



Introduction:

- Existential risks (ERs) defined as hazards that has the possibility to end humanity have increased drastically within the 20th and 21st century due to advancement in technology. (Ord, 2020)
- Yet there is no current research about what the general public prioritises.

Aims:

- To give insight into which risks are seen to be the greatest threat through the ITN framework and worry by the general public
- 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.

Methods:

- 150 participants recruited online took part in a survey requiring the ranking of existential risks based on the importance, tractability, neglectedness (ITN) framework (Gainsberg, 2021) and worry.
- Participants then indicated how much of their annual income they would give to help mitigate their most worrisome risk.
- For the metacognitive measures, participants were told to rank ERs based upon what they thought others would and how much they would donate.

Results:

	Importance	Tractability	Neglectedness	Worrisome	Expert prediction
Climate change	2.53	5.73	4.67	3.14	6
Nuclear War	3.92	5.73	6.29	3.57	6
Naturally arising pandemics	4.94	5.93	6.36	5.15	8
Other environmental damage	5.28	6.47	6.15	6.14	6
Engineered pandemic	5.73	6.23	6.15	5.47	2.5
Unforeseen anthropogenic risks	5.73	6.13	5.75	6.21	2.5
Other known anthropogenic risks	5.83	6.43	5.95	5.33	4
Super volcanic eruption	7.28	5.95	5.86	7.26	9.5
Asteroid or comet impact	7.97	5.41	6.41	7.75	9.5
Unaligned artificial intelligence	8.19	6.43	6.24	7.79	1
Stellar explosion	8.96	5.56	6.15	8.18	11

Table 1. Mean ranks of each existential risk based on the ITN framework and worry. Toby Ords forecasts have also been ranked based upon the likeness of occurring. In this table the lower the number the higher the priority. The findings from the rankings demonstrated a significant correlation solely between importance and worry. There was no significant correlation between worry and neglectedness, tractability or expert prediction.

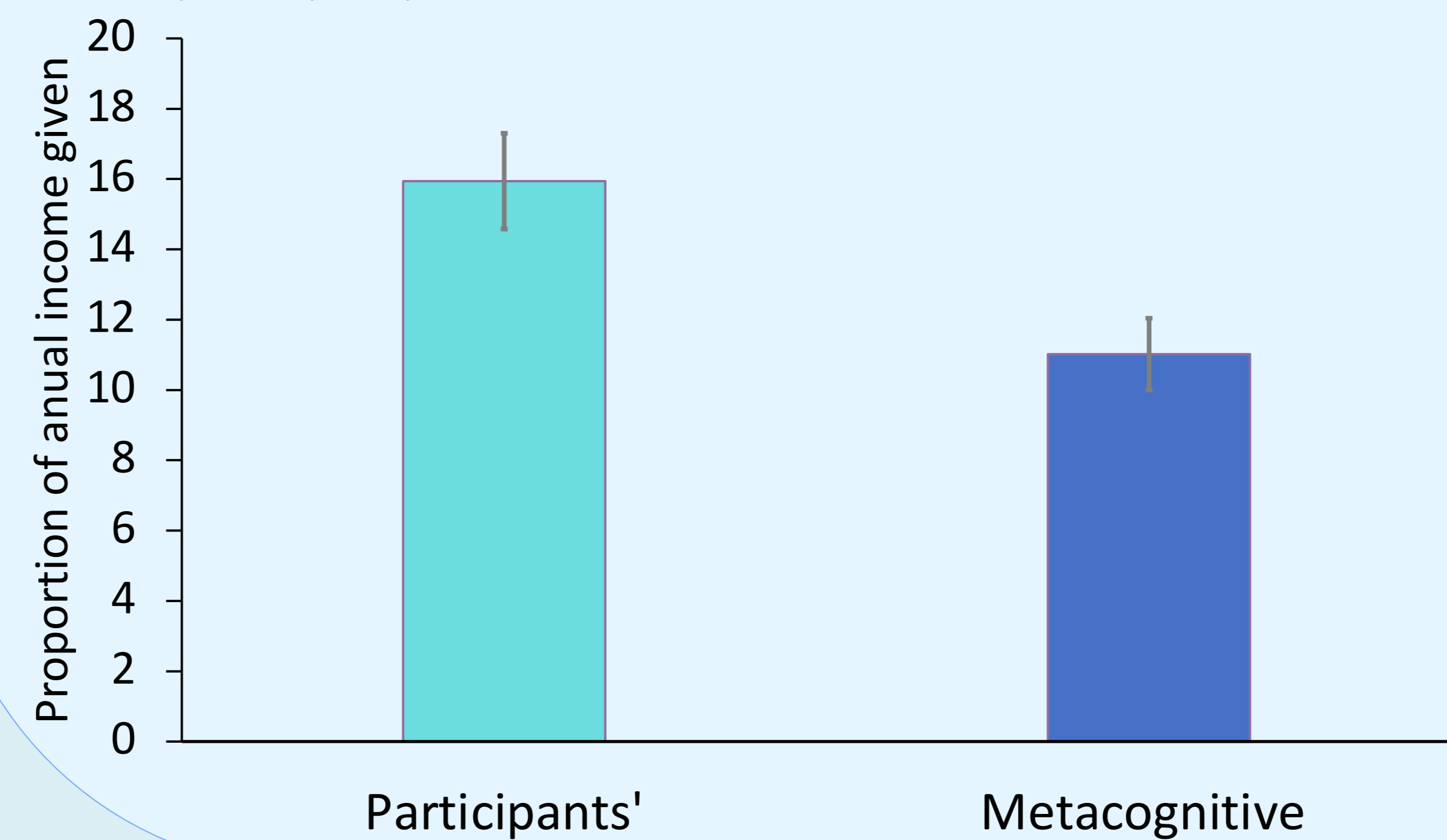


Figure 1. Average proportion of annual income given by participants' personal response and what they thought others would respond (metacognitive). The error bars represent +/- 1 standard error. A t-test revealed a significant difference between variables.

Discussion:

- Top most worrisome risks may be due to lived experiences (Weiner, 2016)
- Neglectedness or tractability ERs were not a driving factor of worry.
- The observation that Unaligned AI ranks as the greatest threat in expert opinion, and the least threat (except Stellar Explosions) in public opinion identifies a specific opportunity for improving risk communication.
- Both egocentric bias and the better-than-average effect was demonstrated.

Conclusion and future research:

- These findings amplify the uncertainty and disagreement as to where our focus should be held when trying to mitigate these risks within the general public and experts.
- Future research should test for more individual differences such as political orientation, age and gender to give insight into why participants answered the way that they did.
- In addition, experts should be asked to rank ERs as it would allow for a more accurate comparison to the general public.

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References:

- 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.
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