

Evidence-Based Intervention Related to: Perinatal Care

Title	<u>Doula Services Within a Healthy Start Program: Increasing Access for an Underserved Population</u>
Author	Thomas et al., 2017
Aim	The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s program, Healthy Start Brooklyn, developed the By My Side Birth Support Program (BMS) to address disparities in pregnancy outcomes for Black and high-poverty women.
Study Design	Prospective study
Population	Pregnant Black and high-poverty women
Sample Size	560 women, 489 infants
Intervention	<p>The <u>BMS Program</u> matched women with doulas to support women and their partners during the pregnancy and birth process. The doulas conducted three prenatal home visits and provided education on topics relating to childbirth and prenatal care. They also conducted screenings for social risk factors such as food insecurity and domestic violence, and offered resources and referrals as needed. The doulas were provided with additional training on case management and provided with resource guides for services in or near the neighborhoods served.</p> <p>The prenatal visits allowed time for the women to discuss and consider their birthing preferences and to develop a relationship with their doula. Post-partum visits were conducted within 2 days after birth, and additional visits occurred at 2 weeks, then 2- and 6-months post-partum. During the four postpartum visits, doulas supported breastfeeding, assessed client and infant risks, and provided counseling on topics such as safe-sleep practices.</p>
Results	Between 2010 and 2015, 489 infants were born to program clients; 84.7% of these births were attended by doulas. Of program participants surveyed, 95.9% said they would recommend the program or use it in a future pregnancy, and 94.3% said they were “well-matched” with their doula. Compared to births in the project area, BMS participants had significantly lower rates of pre-term birth and low birthweight, though rates of cesarean section were similar across both groups. Women in the program reported feeling strong support from their doulas, and that they would recommend the program to others.
Conclusion	This study suggests that doula services may be an important component of an effort to address birth inequities.