currently have as a new midwife without seeing drastic change in the way we see and address obstetric violence. I feel ill at the idea that I am part of a culture that is responsible for thousands of women's trauma.

We need power to stop these actions, we need power to revoke the rights of those practitioners who over and over again cause grave physical and psychological harm to their women, families and staff. We need more services for debriefing, more support for our students and junior midwives because without this we will have no midwives left. We need compulsory, confronting training and education sessions for all practitioners working in maternity care to highlight the impact of birth trauma undeniably. We need better pay and incentives to practice in continuity of care models, the barriers to entry are much larger than the benefits offered to midwives despite the evidence of reducing birth trauma rates. Something must be done.

Please note I give permission for this submission to be published without my name and contact details, and am open to offering evidence in court.

Thank you for your time and action.