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Evaluating a Hospital-Based Volunteer Doula Program in Vermont

Kiersten A. Wulff

The University of Vermont

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Introduction

Continuous labor support is a component of high quality maternal healthcare¹⁻⁴. Birth doulas provide support which benefits maternal outcomes, can lower cost of care, and enhances birth experience^{5,6}. Only 6% of Americans birth with doulas, and the cost of doula services presents a barrier⁷. As such, volunteer and hospital-based doula programs have become increasingly prevalent in the United States⁸.

Local problem: A new volunteer doula program at an academic medical center required methods to measure quality and evaluate progress during a six month pilot period.

Main Objective

This project evaluates a new hospital-based volunteer doula program as an innovation to reduce barriers to continuous labor support.

Interventions

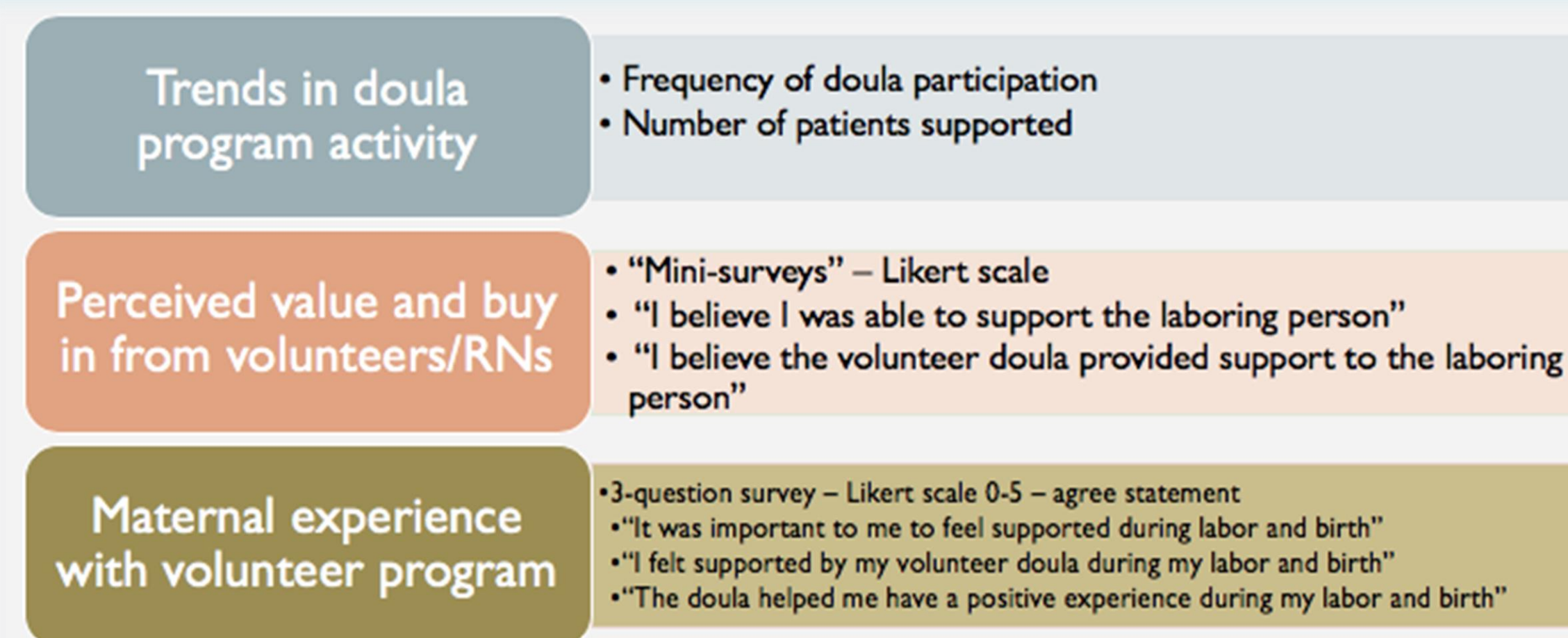
- A list of measurable objectives for the volunteer doula program was created.
- Volunteer doula participation on the unit was measured using sign-in sheets.
- RNs and volunteers completed surveys regarding perceived value of the program.
- Patients who birthed with volunteer doulas were given surveys regarding volunteer impact on birth experience.
- Results were periodically analyzed and shared with stakeholders.

Methods

Setting: Academic medical center serving diverse community of 160,000 with 2226 births in 2019.

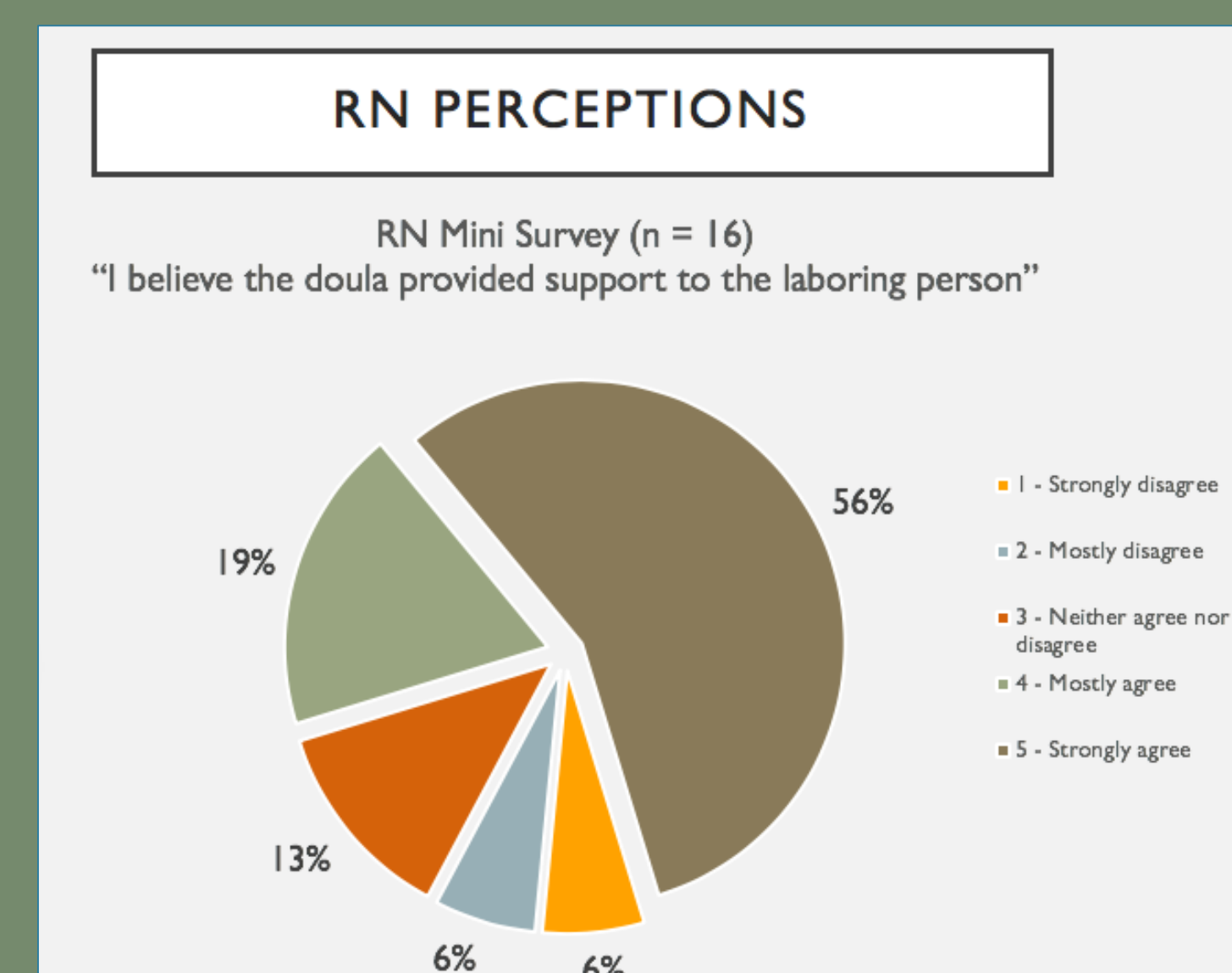
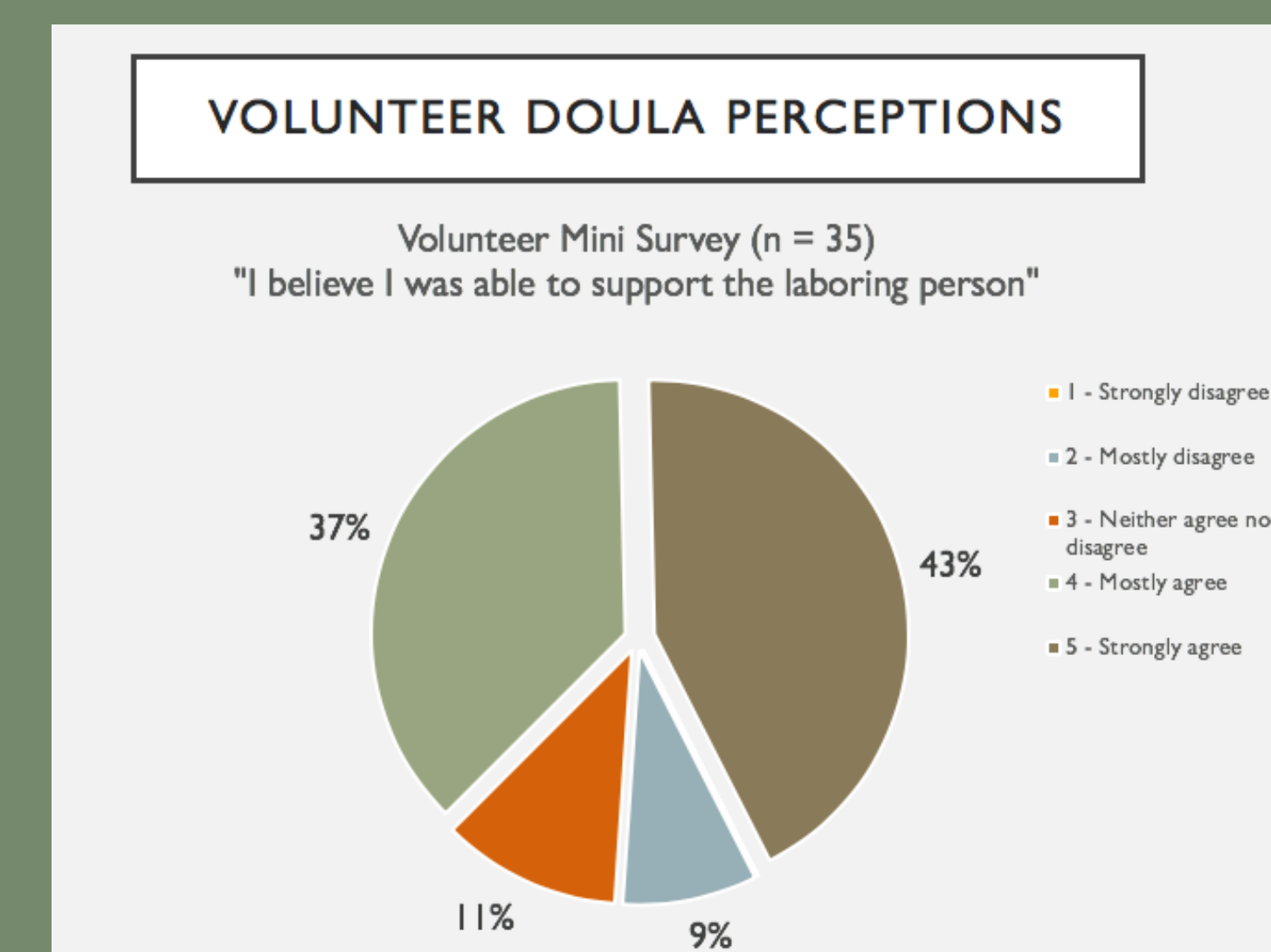
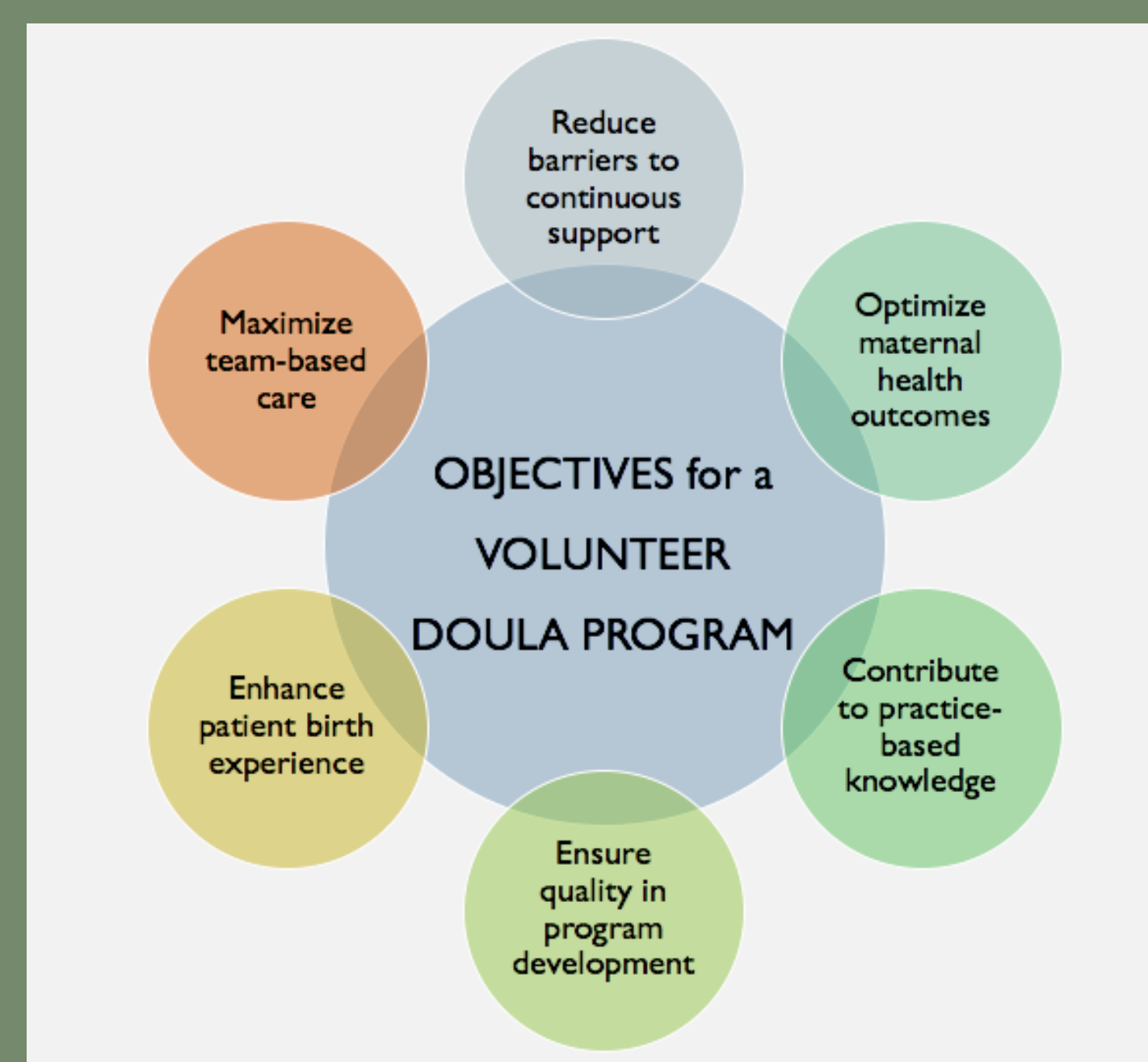
Participants: 40 volunteer doulas, L&D RNs, 92 birthing patients.

Study of the intervention: A concurrent mixed-methods approach assessed results using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis.

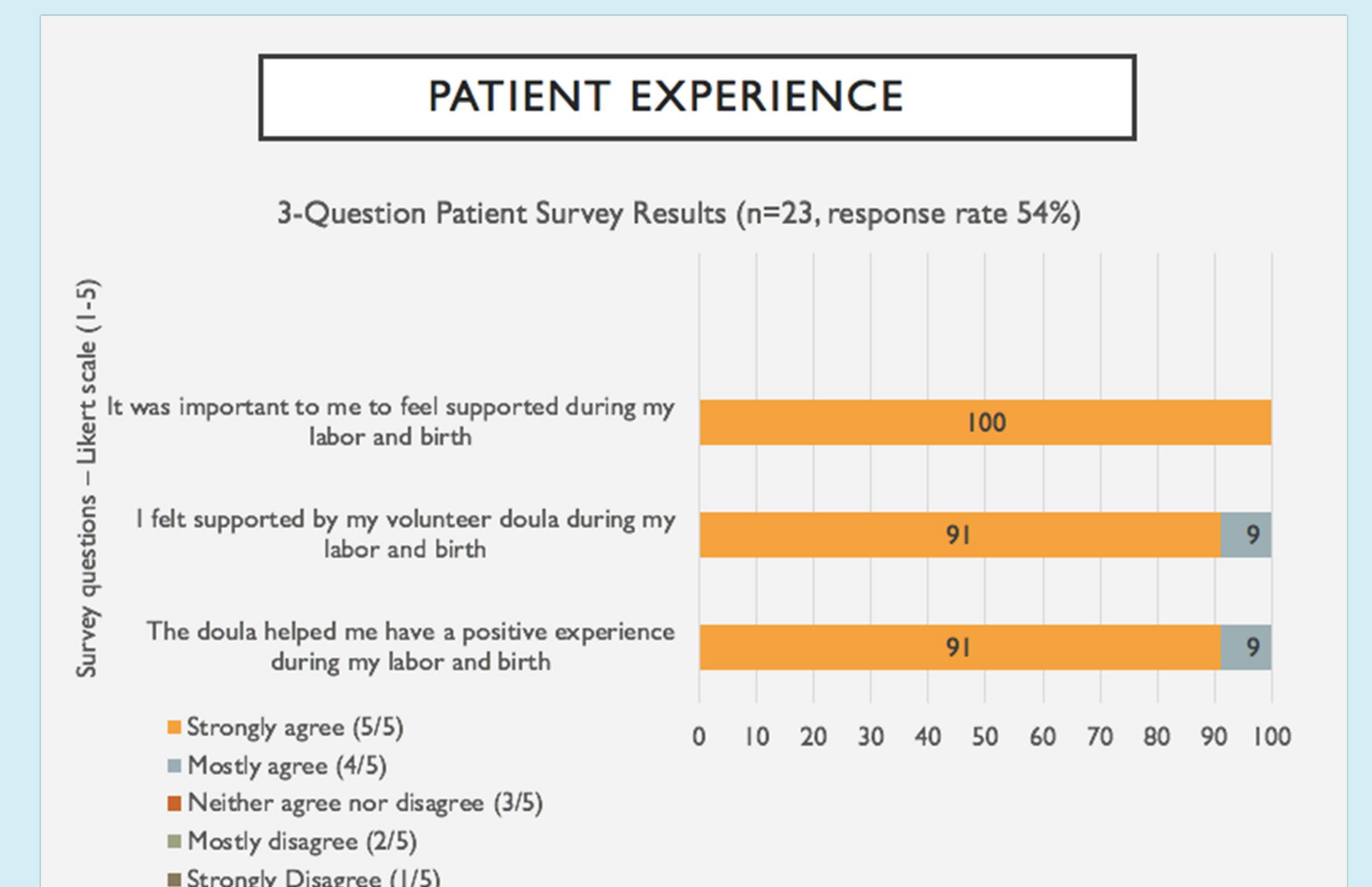


Results

- *Program stats:* Volunteer doulas (VD) (n=74) provided support for 92 patients within 6 months (approximately 8.2% of total births during the period).
- *RNs/Volunteers:* Thirty-five surveys were received from VDs, and 18 from RNs. For RNs and VDs, average rating of doula support given to the patient was 4/5 (1 least – 5 most).
- *Patients:* Surveys were given to 42 patients who received volunteer doula support, and 23 responses received (54% response rate).
- All patient respondents (n=23) rated feeling supported during labor as "most important" (5/5).



What is a doula?
A doula is a non-clinical professional who provides physical, emotional, and informational support throughout the peripartum. The role of the doula is to help the birthing person have the best possible experience.



Conclusion

The volunteer program increased access to continuous labor support. Patient response suggests the program contributes to positive experiences. Monitoring perspectives of nurses and volunteers during the pilot stage explores buy-in and guides improvements. Given these initial findings, the impact of this program on labor and delivery care was positive.