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Papers and Essays

An Interview with the Filmmaker (Interviewer: Dr. Rieko Kishi Fukuzawa)

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Japanese



Upon introducing the documentary film "DOULA!", Dr. Rieko Kishi Fukuzawa, assistant professor at the Graduate School of Medicine, The University of Tokyo, interviewed the director, Toni Harman to discuss about the background and roles of doulas in the UK.

Toni Harman(right)

Q1. What motivated you to make the film "DOULA!" ?

Harman: I made a film called REAL BIRTH STORIES featuring five couples' journey through pregnancy, birth and the first few weeks of parenthood. At the premiere, a doula came up to me and said you should make a film about doulas. I asked "what's a doula?" She started telling me about the work of doulas and it sounded amazing. I started researching doulas and met a number of local doulas. I was interested but not convinced I wanted to make a film specifically about doulas. Then a couple of weeks later, a doula asked if I would like to film a birth (the first birth featured in "DOULA!"). So I went along and WOW. My eyes were opened to the amazing difference having a doula can make to a woman's birth experience and at that moment, I was hooked. I knew this could make a great film!

Q2. What are the social backgrounds that required doulas in the UK?

Harman: [For birth doulas]: The situation regarding the need for birth doulas in the UK is that all low-risk women will be attended by a midwife when they go into labour. Some mothers may choose to birth at home attended by a midwife sent out by the hospital, or they may go to give birth in hospital or a birth centre, but the labouring woman will probably not have met her midwife before. In the UK, there tends to be no continuity of care from pregnancy all the way through to labour, birth and post-partum support. So the presence of a doula during pregnancy, labour, birth and post-partum provides that missing continuity of care and because there tends to be a special bond between the parents and the doula, the doula also provides much-needed emotional as well as practical support. At home, at a birth centre or in hospital, the labouring woman is attended by the "next available midwife" - this means in hospital or at a busy birth centre, the midwife might be overseeing a number of labouring women simultaneously, which means that for much of the time in hospital or birth centre, the labouring woman will be left alone, or just with their partner. The midwife will keep checking the labouring woman from time to time, but will not be with her continuously. Labour and birth is obviously a very anxious time for many labouring women and their partners, so a doula's presence during this time can be very reassuring.

[For postpartum doulas]: In the UK, a community midwife visits the mother every few days at home after the birth for the first month, then the mother can access a health visitor (usually at a clinic). But other than that, the mother is on her own - which means it can be a very lonely and frightening time as a brand new parent. That is why postpartum doulas are so needed, they fill a "gap" that no-one else can, especially if partners have gone back to work after the minimum 2 weeks paternity leave and many new parents live far away from their own larger families.

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Q3. Do most women in the UK know what doula support is? How do the doulas meet the client women?

Harman: Most women in the UK don't know what a doula is. Expectant women tend to learn about doulas because either they know someone who is a doula, or they have a friend who has been supported by a doula. Sometimes there are articles in local and national newspapers about doulas which raises awareness, but generally expectant women find doulas through word-of-mouth from friends of friends, or because they search through a doula organisation website or do a google search for local doulas.

Q4. About what percentage of childbirth in UK are attended by doulas?

Harman: In the UK, there's only a couple of thousand working doulas, so I would estimate the percentage of women supported by doulas is less than 1-2%.

Q5. About how much do the client women pay to a birth doula and/or postpartum doula? (Or about how much do the doulas receive? How much is the birth doula service fee per birth? And how much postpartum doula service fee is charged per hour?) Any financial support from the government or other organizations? Is the income from doula work sufficient for the doulas to make a living? (Usually not, according to literature) If not, what motivates the doulas to continue to be/do doulas?

Harman: Most doulas I have met are not motivated by money. They are doulas because they genuinely and passionately care about supporting women during pregnancy, birth and the postpartum period. Prices vary in the UK depending on region, but a trained birth doula charges between £500 and £800. Trainee doulas do not tend to charge for their services, Postpartum doulas tend to charge per hour - I think it's about £20/£25 per hour. There's no financial support from Governments or other organisations but for women who can't afford to have a doula, there are hardship funds that cover some of the fees doulas charge. To make a living, many doulas supplement their income from being a doula by having another birth-related job, for example, teaching antenatal classes or providing placenta-encapsulation services. The doulas I know who work full-time as doulas usually have 2/3 clients a month which provides a living wage. Like I say, doulas continue to be doulas not for the money, but for the love of doula-ing!

Q6. If I understand correctly, the doula service in the film is a private type for relatively affluent families. Are there any doula programs that are for socially disadvantaged populations (for example, teens, immigrants, low income, etc.) in the UK? (As the disparity issue is growing in Japan.)

Harman: In the DOULA! film, the parents featured paid for their doulas themselves, so they are relatively affluent. Saying that, there are hardship funds run by doula organisations like Doula UK that will provide financial assistance to parents who cannot afford a doula. Some local councils are also providing doulas to socially disadvantaged families. Where I live in Sussex, Sally a doula who was featured in the DOULA! film is regularly hired by the local council (who pay her fees) to help expectant teenagers or lone parents. Also, there are trial schemes in key places around the UK (I know of one in Yorkshire) where doulas are being paid by NHS hospital trusts, so if these trials go well, perhaps they will be trialled in other places too. In this way, doulas could provide the essential practical and emotional support to the many not just the few!

Q7. In the UK, what are the major roles for postpartum doulas? In the film, breastfeeding support looked very important. Does Sally has any specialized certification etc. such as a lactation consultant?

Harman: Postpartum doula covers supporting the mother in all areas, so practical things like cooking, light cleaning, looking after other children, laundry etc so that the mother can rest or spend time with her new baby. And strong emotional support (a shoulder to cry on, listening, encouraging etc), and also most doulas have at least some breastfeeding consultation experience and many are qualified as lactation consultants. It just depends on the needs of the mother.

Q8. What motivated the doulas in the film to become doulas, if you know any? Did they go through certificated training? What is the role of doula certification do you or the doulas think?

Harman: Doulas in the UK go through certification training (with Doula UK and other doula organisations). Depending on the organisation, the training lasts from a few days to a few weeks. There is even a year-long training course that has just started. Then after training, most trainee doulas have a doula mentor to support them for the first few months (or even years). The doulas that I have met are fascinated with birth. Mostly they are mothers themselves and I think they really understand how difficult and sometimes scary it can be for

many expectant mothers and they really want to help and support other mothers during this life-changing time. For many doulas, at least in my experience, being a doula is a "calling" - it is something they love doing and almost need to do!

Do you mean that doulas in the UK are required to go through certification training, in order to be regarded as a doula? Who decides so officially? Or do you mean that, without obligation, or responding to clients' preference, most doulas go through it willingly?

Harman: Not contractual. Anyone can call themselves a doula unofficially, but most willingly have certification training and are members of organisations in order to give them (and parents support).

The "calling" can or usually has a religious meaning. In what sense do you mean?

Harman: By calling, I mean in the spiritual rather than in the religious sense. It's something they feel like they have to do!

Q9. Any recommended information source about doulas in UK (or other countries)?

Harman: There are a few doula organisations in the UK, for example, Doula UK, Nurturing Birth, Developing Doulas etc. In the US, the two main doula organisations are DONA International and CAPP, but there's also smaller doula organisations like To Labor. There's Doula websites like doulamatch.com which match doulas to expectant women.

Q10. Finally, in your opinion, what is the most important attribute/condition/factor for a doula to be a good one?

Harman: In my very humble opinion, the most important thing for a doula to have is compassion. To really care for every expectant mother and father. To empathise with their situation and respond to their individual needs. Every parent is different. Every birth is different. Every postpartum period is different. So in my view, it is essential for a doula to be flexible enough to provide compassion in every situation, with every person - that way they can provide unique individualised care to ensure that the parents have the best possible care throughout their birth and the crucial first few weeks of life with a brand new baby.

Based on this interview, a Japanese article titled "Learning from a British film 'DOULA!'" was published on the Child Research Net website.

<http://www.blog.crn.or.jp/lab/03/28.html>