

# **INCREASING THE COVERAGE OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ISSUES IN THE EGYPTIAN PRESS**

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## SUMMARY

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Dissemination is usually most successful when target groups are identified, their information needs are known, and the best channels to reach them are tested. The mass media can play a significant role in disseminating research findings and communicating important implications, thus influencing public debate and creating awareness of neglected issues. However, print media professionals are often insufficiently oriented about such problems as illiteracy, women's rights, and harmful practices and traditions. This represents a substantial missed opportunity, as several studies in Egypt have shown that literate women have the habit of reading newspapers and magazines to obtain information and to receive advice and guidance on reproductive health issues.

This project was based on the previous experiments of the FRONTIERS and POLICY projects to widen media coverage of critical reproductive health issues and to communicate related research findings in a more systematic manner. The design of this intervention was based on three key elements. First, an assessment of the coverage of reproductive health issues in the Egyptian press was undertaken for 10 months, from May 1999 to March 2000. A sample of Arabic-language newspapers and magazines from different publishing houses in Egypt was selected, representing national and party papers and magazines. Daily screening of the press was conducted in which all reproductive health-related articles were clipped and logged using a specially developed coding sheet. Information gathered on each clipped article included date of publication, author's name, type of publication (newspaper or magazines), size of the article, and other relevant details. Four project staff members (two from the POLICY project and two from FRONTIERS) revised the coding of the clipped articles before the data entry.

Second, a network was formed of about 20 journalists from newspapers and magazines of different publishing houses. Journalists participating in the network included senior editors, editors of health and women's pages in daily and weekly newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines with high circulation, and several junior reporters who cover health and women's news.

Third, four roundtable discussions were organized on critical reproductive health issues: marriage patterns in Egypt, youth and reproductive health, women and menopause, and contraceptive technology. The criteria used to guide the selection of some topics were based on their importance to reproductive health and family planning program in Egypt; an absence of prior coverage in the Egyptian press, and a perceived need for the public to learn about such issues. Most of the topics chosen were inadequately covered in the Egyptian press or were not covered effectively, using the most recent research findings. A packet of resource materials was compiled for journalists participating in the four roundtable discussions, including fact sheets, experts' presentations, parts of translated literature, a list of names and contact information of resource persons, and an evaluation form.

The results of the evaluation sheets from the roundtable discussions showed a general increase in the journalists' knowledge about reproductive health issues, especially for important data, such as prevalence of early marriage in Egypt, age at first pregnancy, the recommended age for routine gynecological checkups, and prevalence of female genital cutting (FGC) among girls, adolescents and women. Journalists attending the roundtable meetings rated the sessions as very useful. The majority said that they would use the data provided in their reports to improve the content of their stories.

Members of the journalists' core group had regular contacts with the project team throughout the project. Project staff received an average of five calls every month. These calls were often made to request information related to a story that the journalist was writing, to seek information about the next roundtable meeting, or to inform the project team about a story the journalist had recently published on a relevant reproductive health issue. The frequent contacts were a positive indicator of the journalists' general interest in the subject matter, their commitment to the project activities, and their perception of the project as a credible source of accurate and scientific information.

The key output indicator of this intervention is the number of articles published on the substantive issues discussed during the roundtable discussion. Overall, some 560 articles on reproductive health were published during the period of May 1999 to March 2000: 433 in newspapers and 127 in magazines.

Over 25 percent of reproductive health articles published in newspapers took up a quarter of a page, a fairly large space for newspaper coverage. Overall, about 30 percent of articles on reproductive health cited an expert in the field as the source of information. Private-sector organizations received less press coverage than government agencies.

One in five (22%) of the 433 newspaper articles on reproductive health reported on one of the roundtable discussion topics (marriage patterns, menopause, youth and reproductive health, and contraceptive technology). Among the articles related to the roundtable discussion, 47 percent were feature articles and 40 percent were news articles. The most frequently cited source of information was an expert in the field (32%).

One in three (35%) of the reproductive health articles in magazines covered topics brought up in the roundtable discussions. The most widely covered reproductive health topics were: safe motherhood (33%); reproductive tract and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS (17%); sexual health (13%); and youth and reproductive health (10%). The least covered topics were population policies, legal issues in reproductive health, family planning, and quality of reproductive health and family planning services. Around 48 percent of all reproductive health articles in magazines were more than one page in size.

Of the 127 reproductive health articles published in magazines, 57 percent were feature articles while 36 percent were news. In contrast to newspapers, there were few letters to the editor, or columns, although the nature of magazines provides opportunity and space for such formats, which permit greater space for expression of readers' views. This

implies that the public is more actively engaged in feedback to newspaper reports than to magazines.

Generally, reproductive health issues and roundtable discussions topics were covered more thoroughly in magazines than in newspapers. Safe motherhood and early marriage, youth and reproductive health, and menopause were widely reported in magazines. Stories on contraceptive technology and family planning were more likely to be reported in newspapers (though the amount of coverage was minimal) as brief news items.

When assessing the content of newspaper and magazine articles published by network members, it was noted that many of them heavily quoted the fact sheets and press releases included in the press files for each roundtable discussion. Thirty-eight percent of magazine articles used operations research findings and press file information, while 32 percent of newspaper articles referred to this information. Analysis of the press clippings shows excessive dependence on a single source of information, usually an expert in the field.

The project's final media event was an opportunity to share the results of the intervention and to honor the media group and the best reporters, newspaper and magazine. Media coverage of this event was extensive.

Although this intervention was limited to print media, various recommendations are suggested to strengthen future media relations initiatives. These include:

1. Integrate this media model in planning for future dissemination and communication activities. This approach, which proved to be effective in maximizing the reach of research findings to multiple audiences via popular channels, would be useful as a strategy to influence public debate and policy.
2. Enlarge the circle of the press network to include journalists from radio and television.
3. Involve a larger number of research institutes and NGOs to utilize their research findings and maximize the reach of their field experience.
4. Disseminate the findings of this experience to other groups who are likely to benefit. These groups include the Ministry of Health and Population, the State Information Service, USAID-funded organizations, and CAs involved in planning media activities.
5. Strengthen journalists' ability to use multiple and diversified sources of information in their coverage of reproductive health issues.
6. Present currently under-represented topics, such as family planning, FGC, gender violence, and abortion to journalists in a more attractive way to ensure future coverage.

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Finally, the principal investigators would like to thank colleagues of the Frontiers in Reproductive Health and POLICY Projects, who provided genuine support leading to the success of this project.



# INTRODUCTION

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Dissemination of findings is key to effective utilization of any research. Dissemination is usually more successful when target groups are well identified, their information needs are known, and the best channels to reach them are tested. The mass media can play a significant role in disseminating research findings and communicating important implications, thus influencing public debate and creating awareness of neglected issues. An informed population is essential to a policy environment conducive to achieving national population and reproductive health goals.

In addition to the classic function of informing the general population, in many countries the media play a vital role in drawing the attention of program managers and policymakers to the strengths and weaknesses of development programs by publishing critical reviews on program performance, identifying potential problems, and highlighting successes. However, in many cases media professionals are not sufficiently informed to effectively discuss problems such as illiteracy, women's rights, and harmful practices and traditions. Among several obstacles hindering the development of effective mass media coverage of these issues, three stand out: media professionals' lack of technical knowledge on specialized or sensitive topics; weak connections with credible sources who could provide accurate and timely information; and the difficulty of communicating research findings in a simple and a catchy publication.

Several research studies in Egypt show that literate women have the habit of reading newspapers and magazines. A study undertaken by the Faculty of Arts in Sohag on a sample of 400 women in Cairo, Dakahlia, and Sohag revealed that women's pages in newspapers were most preferred, followed by women's magazines and finally women's programs on TV. A particular favorite was the Friday supplement on women and children in *Al Ahram* newspaper (59%) followed by the Women's section of *El Akhbar* (23%) and *El Gomhoria* (17%). Interviewees in this study gave several reasons for their preference to read newspapers and magazines, including obtaining information and receiving advice and guidance on certain issues. It is interesting to note that among the issues that female readers wanted to read about were education, motherhood, women's health, and family relations and equity.

In March 1998 the Population Council's ANE OR/TA Project in Cairo organized a roundtable discussion to present key findings of completed research to selected journalists associated with widely read Arabic newspapers and magazines. Topics covered in this session included male involvement, postabortion care, female genital cutting (FGC), and adolescents. Two outcomes resulted from this roundtable. First, participants wrote several articles and in-depth news reports about the issues presented, including male involvement and postabortion care. Secondly, this session led to an ongoing dialogue with members of the group of journalists.

Following this success, the POLICY and FRONTIERS Projects in Egypt jointly organized a media session on maternal health services in collaboration with the Ministry

of Health and Population's Population and Family Planning Sector. The POLICY Project in Egypt collected a substantial amount of research findings on key issues and compiled their policy and program implications in a variety of useful packages supporting advocacy activities. The session resulted in the production of several press articles and lengthy news reports.

Accordingly, this project was designed to build on the previous experiments in order to widen the coverage of critical reproductive health issues and to communicate related research findings in a more systematic manner. The partnership between the POLICY and the FRONTIERS Projects in conducting this activity is an important element of USAID/Egypt's strategic objective to ensure effective utilization of research, not only of operations research, but also of studies implemented by other agencies in Egypt.

## **OBJECTIVES**

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This project was designed to contribute to the strategic objective of the USAID/Egypt Mission of reducing the total fertility rate from 3.63 to 3.45 by the year 2001 through its intermediate result of improving the policy environment. It also contributed to the FRONTIERS Project's intermediate result of disseminating and utilizing research for policy and program improvement. The POLICY Project's intermediate results of promoting effective advocacy for family planning and reproductive health and using information for policy and program development also were addressed.

### ***1. Ultimate Objective***

The ultimate objective of this project was to increase the use of contemporary reproductive health and family planning research by multiple audiences and to maximize the impact of research findings on policy and program management by increasing the coverage in Egyptian Arabic newspapers and magazines.

### ***2. Immediate Objectives***

This 14-month project addressed the following short-term objectives:

- Enhance journalists' knowledge of specific topics related to population and reproductive health issues.
- Improve the content and the quality of reporting in the Egyptian Arabic language press.
- Increase the coverage of reproductive health issues in leading daily and weekly newspapers and magazines in Egypt.
- Strengthen the professional network of talented journalists interested in and committed to covering reproductive health issues.

# INTERVENTION

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To achieve the above short-term objectives, a communication intervention was designed based on the following elements and was implemented during the period of May 1999 – March 2000. Each element is described in the following sections.

## *1. Assessing the Coverage of Reproductive Health Issues in the Egyptian Press*

From May 1999 to March 2000 project staff reviewed a sample of selected Arabic language newspapers and magazines of different publishing houses in Egypt, including national and party papers and magazines. The objective of this daily screening process was to assess the level of coverage of reproductive health issues in the Egyptian press, topics covered, and quality of coverage. This process also aimed at tracking any coverage related to the project activities, to be discussed in subsequent sections of this report.

A part-time project coordinator conducted this daily screening of the Egyptian press. All reproductive health articles were clipped and logged using a special coding sheet (see Appendix I). Any article or news item published by a group member on an issue from the roundtable discussions, or other relevant reports by other journalists in the field of reproductive health, was clipped. Information gathered on each clipped article included:

- Date of publication;
- Author's name (including whether he or she was a group member);
- Type of publication (newspaper or magazine);
- Name of the publication;
- Page number;
- Size of the article;
- Type of article (feature, column, news, letter to the editor);
- Reproductive health issue covered in the article (primary focus, secondary, tertiary and whether it is directly, indirectly or not at all related to the issues covered in the roundtable discussions);
- Main organization covered (government, NGOs, private sector); and
- Use of research.

Four project staff members (two from the POLICY Project and two from FRONTIERS) revised the coding of the clipped articles before data entry. The inter-coder consistency was about 95 percent. Data entry was undertaken at the end of each month using a database system especially developed for the project. The original articles were not entered on the database system; only related information listed above was entered. However, a compilation of roundtable discussion-related articles, including an English summary of each article, is available for further reading of the content of each article.

Table 1 shows the newspapers and magazines selected as the sample for this project, including the circulation of each publication. It is important to note that even though the circulation of each publication reflects its actual distribution, readership is considered

much greater. Media research shows that sharing of the same copy of a publication is very common in Egypt. Thus, one copy could end up being read or shared by four to five persons if not more, depending on the publication's popularity, especially for weekly and monthly magazines (Abdel Rahman et al., 1998). The same study indicated that *Al Ahrām* is the preferred newspaper of women in urban areas, especially among better-educated groups. Women in urban areas also like to read magazines; both specialized for women and unspecialized ones. *El Shabab* ranked as the preferred magazine of women, followed by *Hawaa*. Rural educated women were not particularly interested in magazines.

**Table 1: Sampled Newspapers and Magazines and Their Circulation**

<b>Name of the Publication</b>	<b>Circulation</b>
<b>Newspapers</b>	
1. <i>Al Ahrām</i> (daily)	1.2 million
(weekly)	1.4 million
2. <i>Al Akhbar</i> (daily)	1.1 million
3. <i>Akhbar El Youm</i> (weekly edition)	1.5 million
4. <i>El Gomhoria</i> (daily)	400,000
5. <i>El Wafd</i> (daily)*	600,000
6. <i>Al Ahrām Weekly</i> (weekly)	50,000
7. <i>El Hayat El Dawlia</i> (daily)**	15,000
8. <i>Al Arabi El Youmi</i> (daily)*	13,000
<b>Magazines***</b>	
1. 4. <i>El Shabab</i> (monthly)	750,000
2. <i>Al Ahrām El Raydi</i> (weekly)	650,000
3. <i>Nesf El Donnia</i> (weekly)	350,000
4. <i>Rosa El Youssef</i> (weekly)	250,000
5. <i>Hawaa</i> (weekly)	150,000
6. <i>Horryati</i> (weekly)	150,000
7. <i>Sabah El Kheir</i> (weekly)	130,000
8. <i>Akher Saa</i> (weekly)	120,000
9. <i>October</i> (weekly)	120,000

N.B. Unmarked newspapers are publicly owned.

\*A Party paper

\*\*Privately owned

\*\*\*All sampled magazines are publicly owned.

## ***2. Forming a Network of Reproductive Health Journalists***

In the interest of empowering journalists to act as change agents for creating and expanding a better policy environment, various activities were undertaken to build their capacities and make them more committed to covering reproductive health issues. One of the most important initial steps in this project was the formation of a professional group interested in addressing reproductive health issues and nurturing its development.

A network of about 20 journalists representing newspapers and magazines of different publishing houses was formed. The main criteria for enrolling the members of the group included interest in covering reproductive health issues, previous coverage of these issues in terms of depth and frequency, commitment to covering such topics in the future, and willingness to participate in this activity. Journalists of the network included senior editors and heads of health and women's pages in daily and weekly newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines with high circulation, as well as a few junior reporters covering health and women's news. This combination proved to be very useful for all members of the network. Young members benefited from the experience of the senior staff; and senior journalists made a particular effort to sustain their junior colleagues' participation. Overall this mixture was enriching to the whole process. It even encouraged some of the group members to share the distributed materials and press files with other colleagues who were not members of the group.

### ***3. The Press File***

A kit of resource materials was compiled for journalists participating in the four-roundtable discussions. For each, resource materials, fact sheets, experts' presentations, parts of translated literature, and an evaluation form were included. At the beginning of each session, the facilitator of the discussion reviewed these materials and their relevance as sources for media stories. Support materials and literature extracts were developed by the POLICY Project (in collaboration with the FRONTIERS project) and delivered in a simple format. Other CAs with offices in Egypt, US-based CAs, NGOs and the relevant projects of the Ministry of Health and Population also were contacted to support this process by providing related research findings or details of specific experiences they would like to contribute to the press file. These materials were translated into Arabic and added to the kit. A list of resource persons for every discussion topic was compiled and distributed to enhance the journalists' network and ensure diversity of their sources.

### ***4. Roundtable Discussions***

FRONTIERS and POLICY project staff in Egypt jointly chose the topics to be covered at each roundtable discussion. During the early phases of the project, a brainstorming session was organized at which different issues were considered. Suggestions made by journalists during the previous press meetings also were taken into consideration. Finally, the topics covered in the four-roundtable discussions were identified, to be presented in the following order:

- Marriage patterns in Egypt, with special emphasis on early marriage
- Women and menopause
- Youth and reproductive health
- Contraceptive technology

The choice of some topics over others was based on their relevance to the reproductive health and family planning program in Egypt; their level of coverage in the Egyptian press, and perceived public need to learn about such issues. Most of the chosen topics were under-covered in the Egyptian press, or were not represented effectively, using the most recent research findings. Other subjects not included as topics in the roundtable sessions, yet viewed as equally important—such as male involvement, gender issues, and FGC—were embedded in the discussion portion of each session whenever possible and relevant. It is important to mention that the first roundtable discussion was organized six weeks after the start of the project to allow enough time to make decisions on the topics and to scan published articles on reproductive health in the Egyptian press. The final roundtable discussion was scheduled six weeks before the completion of the clipping process so as to record any relevant coverage. In general, roundtable discussions were conducted every two months.

In some roundtable discussions two speakers presented the topic. The first presenter was a key researcher who provided recent research findings on the issue. The second was an NGO staff member or a credible OB/GYN professor (for the menopause session), who provided an overview of the program, recent research findings, and field experience. Both presentations were simple in language and emphasized the definitions of simple technical terms used (such as contraceptive prevalence rates, mortality rates, and population momentum). This combination of presentations was useful for exposing the media professionals both to research results and program and field experience on the topic. This mechanism also maximized the exposure of the group members to different sources and types of information likely to enrich their reporting of the topic.



Other topics, such as youth and contraceptive technology, involved only one speaker, since the nature of the topic and the depth of information covered did not lend itself to two speakers. At the end of each of the four sessions a brief brainstorming process was initiated regarding possible stories that could be developed to cover the research presented, and the best approaches for related stories.

## FINDINGS

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During the design phase of this project, three levels for the evaluation of activities were established to capture a full range of impact indicators. The first level was related to the information presented at each roundtable discussion as perceived by the journalists, and knowledge acquired as a result. For this level, an evaluation form was administered at the end of each roundtable discussion to measure the effectiveness of the discussion.

The second method of evaluation considered the number of contacts made by group members with the Population Council or any of the other collaborators to inquire about an issue or to request information on a related subject. Such contacts were systematically logged. They proved to be useful indicators of the interaction, the interest of group members in the process, and their level of engagement in project activities

The third and key output indicator of the project was the number and quality of articles published on some of the substantive issues discussed by the group members. The daily clipping process of all the newspapers and magazines provided a regular overview of the project impact. Findings on each of these indicators will be reported in the following sections.

### ***1. Journalists' Knowledge Gain and Their Evaluation of the Roundtables***

One of the key project evaluation mechanisms was knowledge gain of the journalists after each roundtable and their general assessment of the usefulness of the roundtable sessions. To this end, an evaluation form was distributed at the end of each roundtable discussion. This form was also a useful tool for assessing preferences for other topics in future press relations activities. Results of the evaluation sheets showed a general increase in the journalists' knowledge about reproductive health issues, especially for general statistics, such as the prevalence of early marriage in Egypt, age at first pregnancy, the recommended age for routine gynecological checkups, and incidence of FGC among females.

*"These meetings are extremely useful to me as they help me improve the quality of my stories."*

*"The numbers and figures presented are helpful in strengthening my stories and when published it will have a more effective impact on the public opinion."*

*"I suggest to include journalists from Radio and TV. They will also benefit from this kind of sessions."*

*Quotations of the group members as indicated in their evaluation sheets after roundtable discussion meetings*



Journalists attending the roundtable meetings rated the sessions as very useful. The majority said that the most interesting and productive part of the roundtable was the discussion that followed presentations, as they felt it shed light on the issues raised in the technical presentations. When asked about how they will use the data and figures provided in the press file, journalists in most cases mentioned that it would be useful in the coverage of reproductive health issues. They also

reported that the press files as well as the presentations were helpful in writing their stories using the scientific data included in the media kits, which ultimately would make their reports more convincing to the public. Others said that they would use the information included in the press file to write in-depth analyses of the issues raised during each session.

## ***2. Journalists' Level of Interaction with the Project Team***

The second criterion for measuring the effectiveness of this intervention was the number of times that group members contacted the Population Council to inquire about an issue or to request information on a related subject. A special logging sheet (see Appendix II) was developed to record the number of contacts made by any of the group members. The project principal investigator and the FRONTIERS project coordinator were responsible for keeping this form updated. Records on the date of the call, the caller, reason for the call, and action taken were included in the sheet.

Members of the group made regular contacts with the project team. An average of five calls were received every month, usually requesting information related to a story the journalist was writing, asking about the next roundtable meeting, or informing the project team about a story the journalist had published on a relevant reproductive health issue. Journalists from *Al Ahram*, *El Akhbar* and *Al Arabie El Youmi* newspapers were among the most frequent callers. On the other hand, journalists from *Hawaa* magazine were among the most frequent group members to request information on reproductive health. This regular calling process was a positive indicator of the journalists' general interest in the subject matter, their commitment to the project activities, and their perception of the project team as a reliable source of accurate and scientific information.

The project staff also made regular follow-up calls to group members, especially before and after each roundtable discussion. This follow-up was useful to meet any need for up-to-date information on a given story idea and to encourage the group members to share the materials they receive during the roundtable discussions with other interested colleagues within or outside their organizations.

## ***3. Results of the Content Analysis***

The key indicator of this intervention is the number and quality of articles published on some of the substantive issues discussed during the roundtable discussions. The content analysis of press clippings was undertaken to examine the number and quality of articles published on reproductive health in general, and those articles that resulted from the project intervention. Overall, 560 articles on reproductive health were published between May 1999 and March 2000. One in five articles were related to the topics covered in the roundtable discussion meetings.



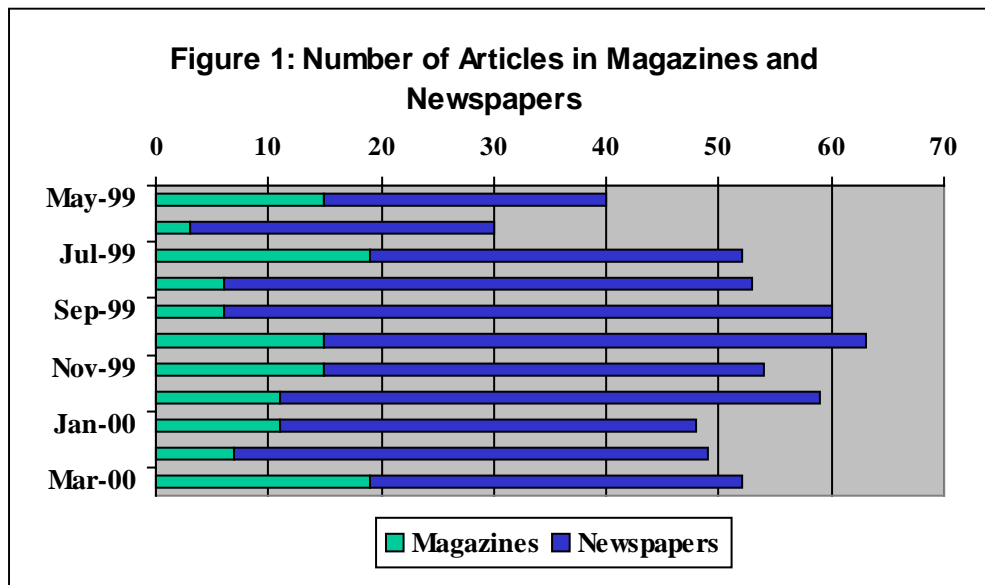
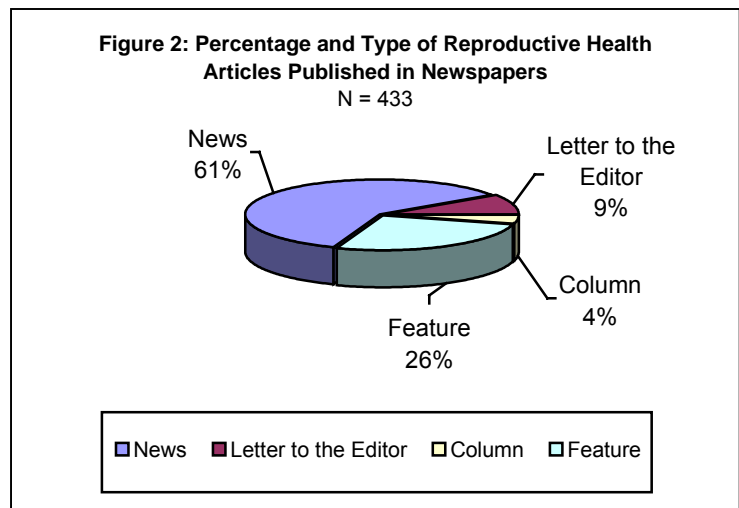


Figure 1 shows the number of articles published monthly this period. More reproductive health-related articles appeared in newspapers than in magazines (433 versus 127).

*A. Press coverage of reproductive health in newspapers: some general features*

As Figure 2 shows, of the 433 reproductive health articles published in newspapers, 61 percent were news items, 26 percent were features, and 9 percent were letters to the editors. It is normal to find that almost two-thirds of the articles were news items, given the nature of this medium. However, it was significant to find that 26 percent of the published articles were features, which provide more space than general news articles to discuss an issue in greater detail. It was also interesting to find that almost 10 percent of the articles were letters to the editors, which is a participatory approach providing the audience an opportunity to express their concerns and provide feedback on issues raised.



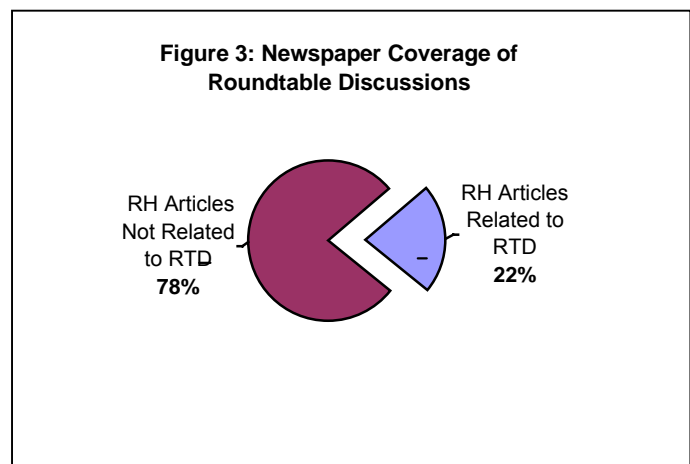
More than 25 percent of reproductive health articles published in newspapers took up a quarter of a page, which could be considered a fairly large space for newspaper coverage. The remaining 64 percent were articles sized around one eighth of a page. Of all the reproductive health-related articles, almost 31 percent were in the central area of the inside pages.

Nearly 27 percent of the reproductive health articles focused mainly on sexually transmitted and reproductive tract infections (STIs and RTIs) and HIV/AIDS, followed by another 25 percent on safe motherhood. The least covered areas were quality of services (7%), family planning (6%), sexuality issues (6%) and gender (6%). The content of these articles varied depending on the type of article. For example, feature articles on STIs, RTIs and HIV/AIDS involved an overview of different STIs, their implications and treatments. When the article was in the news form, it usually focused on findings of a recent research study, information on new drugs, or recommendations and proceedings of a conference or scientific meeting.

In about 30 percent of the articles on reproductive health, the sole source of information was an expert in the field. Fourteen percent involved coverage of government news, while 13 percent covered scientific conferences. The least covered organizations were those in the private sector.

*B. Newspaper coverage related to roundtable discussion issues*

Figure 3 shows that 22 percent of total reproductive health coverage in newspapers was related to the roundtable discussion topics. Ten percent of the articles from roundtable discussions were published on the front page. The nature of these articles was different from the general pattern previously outlined, with a larger proportion of features (47%) and news (40%). A few articles were letters to the editors (7%) and fewer were columns (5%). Similar to general reproductive health articles, the only source of information used was an interview with an expert in the field (32%).

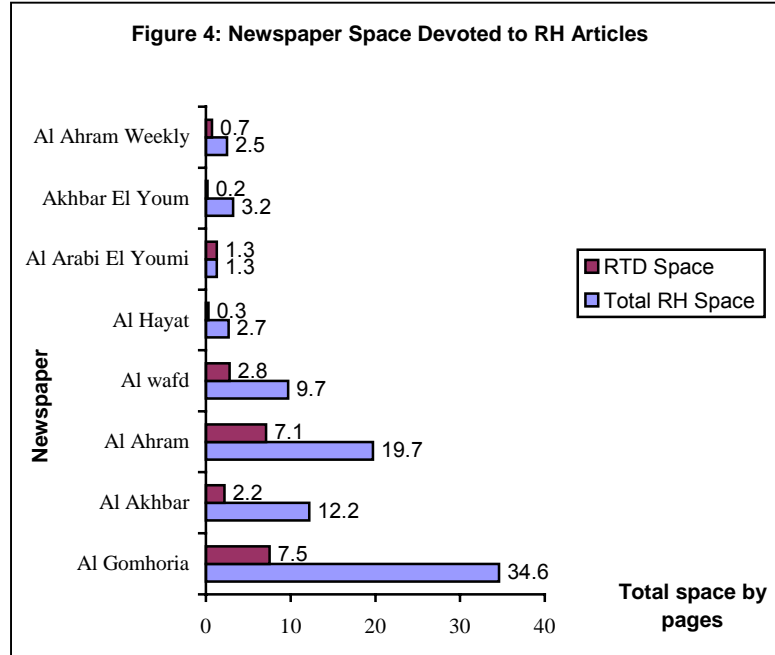


*C. Coverage of reproductive health and roundtable discussions in various Egyptian newspapers*

As noted earlier, a sample of the leading newspapers in Egypt was included in this study. Figure 4 shows the coverage of reproductive health issues in each of the sampled newspapers and their coverage of roundtable discussions issues (by pages). It indicates that *El Gomhoria* newspaper devoted the greatest space to coverage of reproductive health issues, publishing 146 articles, of which 29 were related to roundtable discussions.

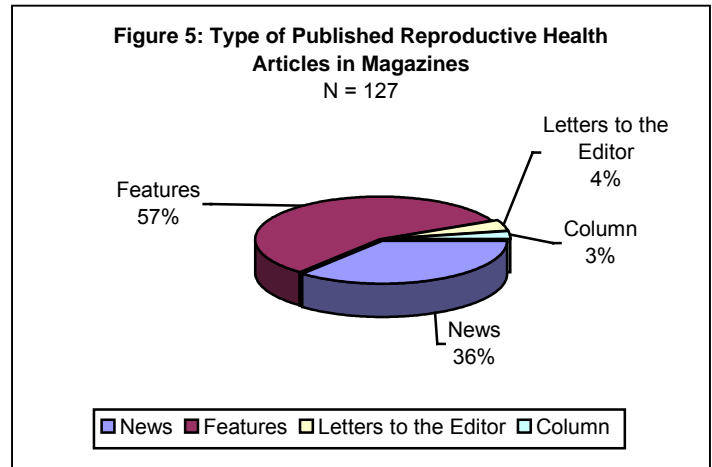
*Al Ahram*—one of the largest circulation newspapers in Egypt—was among the most active newspapers in terms of space given to the coverage of reproductive health issues in general. *Al Ahram* produced 99 articles, of which 32 were related to roundtable discussions.

It is interesting to note that in some cases, such as *Al Arabi El Youmi* (a party newspaper), the only coverage related to reproductive health was the articles on the roundtable discussion issues. This means that coverage of these issues was lacking and was mainly initiated as a result of this intervention.



*D. Press coverage of reproductive health in magazines: some general features*

Magazines published 127 articles on reproductive health articles from May 1999 to March 2000. As Figure 5 shows, 57 percent of these were feature articles, while 36 percent were news. Only 4 percent were letters to the editor, and 3 percent were columns. The dominance of the feature style is normal given the nature of the publication. However, in contrast to newspapers, there were few letters to the editors and columns, even though magazines usually provide the opportunity and space for such modes of writing, allowing a wider expression of the readers’ views. This implies that the public is more actively engaged with newspapers than with magazines.



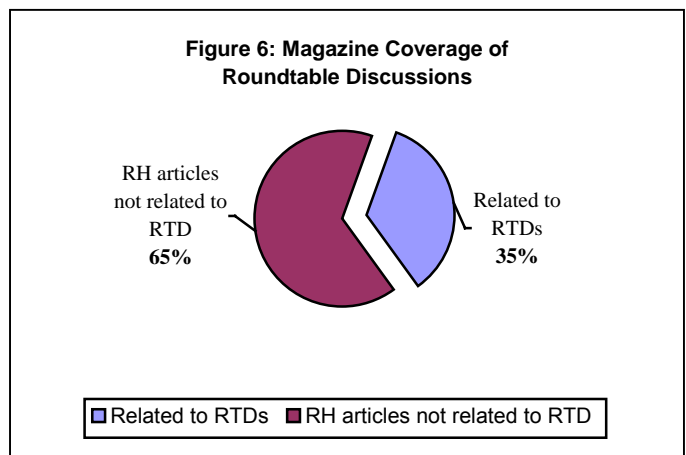
Forty-eight percent of magazine articles on reproductive health were more than one page in size. Of all the 127 articles, 14.2 percent were in the central area of the internal pages. The most widely covered topics were safe motherhood (33%), RTIs and STDs, including HIV/AIDS (17%), sexual health (13%), and youth and reproductive health (10%). The least covered topics were population policies, legal issues of reproductive health, family

planning, and quality of services. The majority of articles on safe motherhood were related to antenatal and postnatal care as well as pregnancy-related issues. A common secondary theme of these articles was nutrition during pregnancy and the postnatal period. On the other hand, youth and reproductive health articles gave much attention to sexuality issues affecting youth and the social implications of these issues, such as illegal marriages. A secondary topic in most of these articles was gender.

More than one-third (37%) of the magazine articles used one expert's opinion as the major source of information mentioned in the article. Another 11 percent interviewed the general public to reflect their opinions, which was not prevalent in the newspapers' coverage. About 9 percent of the articles covered news of scientific conferences, while the least covered organizations were those in the government and private sectors. It is interesting to note that as with the newspapers, the main source of information for articles was experts' opinions (35%).

*E. Magazine coverage related to roundtable discussion topics*

Of the 127 articles on reproductive health published in magazines, 35 percent covered topics presented at the roundtable discussions, in contrast to newspapers (22%). Feature articles were the dominant type of published articles (72%) while 23 percent were news. Columns and letters to the editor accounted for just 2 percent each. Though this is somewhat different from the general pattern outlined for reproductive health articles in magazines, it shows a larger space devoted to covering the roundtable discussion topics, by providing more opportunity to present the issues discussed during the roundtable meetings. In two cases, lead titles appeared on magazine covers, highlighting special stories on youth and reproductive health and menopause.

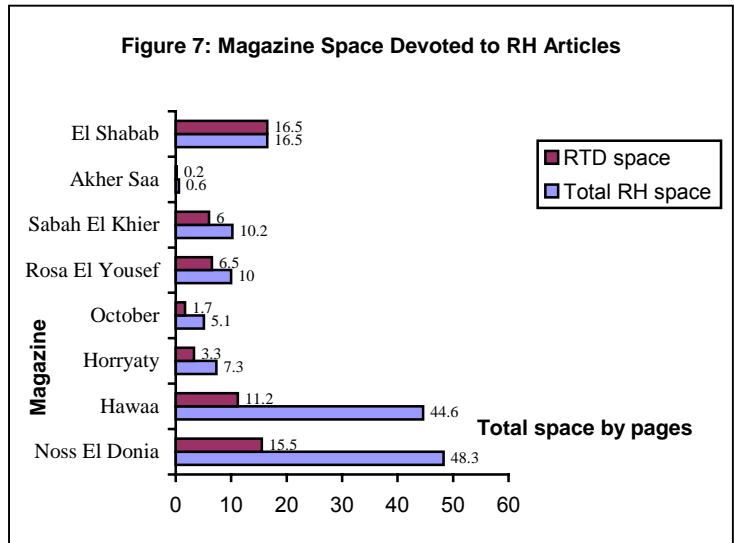


*F. Coverage of reproductive health issues and roundtable discussions in various Egyptian magazines*

Figure 7 shows the total space devoted to reproductive health articles in general and to articles resulting from the roundtable discussions in each of the sampled magazines in this study. The weekly *Noss El Donna*—one of the leading women's magazines in Egypt—devoted the largest space to reproductive health issues, including roundtable discussion topics. One in four of the 40 articles on reproductive health issues published from May 1999 to March 2000 were related to the roundtable discussion topics. It is

worth noting that the dominant type of published articles in *Noss El Donnia* was features (28 articles), with only one news item and one letter to the editor.

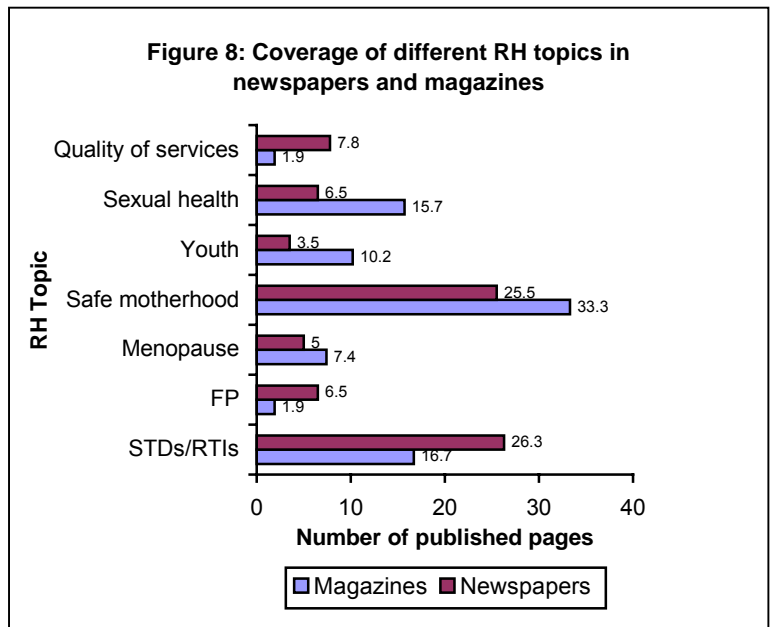
The weekly magazine *Hawaa*, which published 47 articles on reproductive health, was also active in covering reproductive health. *Hawaa* published 11 articles based on the roundtable discussions, compared with 10 in *Noss El Donia*. Although features were the dominant type of published articles, a wider variation was observed in the general reproductive health coverage of *Hawaa*. *Hawaa* had more news items on reproductive health (8) and letters to the editor (2) as well as columns and editorials (2) than *Noss El Donia*.



*El Shabab*, the only monthly magazine in the sample, covered the roundtable discussion topics, especially youth and reproductive health, particularly well. “*El Shabab*”—meaning “youth” in Arabic—has the largest circulation of the sample of magazines (see Table 1) and is widely read and shared among youth and adolescents. *El Shabab* provided wide coverage of youth and reproductive health with a lead title on the cover page.

Winning space in this magazine for such a topic is considered a sign of the project’s success, since the magazine addresses a large segment of youth in Egypt. It is also important to note that all reproductive health articles published in *El Shabab* over the year were generated by the roundtable discussions.

Figure 8 shows the reproductive health topics covered in newspapers and magazines.<sup>1</sup> Generally, reproductive health issues and roundtable discussion topics were covered more frequently in magazines than in newspapers. Safe motherhood, early marriage, youth and reproductive health, and menopause were widely reported in magazines. The only exceptions with regard to the roundtable topics are contraceptive technology and family



<sup>1</sup> Other coded reproductive health issues such as population policies, legal issues, and gender are not shown on this graph since their coverage was generally low in both newspapers and magazines.

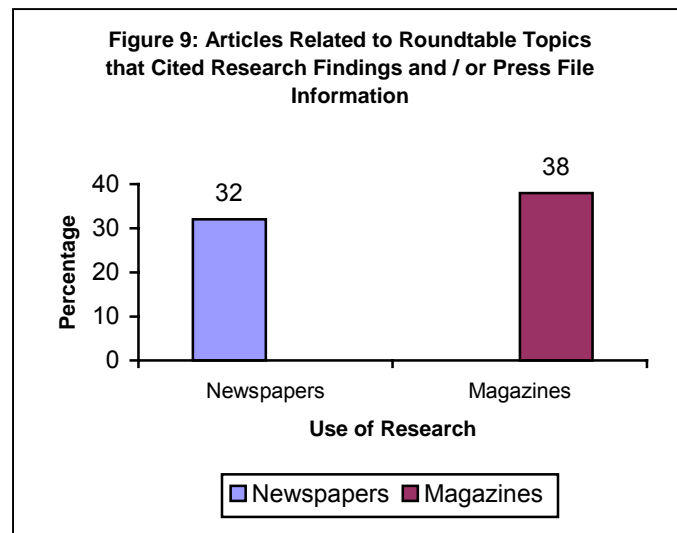
planning. These were more reported in newspapers, although the amount of coverage was limited and only in the form of news items.

#### 4. Assessing the Quality of Published Articles

This project sought to document any improvement in the quality of reproductive health articles published in the Egyptian press. An assessment of the content of articles published by the group members found that many articles quoted heavily from the fact sheets and press releases included in the press kits provided at each roundtable discussion. These materials, as well as the technical presentations, were mostly based on findings of contemporary research in Egypt, including the Demographic and Health Survey, POLICY Project research, studies by the ANE OR/TA project, and recent FRONTIERS studies.

It was also observed that several group members shared the press file with other colleagues specializing in covering health and women’s issues. These journalists, who were not part of the group, also quoted and used a large percentage of the distributed materials in their articles. When questioned, some group members confirmed this observation. One said, *“We quote the project fact sheets and press file information in general in writing our stories as they are very well written and have a good journalistic style.”*

Quality of writing was assessed in terms of use of research findings and multiplicity of information sources. The number of roundtable discussion-related articles that cited research or information presented in the press file was evident in both magazines and newspapers. Figure 9 shows that 32 percent of newspaper articles and 38 percent of magazine articles based on roundtable discussion topics used research data from the technical presentations and the press file information. This use of project materials indicates that this intervention improved the quality of journalists’ writing and their overall use of research findings and other information.



However, one of the drawbacks in the quality of writing of both newspaper and magazine reporters was their over-dependence on one source of information, such as an expert’s opinion. Only a few journalists used more than one source. The lack of diversity of sources in covering reproductive health issues suggests the need to strengthen journalists’ ability to use multiple sources to strengthen the quality of coverage.

### *Expert committee evaluation of the best coverage*

To motivate group members to cover the issues discussed during the roundtable discussions, a contest was announced at the beginning of the project for the best article produced by a group member from a magazine and from a newspaper. An expert committee was formed to make this selection. The committee members included a media expert, a professor of communication from Cairo University, a program manager, and a representative from USAID, in addition to POLICY and FRONTIERS project staff. The committee also was asked to choose the best newspaper and magazine coverage by reporters who were not part of the group and to identify the publishing houses that devoted the most space to the coverage of reproductive health issues over the year.

Project staff prepared a special file for each committee member, including copies of published articles for the group members and a sample of the work of non-group members. They also provided the committee with some guiding criteria for the choice of the above candidates, yet the decision was not limited to these criteria. The information provided to the committee included:

- Number of articles published on reproductive health between May 1999 and March 2000;
- Number of articles published on the topics of the roundtable meetings for the same period;
- Size of both categories of articles;
- Type of published articles (news, feature, column, letter to the editor);
- List of all writers in newspapers who published a total of 0.5 pages or more and those in magazines who published a total of two pages or more with the above information as related to each of these writers;
- List of all newspapers and magazines and their level of publishing of reproductive health and roundtable discussions topics over a year in addition to the above information; and
- A circulation table of sampled newspapers and magazines.

The criteria for selection of the most active journalist included (but was not restricted to):

- Number and total space of articles the journalist published about reproductive health in general;
- Number and total space of published articles related to the roundtable discussions; and
- Quality of writing in terms of (1) use of research findings and (2) multiplicity of sources of information.

The criteria for selecting the most active newspaper and magazine included:

- Number of articles and space devoted to reproductive health issues;
- Number of articles and total space devoted to roundtable discussion issues; and
- Target group of the publication and their relevance to the project objectives.



The committee met for half a day to discuss the selection process and the final result. The decision was announced during the media event described in the following section. The committee recommended honoring all members of the media group, but specially honoring the two best newspaper reporters and the two best magazine reporters for their outstanding performance. The committee also recommended honoring one non-member journalist from a newspaper and one from a magazine, in addition to the most active two newspapers and two magazines, for their commitment to coverage of reproductive health issues.

## **MEDIA EVENT**

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The project's final media event was an opportunity to share the results of this intervention and to honor the media group, the best reporters, and the best newspaper and magazine. The event was well-attended, with more than 70 persons representing various media groups from TV, radio, the press, USAID, CAs, research organizations, roundtable discussion speakers, committee members, and the POLICY and FRONTIERS teams (see Appendices III and IV for an event agenda and a list of participants). Media coverage of the event was extensive. Coverage included two programs on national television channels, the international satellite channel (Nile TV), and three radio stations running three different programs. Press coverage before and after the event also was prominent in most of the newspapers and magazines. The program associate of FRONTIERS/Egypt and the director of the Advocacy Project of the Ministry of Health and Population gave the opening keynote addresses. Subsequently, the principal investigators from the FRONTIERS and POLICY projects gave presentations on the project background, design, and findings.

The awards to the media followed. It is worth noting that the Population Reference Bureau sponsored one of the winners to attend the Beijing+5 conference in New York in June, 2000 as a contribution to the efforts of this project. In addition, USAID/Egypt will sponsor two other journalists to participate in a study tour to Thailand

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and the Philippines at the end of the year to observe successful family planning and reproductive health programs. They will write articles about these programs when they return.

## CONCLUSIONS

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This project had a positive impact on increasing the coverage of reproductive health issues in Egypt and hence in raising public awareness of these important issues. It also contributed to the formation of an informed cadre of print journalists who are knowledgeable and committed to reporting on critical reproductive health issues in Egypt. Use of contemporary reproductive health and family planning research by media groups, and hence its dissemination to the public, also increased. This press coverage had the effect of maximizing the impact of research findings on informed policy and program management.

It was clear that journalists' knowledge increased as a result of the roundtable discussion. The majority of group members rated the sessions "very useful." They mentioned that they plan to use data from the technical presentation and the press file to support their coverage of reproductive health and strengthen their stories. Many journalists felt that including such data would make stories more convincing to the public. Members of the media group made regular contacts with the project team, indicating the group's significant interest and engagement in the process.

One in four newspaper articles were feature stories. This type of coverage provides more space than news articles to discuss an issue in greater detail. Nearly one in 10 articles were letters to the editor, which is a participatory approach giving the audience the opportunity to express their concerns and provide feedback on issues raised. Although the nature of magazines provides greater scope for feedback from readers, it was not well utilized, suggesting that readers are more actively engaged with newspapers than magazines. Reproductive health agencies need to do more work with journalists to create different ideas that further engage the public in seeking reproductive health information.

Through the content analysis, it was evident that this intervention had a clear impact on the quality of writing of both newspaper and magazine journalists. Many of the group members shared the press file with other colleagues covering health and women's issues. These journalists also quoted and used a large percentage of the distributed materials in writing their articles. Roughly one-third of the newspaper and magazine articles cited information provided in the press kits at the roundtable discussions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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This initiative has led to an improvement in the coverage of reproductive health issues in the Egyptian press both in terms of the quantity and the quality of coverage. Although the intervention was limited to print media, recommendations pertain to the broader scope of media relations activities. In particular, they suggest ways to move this project to a larger scale.

Major recommendations for reproductive health agencies are:

1. Integrate this media model in planning for future dissemination and communication activities. This approach, which proved effective in maximizing the reach of research findings to multiple audiences via popular channels, would be useful as a means of influencing public debate and policy. Holding press briefings featuring local experts creates news stories that attract press coverage of research studies and also influences policymakers with information about research findings and their policy and program implications.
2. Enlarge the circle of this press network to include journalists from radio and television. Greater contact with these groups would greatly increase the impact of research findings on public opinion, given that the majority of Egyptians rely on television as their prime source of health information.
3. Involve a larger number of research institutes and NGOs in media relations to utilize their research findings and maximize communication of their field experience.
4. Disseminate the findings of this study to concerned groups at the Ministry of Health and Population and the State Information Service and to other USAID and CA groups involved in planning media activities. This dissemination would offer these groups a wide range of benefits from the findings of this project and offer different channels for utilization of this model.
5. Strengthen journalists' ability to use multiple and diversified sources of information in their coverage of reproductive health issues in general.
6. Present under-represented topics, such as family planning, FGC, gender violence, and abortion in an attractive way. Simpler packaging of the information is needed to attract journalists to cover these topics. Yet, the communicated message should be sensitive to the social context and need of readers. Other obstacles hindering journalists from covering these issues should also be explored.

## REFERENCES

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Abd El Rahman, Awatef et al. 1999. *Egyptian Women and the Media in Urban and Rural Areas*. Cairo: Al Arabi for Publishing & Distribution.

\_\_\_\_\_. 1998. *Use of Media by Egyptian Women*. Faculty of Arts, University of Sohag. Master's Thesis.



## APPENDIX II



Increasing the Coverage of Reproductive Health Issues  
in Egyptian Press Project

### Journalists' Contacts Sheet

Date of the call	Caller	Group member Y / N	Name of the newspaper / magazine	PC staff who answered	Reason for the call	Action Taken	Remarks / Outcomes

APPENDIX III



The Policy Project  
Futures Group International

Increasing the Coverage of Reproductive Health Issues  
in Egyptian Press Project

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**A G E N D A**

**May 29, 2000**

**Cairo Meridien - Alexandria Hall**

<b>11:30am-12: 00pm</b>	<b>Registration</b>	
<b>12:00pm-12: 30pm</b>	<b>Opening Notes</b> Laila Nawar Ayman Abd El Mohsen Moushira El Shafie	Population Council USAID Undersecretary Director, Population and Family Planning Sector, Ministry of Health and Population
<b>12:30pm-1: 00pm</b>	<b>Presentation of the Findings of the “Increasing the Coverage of Reproductive Health Issues in Egyptian Press Project”</b> Sahar Hegazi Mona Khalifa	Population Council Policy Project
<b>1:00pm-1: 30pm</b>	<b>Award Ceremony</b> Keynotes of Winning Journalists	
<b>1:30pm-2: 00pm</b>	<b>Adjourn &amp; Refreshments</b>	

**APPENDIX IV**  
**List of Invitees to the Media Event**

**MOHP**

Moushira El Shafai  
Tarek Morsy  
Hosam Rasekh  
Hosam Shalaby  
Mohamed Farid  
Mona El Ghazaly  
Mona Amin

**USAID**

Chris Mcdermet  
Ayman Abdel Mohsen  
Torhan Nory  
Shadia Attia

**IEC / SIS Center**

Salah El Toukhy

**Pathfinder Int.**

Ron Hess  
Madiha Saied

**Roundtable Discussions' Speakers**

Fatma El Zanaty  
Omamia Abou Shady  
Mohamed Fayed  
Sahar El Tawila  
Nabil Younis

**UNFPA**

Abdel Moniem Abou Nawar  
Hala Abou Taleb  
Shadia Gomma

**UNICEF**

Nagwa Farag

**CEDPA**

Samah Saied

**CDC**

Hesham Maklouf

Magdy Abdel Kader

**NPC**

Ibrahim El Itribi  
Adel Zaher  
Mary Haleem

**Media Core Group**

**El Gomhoria**

Nahid El Menshawy

**El Ahkbar and Akhbar El Youm**

Nawal Mostafa  
Nahed Hamza  
Hanna Gohar  
Saffia Amin

**Al Ahram / Nos El Donnia / Al Ahram**

**El Rayedi/ Al Ahram Weekly/ El Shabab**

Magda Mehna  
Hala El Sayed  
Alice El Mankabdi  
Heba Basha  
Khaled Taweed  
Amany Abdel Moneim  
Mariz Tadros  
Nadia Mansour

**El Wafd**

Sanaa Mostafa

**Al Arabi El youmi**

Khalil Abou El Hassan

**El Mosawer**

Laila Marmoush

**Sabah El Kheir**

Karima Kamal

**AL Hayya EL Dawlia**

Mohamed Kotb

**Hawaa**

Ikbal Baraka

Iman El Hefnawi

Hala Salah

**News Agencies**

**BBC**

Hala Abou Khatwa

**Television**

**Nile TV**

Pakinam Ahmed

Nevine Ramzy

**Channel One**

Hanaa Mostafa

Laila Ibrahim

Fatma El Zahraa

**Channel Two**

Soad El Deeb

Mervat Farrag

Seefine Salah EL Din

**Channel Three**

Gamal Abou Aly

Dr. Tharwat Mekky

Nagwa Azzam

**Radio**

**General Program**

Amanyi El Sayad

Salwa Mohamed Karawya

**The Voice of Arabia**

Nadia Ateyya Mohamed

**El Shabab we El Riyadah**

Nabila Abd El Khalek

**Greater Cairo**

Mohamed Ahmad Sobeih

Nadia Helmy

Amal El Anani

**Media Project Team**

**(FRONTIERS Project)**

Barbara Ibrahim

Laila Nawar

Sahar Hegazi

Nancy Ali

M.E. Khan

Jim Foriet

Dalia Mostafa

Naglaa El Shamy

Magda Fayek

Gihan Hosny

**(POLICY Project)**

Mona Khalifa

Fatma El Geel

Salah Abd El Tawab