

RISK PERCEPTION AND RISK COMMUNICATION IN RELATION TO NON-IONIZING RADIATION

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Background and research objectives

The objective of these studies was to explore perceptions of risk related to mobile phone masts and mobile phone use in the Danish population.

Methods

The study comprised qualitative interviews of 20 families and two surveys of the general population.

Results

The interviews revealed that mobile phones are an important and integral part of family life, not least for children. People are aware of potential risks, but they accept the risk, mainly because it is the only way to cope with a phenomenon you cannot get away from and because they have to trust the experts. The results of the first survey indicate that a minority (15%) of the population is concerned about mobile phone radiation while a majority (80%) is concerned about pollution. A small proportion is very concerned, and such concern is associated with fear of new technologies in general. The second survey indicates that about half of the population accepts to have mobile phone base stations in the neighbourhood, and the proportion is greater among men than women. The study further indicates that people consider information about mobile phone risk more useful and trustworthy if it is presented in terms of brief pieces of advice rather than lengthy technical information. Finally, to the extent people think about mobile phone risks, they are more concerned about ill-documented radiation harm than well-documented risks of driving a car while speaking on a mobile phone.