

Grace Peterson Nursing Research Colloquium

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Effects of a Doula Service for Low Income Women

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Effects of a Doula Service for Low-Income Women

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Background

While research shows that a doula service has many health benefits for both the mother and baby, many barriers to the use of the service remains unknown.

Purpose

The purpose of this integrative literature review is to explore the effects of a doula on maternal and newborn outcomes for low-income women. The results of the literature review would establish that doula community programs offer health benefits to low-income mothers and their newborns.

Methods

An integrative literature review was used and modeled by Garrard. It was conducted by using CINAHL, PubMed, and Nursing and Allied Health Database search engines.

Terms used in search: doula service, doula program, labor, birth rate, low-income women, birth outcomes, birth support, birth experience

Findings

The research database shows that having a doula for support during childbirth has profound health benefits which consists of low cesarean birth, decreased number of pre-term births, and overall low infant mortality. Studies have shown that low-income women who receive doula care can enjoy physical, emotional, and educational benefits. This includes many health benefits for the baby such as a low risk of child birth defects and pulmonary complications.

- ❖ **Physical Benefits:** Soothing massage through touch, creating a calm environment, assisting with food, ice chips and drinks, and assisting with walking to and from the bathroom
- ❖ **Emotional Benefits:** Encouraging the mother during birth, continuous presence and praise, offering reassurance, demonstrating a caring attitude and helping the mother work through fears and self-doubt
- ❖ **Educational Benefits:** Helping explain medical procedures as they occur, guiding the birthing mom and their partner through labor, initiating techniques during labor such as positioning, breathing, and relaxation
- ❖ **Implementation:** The limited availability of a doula service in the United States healthcare system needs to be addressed. There is a need for a hospital integrated doula system, as well as an expansion into low income communities where there is an increase in birthing risks. In order to achieve an increase and expansion in doula services, an understanding of the importance of a doula's services can be made public to communities with high risk births. Additionally, insurance companies can expand their coverage to include doula services and make it affordable.

Discussion

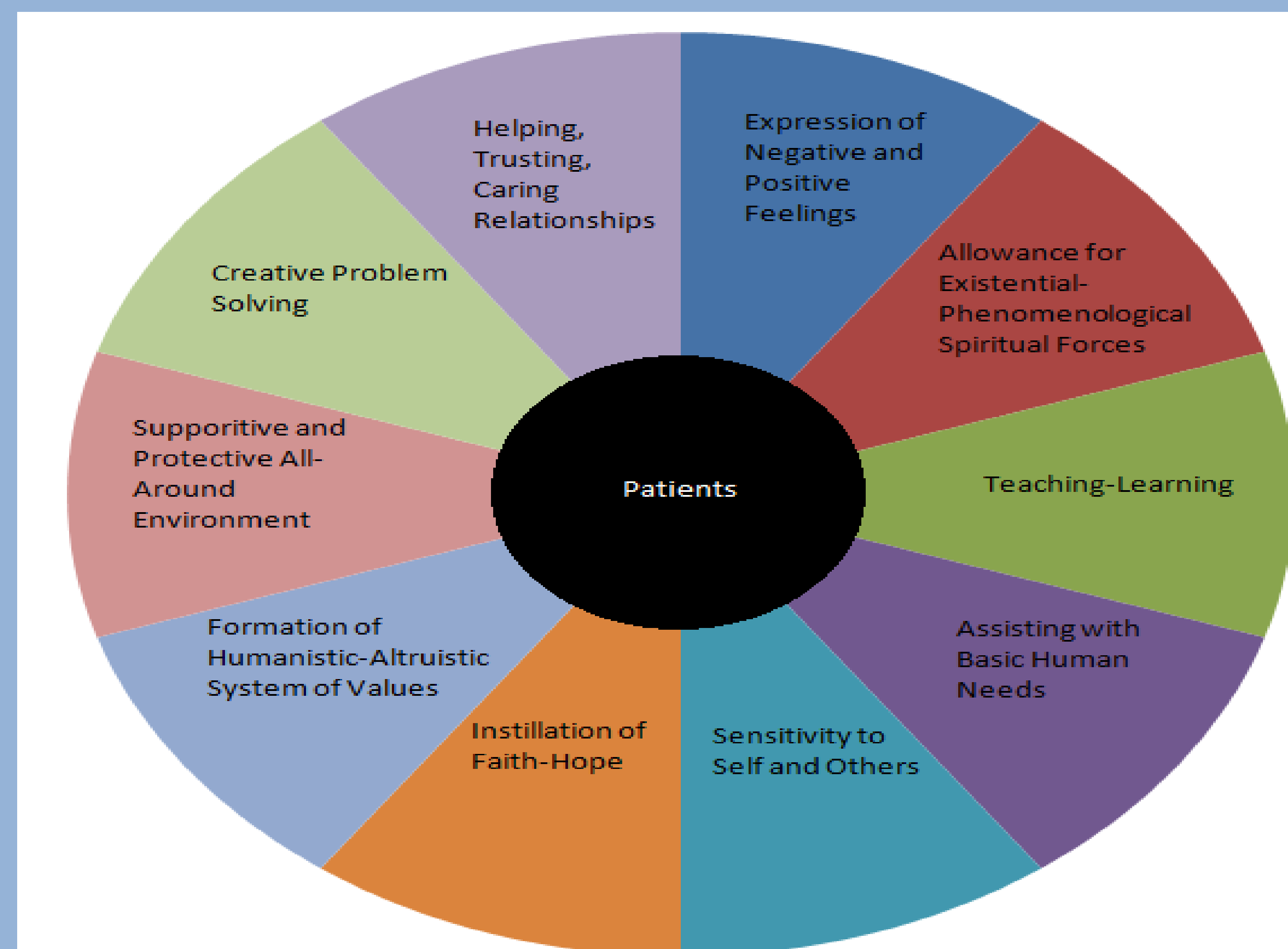
This integrative literature review found many benefits of using a doula during childbirth. The doula's precautionary actions emphasized the notion of positive health, which lead to the attainment and preservation of a satisfactory level of well-being. These benefits can be both psychological and physiologically helpful for the pregnant mother and their babies, especially those of low income where studies have shown the most necessity.

Nursing Implications

- ❖ Doula support during labor improves birth outcomes, including increased spontaneous vaginal birth, shorter labor duration, and decreased caesarean births.
- ❖ There are little known effects of continuous intrapartum support on a mother and baby's well-being during the postpartum period.
- ❖ Research across all types of settings including a focus on long-term outcomes for both mother and baby would be beneficial.
- ❖ Nurses can work to explore targeted and continuous doula support interventions for nulliparous women in attempt to minimize the risk of a first caesarean section.

Conclusion

The support given by a doula service offers many health benefits to both the mother and baby. Numerous studies have highlighted that low income mother's and their infant experienced a positive health outcome due to a doula service. Therefore, it can be concluded that hospitals need to integrate a doula service and insurance companies need to expand their coverage in order to allow these services to be affordable.



Conceptual framework of Watson's Theory of Caring.