



# Doula Research

## **Doula support reduces cesarean and epidural rates**

### **A Randomized Controlled Trial of Continuous Labor Support for Middle-Class Couples: Effect on Cesarean Delivery Rates**

Susan K. McGrath, PhD, John H. Kennel, MD

Birth: Issues in Perinatal Care Volume 35, Issue 2, P 92-97, May 2008

*This research was supported in full by a grant awarded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Bethesda, Maryland, USA*

The continued presence of a doula during labor significantly reduces cesarean delivery rates and the need for epidural analgesia in middle- and upper-class US women accompanied by their male partner or another family member, researchers report. They suggest that maybe fathers should not be expected to fulfill the role of primary labor companion.

Susan McGrath and John Kennel from Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, USA, investigated the potential benefit during labor of an experienced doula to provide both emotional and instrumental support. A total of 420 women were randomly assigned to either have a doula present throughout labor in addition to their male partner or no such additional support.

Women who had the support of a doula had a significantly lower cesarean delivery rate than the control group, at 13.4 percent versus 25.0 percent. They were also less likely to need epidural analgesia, at 64.7 percent versus 76.0 percent, respectively.

Among women with induced labor, just 12.5 percent of women with a doula had a cesarean delivery, compared with 58.8 percent of those without a doula.

All women and their male partners who received the support of a doula rated their experience as positive.

"Continuous labor support by a doula is a risk-free obstetric technique that could benefit all laboring women and should be made available in all maternity units," the researchers conclude.