

## Perception of Risks of the Telecommunication Towers in Malaysia: A Qualitative Inquiry

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**Abstract :** In 2011, the Malaysian Government has initiated a nationwide project called 1BestariNet which will adopt the using of technology in teaching and learning, resulting in the construction of telecommunication towers inside the public schools' premise. Using qualitative approach, this study investigated public perception of risks associated with the project, particularly the telecommunication towers. Data collection involved observation and in-depth interviews with 22 individuals consist of a segment of public that was anxious about the risks of radio frequency electromagnetic field (RFEMF) which include two employees of telecommunication companies (telcos) and five employees of Government agencies. Observation of the location of the towers at 10 public schools, a public forum, and media reports provide valuable information in our analysis. The study finds that the main concern is related to the health risks. This study also shows that it is not easy for the Government to manage public perception mainly because it involves public trust. We find that risk perception is related with public trust, as well as the perceived benefits and level of knowledge. Efficient communication and continuous engagement with the local communities help to build and maintain public trust, reduce public fear and anxiety, hence mitigating the risk perception among the public.

**Keywords :** risk perception, risk communication, trust, telecommunication tower, radio frequency electromagnetic field (RFEMF)

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