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Book Review: Birth Shock: How to recover from Birth Trauma, by Mia Scotland

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Birth Shock: How to Recover from Birth Trauma

By Mia Scotland

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224 pages

Publisher's recommended price £12.99

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Reviewed for AIMS by Anna Madeley

This new book by Mia Scotland is a perfect read for women, and their families, who suspect that they have suffered trauma in connection with giving birth. Mia is a perinatal clinical psychologist, specializing in birth trauma and perinatal mental health issues. Mia's care about this subject - and her kind and patient support for women and families - is evident in every page.

Focussing not only on the 'whats and ifs' of birth trauma, this text lays foundations and contextualises, by taking the reader on an easily readable and accessible journey through the history of birthing and the maternity services in the UK, including an examination of how people might be affected by different ways of birthing and of organising care. By people, I include partners, since this book also encompasses the trauma that can be experienced by those witnessing trauma and being involved in that journey alongside their loved ones. In later chapters, there is also a focus on trauma experienced by those in the wider birthing community: midwives, doctors, doulas and allied health professionals. As a midwife, I felt that the book did a good job in highlighting that all birth professionals are human and therefore can experience vicariously the trauma of others. This is such an important subject, not only for women and

their families to recognise, but birth professionals too. It was an 'I hear you' moment and I applaud the author for this.

One of the real strengths of this book is how it moves away from the perception that trauma is caused alone by labour and birth, discussing how events surrounding birth, for example having children in special or intensive care, breastfeeding experiences and experiences of postnatal care, can have an equally devastating and long-term effect on women and their families. The inclusion of discussion around trauma in babies is an angle that I have rarely considered in this context, and was highly thought-provoking. Additionally, the gently presented differences between anxiety, depression and PTSD was highly effective, and should be of real practical help.

Whilst this book's target audience is women and their families, I'd also recommend it to birth professionals, and indeed anyone seeking a starting point for exploring some of the main issues around birth trauma and resolution. The text is sensitively written, mindful of the reader who might find some of the book emotionally difficult to read, and each chapter is accessible, clear and simply presented. The chapter that delves into the psychology of birth trauma is very interesting indeed, and I'd say succeeds where many texts fail, in simplifying the psychological processes involved in trauma without 'dumbing down'.

To sum up, I think that this book would be helpful for anyone wondering if they are suffering trauma, including when planning for a future pregnancy. The book treats those living with birth trauma respectfully, as people with agency: it describes a range of helpful techniques and routes for support (not just NHS) as well as plenty of friendly and accessible tips for reflection and planning. I would predict that this book - as well as being helpful in its own right - will nudge some readers to seek the further support and help they deserve.