

## A Collective Response to “Doulas, a Growing Force in Maternity Culture, Are Organizing for More Recognition”

By: Members of the [NYC Doula Collective](#)

The NYC Doula Collective (NYCDC) is a community of 32 doulas who serve NYC and the surrounding areas. We provide labor and postpartum services to childbearing women, their partners and families. As professionals in this field we were disappointed by Tuesday’s *New York Times* article by Anemona Hartocollis entitled “[Doulas, a Growing Force in Maternity Culture, Are Organizing for More Recognition](#)” which failed to articulate the valuable information from Choices in Childbirth’s report “[Doula Care in New York City: Advancing the Goals of the Affordable Care Act](#)” as well as the evidence-based research that has shown that doula support improves outcomes for childbearing women. We were also disconcerted with Hartocollis’ two-dimensional depiction of the roles of both birth partners (often a family member or loved ones in attendance during labor) and doulas.

Doulas offer important informational, emotional and physical support continuously to laboring women and provide prenatal as well as postpartum services to women, filling a gap in maternity care. Numerous studies have also shown that obstetrical outcomes may improve when women receive continuous emotional and physical support during labor. According to a meta-analysis of 15 trials from North America, Europe, and Africa:[\[1\]](#)

‘Women cared for during labor by a birth doula, compared to those receiving usual care were:

- 26% less likely to give birth by cesarean section
- 41% less likely to give birth with a vacuum extractor or forceps
- 28% less likely to use any analgesia or anesthesia
- 33% less likely to be dissatisfied or negatively rate their birth experience’

While doctors and midwives provide essential medical care for the needs of their patients during pregnancy, birth and postpartum; a birth doula’s role is to provide important non-medical physical, emotional and informational support to her clients and their partners during childbirth. Most importantly, a doula’s continuous presence during labor and birth often fills a gap left open by medical practitioners who are, for the most part, unable to provide the kind of uninterrupted and continuous support provided by birth doulas. In fact, continuous support appears to have the greatest impact when the labor companion is neither on the hospital staff nor selected from the woman’s social network.[\[2\]](#)

Penny Simkin, in her essay the "Benefits of Continuous Support," also notes important psychological outcomes. She reports that women who had doula support had more positive outcomes 4 to 8 weeks later than those who did not have a doula. Positive outcomes included ‘enhanced breastfeeding; better maternal-infant interaction; less postpartum depression, anxiety, and low self esteem; greater maternal assessments of their baby when compared to the ‘standard baby’, and greater satisfaction with the birth experience.’[\[3\]](#)

According to [DONA International](#), “The most crucial role for the doula is providing continuous emotional reassurance and comfort ... [and] a doula’s goal is to help the woman have a safe and satisfying childbirth as the woman defines it.[\[4\]](#)” Doulas help women and their partners understand the risks and benefits of childbirth options and interventions. Doulas also work as advocates for their client’s birth wishes, as expressed in her birth plan.

Scientific evidence has proven the benefits of doula support for women and shown how a trained labor companion can help women experience better birth outcomes. According to Klaus, Kennell and Klaus in [The Doula Book](#), “Doula support enhances the well-being of mothers and babies, leads to fewer medical interventions in the process of labor and delivery, and saves money. The findings provide a strong argument for expansion of doula services.”<sup>[5]</sup>

As a collective, we provide both quality care for birthing women and a space for doulas to build a strong sense of doula community. We offer ongoing professional development, regular meetings for members, active mentoring, and a commitment to giving back to the community through educational workshops. Our collective strives to create a close knit community of doulas offering NYC families professional labor and postpartum services in a range of fee levels. Ms. Hartocollis’ article not only failed to represent the depth and breadth of organized doula communities across New York City and beyond, but her article proved to be a poor piece of journalism that misrepresented the science, information and evidence regarding the positive impacts that doula support has made for childbearing women and their families.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Hodnett E, Gates S, Hofmeyr G, Sakala C. *Continuous support for women during childbirth*. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2003. Issue 3, Art. No. CD003766. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD003766.

<sup>[2]</sup> Hodnett E, Gates S, Hofmeyr G, Sakala C. *Continuous support for women during childbirth*. The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2003. Issue 3, Art. No. CD003766. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD003766.

<sup>[3]</sup> Simkin, Penny. Benefits of a Continuous Doula. DONA Birth Doula Workshop Manual. 2006.

<sup>[4]</sup> DONA International’s Position Paper *The Birth Doula’s Contribution to Modern Maternity Care*

<sup>[5]</sup> Klaus, Kennell and Klaus. *The Doula Book: How a Trained Labor Companion Can Help You Have a Shorter, Easier, and Healthier Birth*. Cambridge, MA: Da Campo Press, 2002.