

A GROUNDED THEORY MODEL OF  
EFFECTIVE LABOR SUPPORT

BY DOULAS

By

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A THEORY OF EFFECTIVE LABOR SUPPORT  
BY DOULAS

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**Purpose:** This study explored and defined the different informational support and advocacy functions of doula care; compared independent practice and hospital-based doulas; and examined the relationships between fathers and doulas.

**Participants:** Participants included 28 independent practice (IP) doulas; 8 hospital-based doulas; 10 mothers who had received care from IP doulas; and 16 mothers and 12 fathers who had received care from HB doulas. IP doulas were from ten different states and two Canadian provinces, while IP doula mothers were from three different states in the Midwestern United States; two HB doulas were from the Midwest, while the remaining HB doulas and HB doula parents were located in South Carolina, United States.

**Methods:** Grounded theory methodology was utilized in collecting and analyzing interviews. Use of all four types of informants offered a clearer picture of the roles and relationship processes utilized by both the providers and recipients of doula labor support.

**Findings:** Informational support was found to be integral to both HB doula and IP doula care. Advocacy was found to be a significant part of the doula support paradigm for IP doulas but not necessarily for HB doulas. Informational support and advocacy appeared to utilize similar communication processes. However, the purpose behind each strategy seemed to differ, which shifted the meaning of the communication processes. The doula's philosophy of personal empowerment of the mother was seen as guiding

advocacy support. When compared to IP doulas, HB doulas gave the impression of developing additional caretaking skills that framed a two-stage model of HB doula effective labor support. Indications were found for three main roles for fathers during labor, and four different levels of engagement with labor support. A model of effective labor support of fathers by doulas emerged. Mothers and fathers expressed satisfaction with all levels of paternal involvement and with doula care. Analysis revealed support for proposing the existence of a doula's internalized model of caregiving and utilization of female 'tend and befriend' stress relieving strategies.

Conclusions: Advocacy and informational support strategies were dependent on the individual mother's needs and personal philosophy of her doula. Doula care has the potential to enhance paternal involvement with labor support and increase satisfaction levels of fathers and mothers with their birth experience. Doulas utilized a wide variety of social support skills that were uniquely applied according to their setting and perception of their professional role. Doula care may have the potential to reduce a father's stress level during the birth experience by employing a variety of techniques, thus improving the quality of his experience.