

Research Proposal: Existential risks. Who knows? Who cares?

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Summary of Research:

There has been little research on how much knowledge non-experts have about ERs, what are their main worries and if individual differences have an effect such as age, gender and political alignment. This research sets out to give a novel insight into ERs.

The main aims are:

- To give insight into which risks are seen to be the greatest through the ITN framework by non-experts
- To compare the results with experts' forecasts on the likelihood of these risks occurring (Ord, 2020).
- To have both cognitive and metacognitive measures (respondents' estimates of other people's judgements) for the same survey items.

The proposed research meets these aims by conducting a correlational study requiring participants to complete a questionnaire. Participants will be asked demographic information (age and gender) and to rate anthropogenic and natural ERs in terms of worriedness, importance, tractability, and neglectedness (Gainsburg et al., 2021) using a Likert scale to understand what participants' top priorities and worries are. They will also be asked the proportion of their income they are willing to sacrifice to reduce the risk of their most worrisome risk. They will then be asked to complete the same questionnaire but in terms of what they think other participants have answered. This provides for a meta-cognitive analysis allowing testing for egocentric bias. Finally, they will be asked to indicate their political stance.

Once the data is collected, it will be compared to expert predictions on what is most likely to occur (Ord, 2020). A factor analysis will be conducted to explore if individual differences correlate with what is considered the greatest threat. I will also carry out a comparison of the metacognitive data versus the actual results of the participants.

Outcomes for this research are difficult to predict as there is little previous research. However, the desired outcome would be a consensus amongst participants on what is considered to be the greatest threat.

This research aims to provide novel insight into the field of ER. The information we can gather relates to risk, evidence, and decision-making, allowing greater insight into what non-experts consider the most worrisome risk. Equally, if age, gender or political inclination may affect the decision made. This research will also add to the field of existing knowledge and provide the basis for future further in-depth investigations.

Gainsburg, I., Pauer, S., Nawal, A., Aloyo, E., Mourrat, J.-C., & Cristia, A. (2021). *How Effective Altruism Can Help Psychologists Maximize Their Impact*.
Ord, T. (2020). *The Precipice. Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity*. New York Hachette Books.

