

## Article

# A Synthesis of Mixed Evidences Regarding Role of Birth Companionship on Labor Progression and Maternal Health: A Narrative Review

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## A B S T R A C T

Childbirth can be a challenging experience, especially for first-time mothers. There are several methods available to enhance the maternal and neonatal outcome. Continuous support from a chosen companion during labor significantly improves both maternal and neonatal outcomes. The literature search used PubMed, CINAHL, Ovid Medline and Scopus. Determination of keyword-which is based on PICOT framework, as follows P: Pregnant women, I: birth companionship, C: any comparison, O: Maternal & fetal outcomes, T: any time. The Article published in English, full text available article and published article were criteria for inclusion in this study. We reviewed eight papers of continuous support from a chosen companion during labor significantly improves both maternal and neonatal outcomes. This support includes emotional reassurance, pain management, physical comfort, and newborn care assistance. Studies indicate that such support also positively impacts postpartum mental health. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Government of India recommend to have a birth companion for all women in labor. While there is still a gap in understanding how this support affects overall satisfaction studies show that non-medical support, such as from doulas, leads to better outcomes, including higher rates of vaginal births, reduced need for pain relief, and improved breastfeeding initiation. Despite challenges in implementation, continuous support is key to improving maternal and child health globally.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Childbirth or labour is a natural process through which a baby come to the new world, it is involving several stages as the baby moves downwards from the uterus through the birth canal and finally get delivered. There are several methods are available to enhance the maternal and neonatal outcome, one simple yet effective way to improve both maternal and neonatal health outcomes is having a birth companion. Over the past few years, research has demonstrated that continuous support from another person during labour has significant, positive effects and favourable outcome.(1) For many women it is found that labour is a difficult experience, particularly first-time mothers reported that, labour can be a frightening experience for them. Fear and anxiety can complicate the process of labour; it is often leading to various complications and difficulties. Majority of first-time mothers feeling anxious about childbirth and labour process, which can result in increased duration of labours, sudden change in birthing plan as unexpected caesarean sections, preterm births, and low birth weight babies. (2)

The support given to mother during the period of her labour is often referred as a “companion of choice at birth,” “continuous support during childbirth,” or “emotional support during birth.” A birth companion or a person who accompany her during this period provides an emotional reassurance, that helps the mother to understand the progress of labour, teaches her the techniques of breathing and to manage the contractions and pain, the companion offers physical comfort through massage. They also remind her to stay hydrated, assist here to change positions, advocate for her needs, and also help with newborn care. (3)Different research, including randomized controlled trials, has demonstrated that labour support not only benefits the women during childbirth but also has positive effects the postpartum period of the women.(4)This kind of support is crucial for postpartum mental health and manging the challenges of postpartum mental health. Every woman who becoming a mother deserves a positive and empowering experience of childbirth, and the quality care includes clear communication, respectful treatment, and emotional support that is tailored according to her individual preferences and needs.(3-5)

If we see the history, it found that, women have consistently supported to other women during her childbirth and labour. World Health Organization (WHO) and the Government of India (GOI) both advocate that every woman in labour to have a birth companion for the process, it is a cost-effective and evidence-based approach that benefits mothers and their babies both. This recommendation is a significant move towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. WHO encourages that women to be accompanied by someone of their trust during labour to be with them, a partner, friend, doula, nurse, or midwife or anyone of their choice. (6)However, there is still a gap between the research regarding that how having a chosen companion affects a woman's satisfaction with the experience, the labour process, and her overall outcomes. Many of the research studies suggest that support from family or friends has been observational rather than experimental. non-medical labour support, such as doulas, indicate that it can lead to a favourable outcome and it also include higher rate of vaginal delivery, reduction in need of pain relief, a shorter duration of labour, greater satisfaction, and also improved breastfeeding within the first 24 hours. (1-4) A Cochrane review from 2017 revealed that women who receive continuous a support during her period of labour is less likely to require medical interventions, have more spontaneous vaginal births, and also enjoy a better neonatal outcome. WHO too advocate continuous support for all the women during her labor, although implementing this process in many areas remains a challenge. (5-6)

## II. METHODS

The literature search strategy used were PubMed, CINAHL, Ovid Medline and Scopus. Determination of keyword is based on PICOT framework, which is as follows P: Pregnant women, I: birth companionship, C: any comparison, O: Maternal & fetal outcomes, T: any time. We used MeSH terms as the keywords. Search strategies were defined in the study selection process. Eight

articles have fulfilled the inclusion criteria in this study are original articles, search from the journal, article available in full text, and article published in english. Strategic ways for searching in journals were done by using the keywords Birth companionship, pregnant women, maternal outcome, neonatal outcome, maternal satisfaction etc (Figure 1)

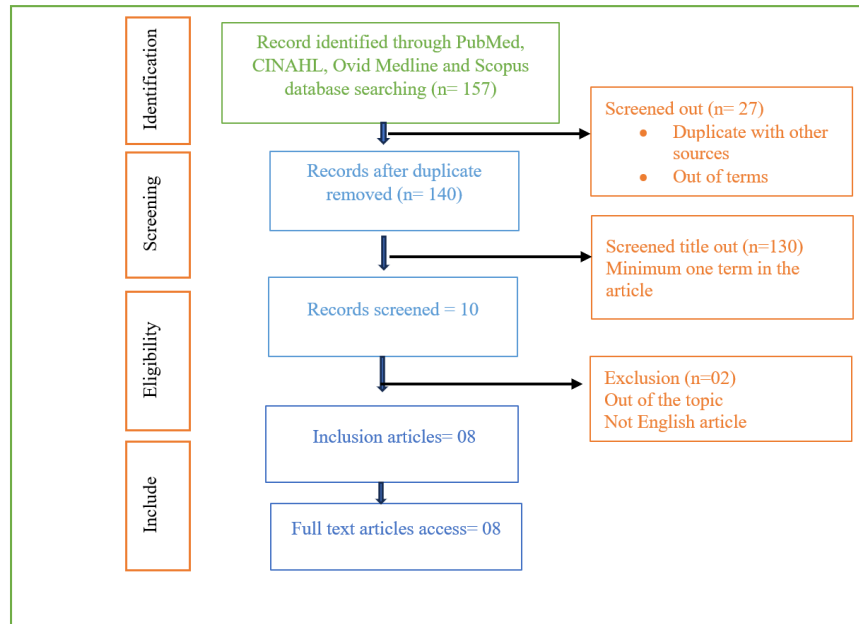


Figure 1. Selection Process of Article

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This review examined several studies investigating the impact of birth companion support during labour on maternal and neonatal outcomes. The consistent finding across most studies is the positive influence of birth companions on various aspects of the labour and delivery process. The key findings are categorised as (Figure 2):

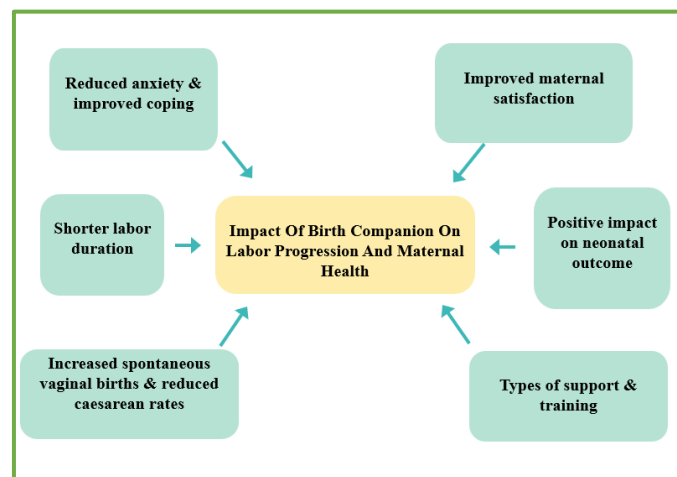


Figure 2. Key Finding

#### Reduced Anxiety and Improved Coping:

Several studies (Wanyenze et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2023; C et al., 2021) demonstrated that the presence of a birth companion, particularly when trained or oriented by midwives, significantly reduced maternal anxiety (5.1 vs. 5.7;  $p = 0.001$ ) and improved coping mechanisms during early active labour. (89.7%) but decreased as labour progressed. Midwife-guided companion support

improved coping, particularly at 4–7 cm dilation ( $p = 0.031$ )(7). This suggests that emotional support plays a crucial role in a woman's perception and experience of labour.

### **Shorter Labor Duration:**

Multiple studies such as Younes et al., 2020 reported a statistically significant reduction in the duration of labour, particularly the Stage I ( $p = 0.03$ ) and Stage II ( $p = 0.002$ ) of labour, in women who had birth companions(8). The findings were consistent with Seth et al (2023), found a significant reduction in labour duration in the birth companion group ( $9.96 \pm 1.62$  hrs vs.  $11.66 \pm 3.67$  hrs,  $p = 0.01$ ), as well as a lower rate of assisted and caesarean births (3% vs. 8.5%,  $p=0.04$ )(9). Sharma et al (2023) also showed a shorter first stage of labour in the experimental group ( $5.9 \pm 2.19$  hrs) compared to the control ( $7.03 \pm 3.2$  hrs) ( $p < 0.05$ )(14). Campbell et al. (2006) found that the doula-supported group had shorter total labour duration and greater cervical dilation at epidural analgesia administration(15). This could be attributed to the companion's encouragement, physical support (e.g., position changes), and stress reduction, all of which can contribute to more efficient uterine contractions.

### **Increased Spontaneous Vaginal Births and Reduced Caesarean Rates:**

Chaibekava et al. (2023) found a significantly higher rate of spontaneous vaginal births and lower caesarean delivery rates in the group receiving continuous support from trained maternity care assistants (who acted similarly to doulas)(10). While not all studies explicitly reported on caesarean rates, the trend across the reviewed literature suggests that birth companion support may contribute to fewer surgical interventions.

### **Improved Maternal Satisfaction:**

Younes et al., (2020) found that 86.7% of pregnant women in the birth companion group were satisfied with their labour experience, in comparison to 20% in the control group ( $p < 0.001$ )(8). Women with a birth companion experienced significantly lower instances of physical (0.5% vs. 13%) and verbal abuse (16.5% vs. 48.5%), fewer breaches of privacy, and lower pain scores (mean 4.97 vs. 6.52) as reported by Seth et al., 2023(9). Bruggemann et al. (2007) highlighted significantly higher levels of maternal satisfaction with the labour and delivery experience, with reduced incidence of meconium-stained amniotic fluid (RR 0.51)(13). When birth companions were present. This underscores the importance of emotional and psychological support in shaping a woman's overall perception of childbirth.

### **Positive Impact on Neonatal Outcomes:**

While not the primary focus of all studies, some (Wanyenze et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2023; Campbell et al., 2006; C et al., 2021) reported positive trends in neonatal outcomes, such as higher Apgar scores, in the presence of birth companions. This may be related to shorter labour durations and potentially fewer interventions(7),(15),(12).

### **Types of Support and Training:**

The studies varied in the type of support provided by birth companions and whether they received any formal training. Studies where companions received training or orientation (Wanyenze et al., 2023; Younes et al., 2020; Campbell et al., 2006; C et al., 2021; Bruggemann et al., 2007) often showed more pronounced positive effects, suggesting that structured guidance for companions can optimize their support role (7), (13) .

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, supporting women to have birth companions during labour is a simple yet powerful intervention that can significantly improve the childbirth experience and potentially lead to better maternal and neonatal outcomes. The inclusion of trained birth companions in maternity

care policies should be prioritized to improve labour outcomes and promote respectful maternity care worldwide.

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