

## **Mobile Phones and the Preservation of Family Well-being in Egypt**

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In the past 10 years the number of mobile phone subscribers in Egypt has climbed to 14 million, representing 20 percent of the country's population. Research on mobile phones in the public health context has traditionally focused on the hazards of using the technology while driving and the risk perceptions of radiation from handsets and cell towers. The contribution of mobile phones within the general population towards enhancing health and health service delivery is generally taken for granted. This paper describes findings from a qualitative study of the direct and indirect health-related benefits of mobile phones in Minia Governorate, Egypt. The most prominent role that mobile phones play within Egyptian families is that of a preserver of physical and mental well-being. Through enhanced family communication, family members report experiencing an improved sense of safety and security at a time of social change during which there is a shift from extended families to nuclear families and increased migration to pursue employment and educational opportunities.

Among family members mobile phone uses associated with work and social interaction contribute to economic and psychological well-being, and a by-product of possessing the technology is the increased capacity to mobilize support for emergency health care in order to maintain physical well-being. Before mobile phones and associated increases in fixed-line telephones, most Egyptians besides those residing in major cities had to go outside of the home to make phone calls. Their options included not making phone calls (and '*leaving things to God*'), telegrams, local telephone stations known as *centrales* mostly located in urban and peri-urban communities, pay phone booths, and private land-lines owned by wealthier neighbors willing to share their fixed-line in emergency situations. For husbands, wives, children, aging parents, and siblings mobile phones enable direct contact to mobilize collective responses to problems as they occur to attain reassurance particularly in mitigating the effects of motor vehicle accidents, caring for sick children and aging parents, and maintaining harmony in marital and pre-marital relations.