

Is Doula Care Being Evaluated in Clinical Research to Enhance its Utility and Utilization in Service of Low-income and BIPOC Women?

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Background

- Doula care is a promising approach to improving childbirth outcomes in BIPOC women.
- Doulas are nonmedical professionals who provide physical and emotional support during childbirth.
- A limited number of studies suggest that childbirth doulas may help increase positive health outcomes in childbirth (Campbell et al. 2006).
- However, little is known about what exactly contributes to these differences these potential differences of childbirth outcomes in the presence of a doula.
- Nevertheless, several hospitals have instituted volunteer doula programs to help improve the childbirth outcomes of low-income and BIPOC women.
- Additionally, a few states have funded doula programs to improve childbirth outcomes.
- For instance, Massachusetts has funded a doula program to reduce racial disparities in childbirth outcomes (Commonwealth of Massachusetts)
- Other government doula programs, like the Birth Outcomes Made Better (BOMB) Doula Program, focus on improving childbirth outcomes for women living in designated zip codes (Milwaukee Health Department).

Purpose

- To explore and describe the number and nature of ongoing clinical trials evaluating doula care utilizing large publicly available sources

Relevance

- Childbirth is an essential healthcare event that can leave a lasting influence on the health of both the mother and infant (Larkin et al. 2009).
- Research shows that a variety of external factors can influence the nature of a woman's childbirth experience and childbirth outcomes (Goodman et al. 2004; Simpson and Catling 2016).
- A growing number of studies confirm the prevalence of higher incidences of a variety of childbirth complications within the BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) community (Attanasio et al. 2021; Shorter et al. 2021).
- These complications include but are not limited to maternal mortality, premature delivery, caesarean sections, and low birth weight (Attanasio et al. 2021).
- The reasons for these poor outcomes are assumed to be multifactorial and therefore challenging to address. While a large body of media coverage appears to cover these racial inequities within maternal health, research proposing potential solutions to these racial and ethnic disparities are not highly prevalent.
- As such, further research is needed to better understand contributing factor and potential solutions to these issues of inequity within maternal-child healthcare.

Methods

- A search for ongoing clinical trials evaluating doula care was conducted on clinicaltrials.gov in October 2021. Additionally, National Institute of Health (NIH) funded grants were searched for doula care.

Results

Out of 392,468 research studies listed on clinicaltrials.gov only 7 studies that were currently active evaluating doula care were identified. (Search of: "doula" | Recruiting, Not yet recruiting, Active, not recruiting, Enrolling by invitation Studies - List Results - ClinicalTrials.gov). All these studies were restricted to USA.

Limitations

Leading institutions across the USA are conducting pioneering research on the potential utility of doula care. However, the studies are few in number and represent small sample sizes. This is potentially a function of limited funding availability. Therefore, we need an increase in funding for this important health care area. This would lead to more research to inform and improve the healthcare outcomes particularly in minority or BIPOC pregnant women

Table: Studies and Associated Characteristics

Study Title	Sponsor	Overarching Objective	Sample Size	PI
ICU Doulas Providing Psychological Support	Mayo Clinic	To evaluate doula delivered psychological support during critical illness	42	Lioudmila V Karnatovskaia
Reducing Racial Disparities in Severe Maternal Morbidity	Tufts University	Identify potential causes and solutions for racial disparities in maternal morbidity	800 participants	Ndidiamaka Amutah Onukagha, PhD
Expanding Knowledge About and Evaluating Services for Incarcerated Pregnant and Postpartum Women in Arkansas Today Not Tomorrow Pregnancy and Infant Support Program (TNT- PISP)	University of Arkansas	Assessing the benefits of an assortment of treatments, including doula care, for childbirth outcomes of incarcerated women.	500 participants	Melissa Zielinski, PhD
Alternative Lifestyle Interventions for Vulnerable Ethnic Groups	University of Wisconsin, Madison	Investigating the acceptability and feasibility of a unique style of prenatal care for black women that incorporates doula care along with other prenatal support services	40 participants	Jasmine Y Zapata
Psychological Support Based on Positive Suggestions (PSBPS) on Mental Health Morbidity and Cognitive Function	Vanderbilt University Medical Center	The efficacy of doula care along with a diabetes prevention program will be investigated in a population of obese and diabetic African American women	435 participants	Rolanda Lister
	Mayo Clinic	Researchers are attempting to investigate a psychotherapeutic approach that includes doula care on critical ill patients	240 participants	Lioudmila Karnatovskaia

Conclusion

Limited research in being conducted to inform the value of doula care and approaches to optimize its delivery. More research is needed in an effort to improve the care using this modality, particularly to help BIPC women.

Discussion

Leading institutions across the USA are conducting pioneering research on the potential utility of doula care. However, the studies are few in number and represent small sample sizes. This is potentially a function of limited funding availability. Therefore, we need an increase in funding for this important health care area. This would lead to more research to inform and improve the healthcare outcomes particularly in minority or BIPOC pregnant women

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