

## **Women's perceptions of their doula support**

Jodi Lyn Koumouitzes-Douvia

*Objective:* This study presents the qualitative results of asking women about their perceptions of the doula support they received in the perinatal period. This study focuses on women in Western Washington who gave birth with the support of a certified doula at a hospital. This study aims to discover detailed experiences of doula support.

*Methods:* Ten in-depth interviews were held with women in their homes, on average, 9.8 weeks postpartum. A short demographic information sheet was completed by the women after the interview. Interview topics included: four major support categories (physical, emotional, informational and advocacy), helpful and unhelpful support, unique and exclusive support, essential hours of doula support, future use and recommendation of doulas, and overall birth experience. Transcripts were analyzed using content analysis.

*Results:* The interviews showed that overall women had positive experiences with their doula support. Doulas were able to assist women in meeting their birth expectations, and the women often stated doulas were exceptional at providing support. Most women received support from all four major support categories, would choose to have a doula again, and would recommend doulas to other women. Important themes that emerged included: doulas provided support for (1) husbands, (2) tailored approaches, (3) reassurance and encouragement, (4) the ability to fulfill the women's desire for the support of an experienced woman, and (5) praise for the doula. Findings in this study were similar to findings of other doula research.

*Conclusions:* The results show that the doulas were beneficial in many areas to their clients. They provided unique and exclusive support that was tailored to meet each woman's specific needs and the doulas afforded most women the birth experience and support they had expected. The results of this study have implications for both childbirth educators as well as public health and hospital organizations. For childbirth educators, a small module on doula support could be incorporated into their curriculum, if it is not included. Public health practitioners in the maternal and child health field, along with hospitals, should consider a hospital based doula program in their community as another valuable resource to pregnant women.

*Thesis Committee:*

Michelle Bell, PhD, MSW (Chair)

Catherine Carr, CNM, DrPH