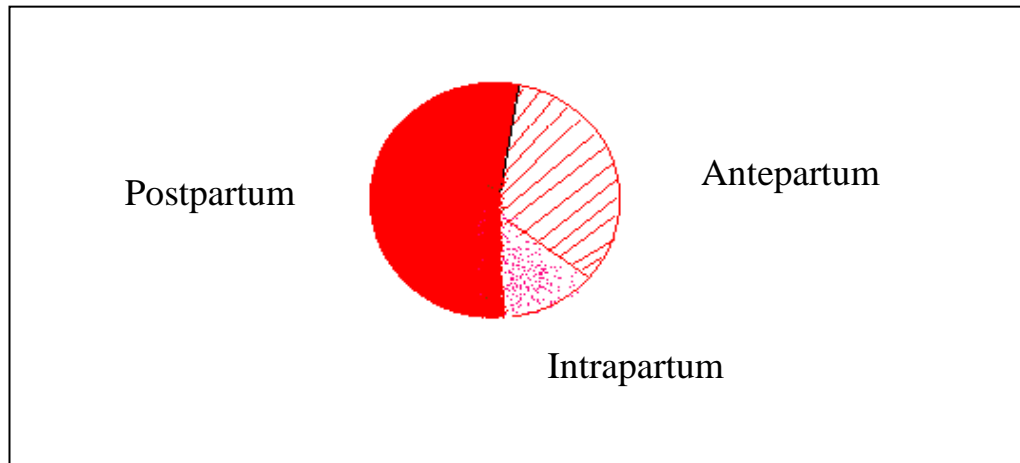


## INTRODUCTION

The postpartum period covers a critical transitional time for a woman, her newborn and her family. In both developing and developed countries women's needs during this period and those of their newborns have been all too often eclipsed by the attention given to pregnancy and birth. Such an eclipse ignores the fact that the majority of maternal deaths and disabilities occur during the postpartum period (Fig. 1) and that early neonatal mortality remains high. Driven frequently by non-existent care offered to women and their newborns makes little contribution to their well-being and provides a frail basis for their future health. Poor quality reduces opportunities for health promotion and for the early detection and adequate management of problems and disease (*W.H.O, 1998*).

***Fig.1 Time of maternal deaths in developing countries***



The first hour postpartum is an extremely dangerous one for haemorrhage. It is also the optimum period when breast-feeding should first begin. The main goals of national health are to reduce maternal mortality rate to no more than 3.3/100.000 live births from a base line of 7.1/100.000; increase to at least 75% the proportion of mothers who breast-feed their babies in the early postpartum period from a base line of 64%

and decrease the proportion of births occurring within 24 months of previous birth to 6% from a base line of 11%. Nurses can be instrumental in helping the nation to achieve these goals by maintaining close observation in the immediate postpartal period to detect maternal hemorrhage and encouraging and supporting women who breast-feed (*Pilliteri, 2003*).

The goal of nursing care in the immediate post partum period is to assist women and their partners during their initial transition to parenting. The approach to the care of women after birth has changed from one modeled on sick care to one that is wellness oriented. It focuses on the woman's physiologic recovery, her psychologic well-being, and her ability to care for herself and her new baby. (*Wong et al., 2002*).

Quality of care is determined by the knowledge and skills of the nurse's assessment. In order to deliver high quality care, the nurse must be able to perform effectively and must be competent in the application of theory and skills in the clinical situation (*Hogston, 1995*). This should be guided by clearly defined standards that describe a common or acceptable level of client's care or performance, thus the standards of care become the basis for determining the level of care delivered and for quality improvement within the organization (*Ellis & Hartly, 2000*).

The quality of health care consists of the proper performance (according to standards) of intervention that are known to be safe, affordable to the society in question, and have the ability to produce an impact on mortality, morbidity, disability and malnutrition (*Roemer et al., 1998*). One of the most common factors that contribute to poor quality care is substandard care which is often the result of poor staff supervision, under

payment, over working and lack of adequate training or refresher courses to up grade their skills (*Graham, 1997*).

In fact, postpartum care is a vital part of the child rearing process but, unfortunately, it has been given a low priority in many maternity units. It is important however, to examine nurse's practice, criticize the care given and make systematic efforts to improve the quality of care (*Alexander et al. , 1997*).

### ***Justification of the study:***

The immediate postpartum period is neglected in most hospitals in Egypt. Most of the problems and complications during this period may expose the mother and newborn to significant morbidity and mortality. As quality is regarded as fundamentally important to nursing practice, professional standards of nursing care should be developed and applied in the future to ensure effective, safe care, assessment of nursing performance is the preliminary step in order to attain this goal. This study will be conducted in order to assess the quality of nursing performance and criticize the way postpartum care is delivered and make recommendations to improve the quality of care.