

Coming of age in a world in polycrisis

Chair: Stijn Van Petegem

Symposium overview

Contributions

Van Petegem et al.

Macro-threat perceptions and youth mental health and identity formation

Skhirtladze et al.

Macro-level threat perceptions and identity and motivation in Georgian emerging adults

Venninx et al.

Seeing the world through my parents' eyes: Intergenerational similarities in worldviews

Spitzer et al.

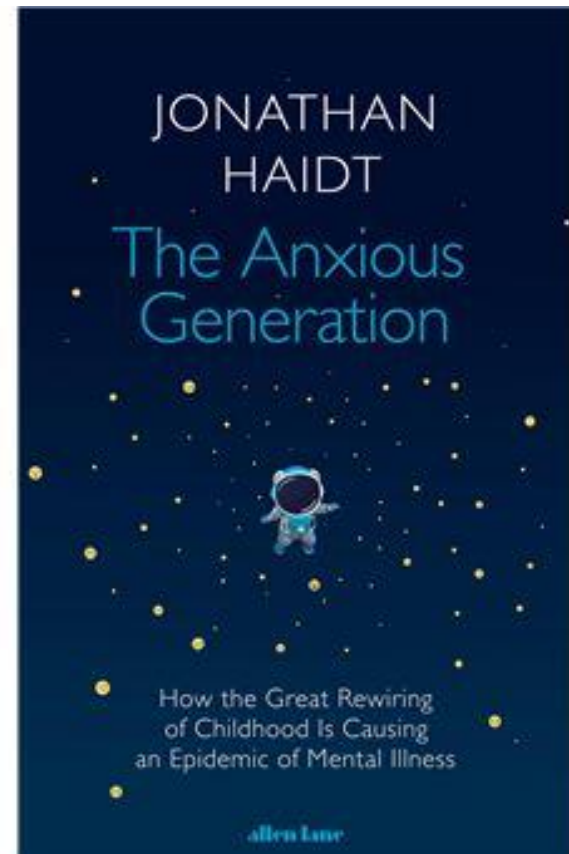
Motive-alignment boosts youth climate engagement:
Evidence from three field experiments

Macro-threat perceptions and youth mental health and identity formation

Stijn Van Petegem, Annalisa Soncini, Nele Flamant
& Nino Skhirtladze

Introduction

Youth mental health



Introduction

Youth mental health

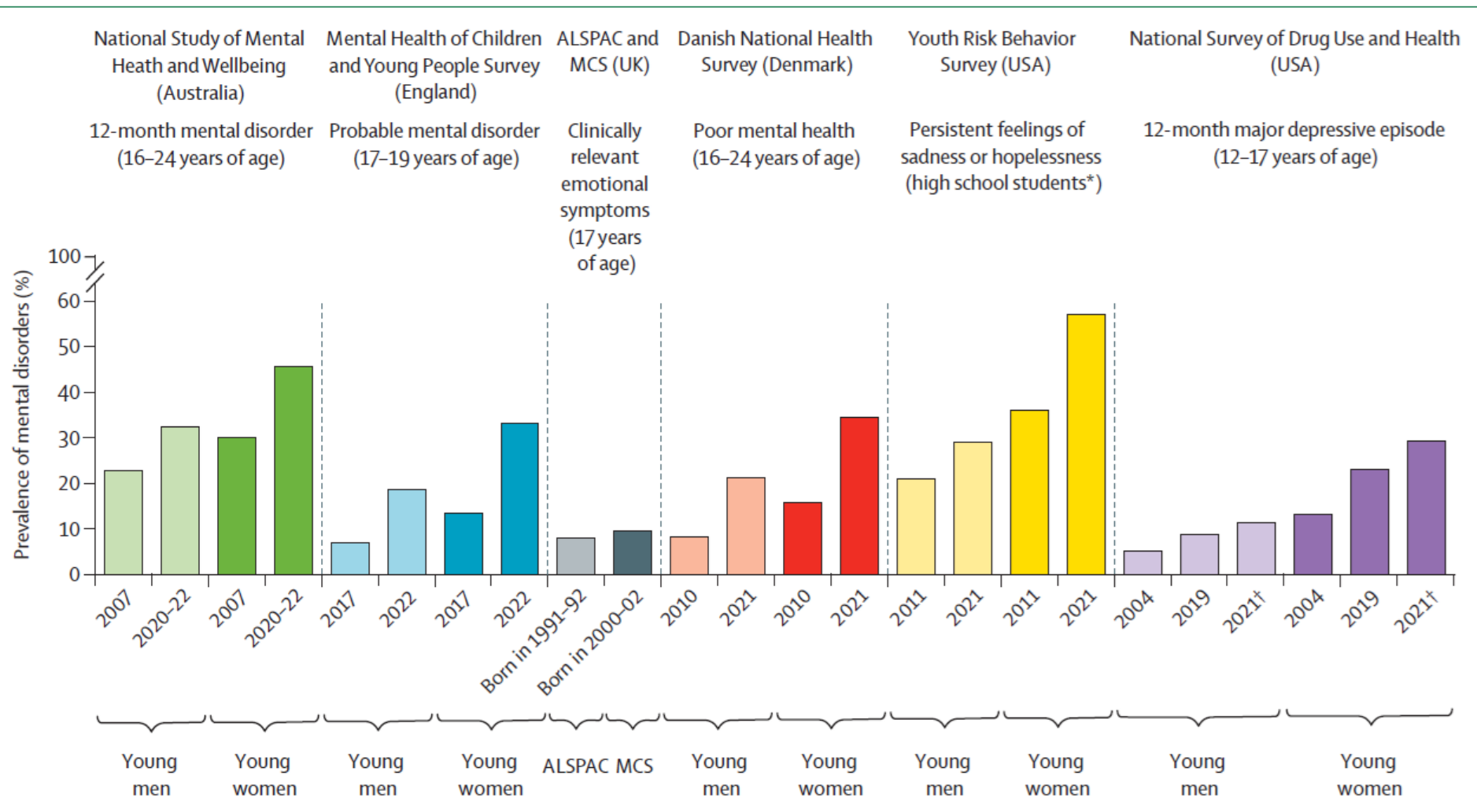


Figure 1: Youth mental health trends by country and sex

(McGorry et al, 2024)

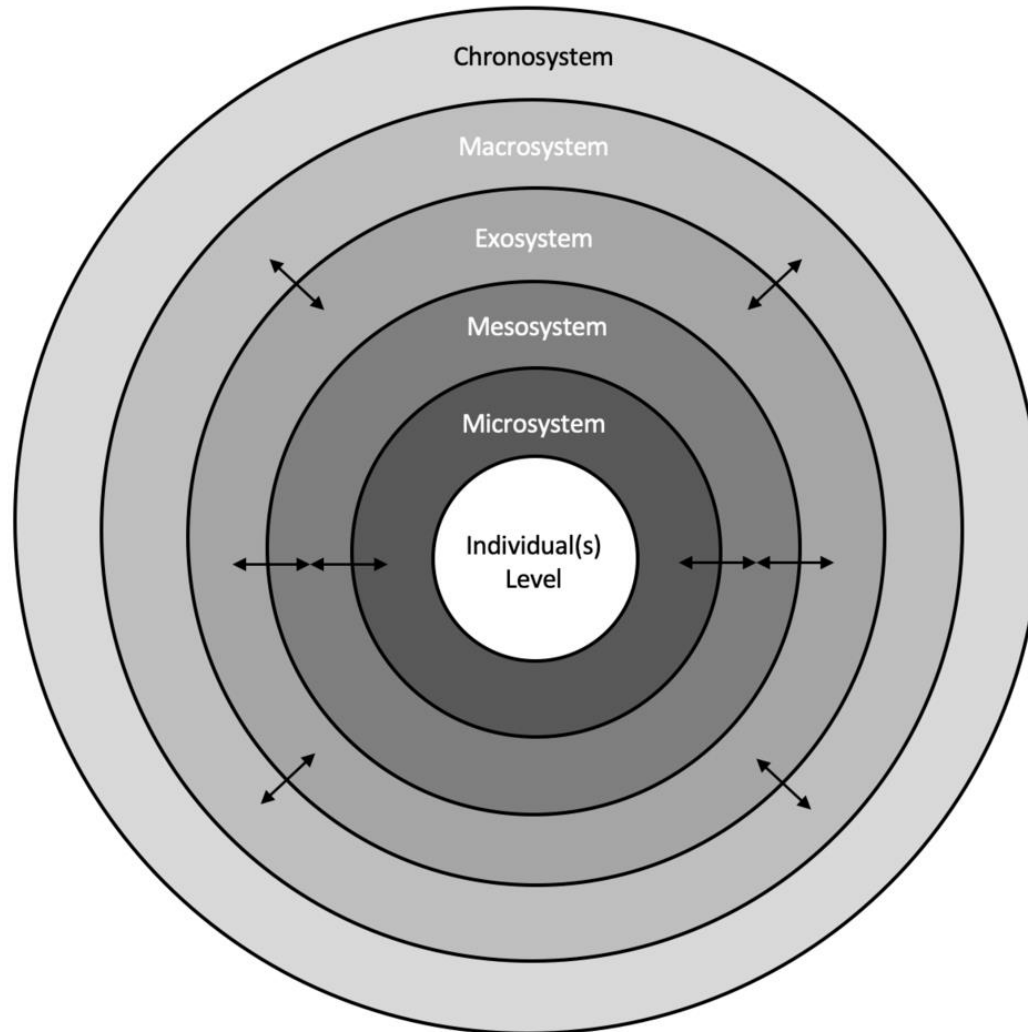
Introduction

Why is this happening?



Introduction

Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)



Introduction

WEF global risk report



HEALTH AND HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS

This is why 'polycrisis' is a useful way of looking at the world right now

Mar 7, 2023



Introduction

Youth mental health

The Journal of Child
Psychology and Psychiatry

Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 65:12 (2024), pp 1551–1553



doi:10.1111/jcpp.14065

Editorial: Adolescent mental health in a rapidly changing world

The Lancet Psychiatry Commission on youth mental health



Patrick D McGorry, Cristina Mei, Naeem Dalal*, Mario Alvarez-Jimenez, Sarah-Jayne Blakemore, Vivienne Browne, Barbara Dooley, Ian B Hickie, Peter B Jones, David McDaid, Cathrine Mihalopoulos, Stephen J Wood, Fatima Azzahra El Azzouzi*, Jessica Fazio*, Ella Gow*, Sadam Hanjabam*, Alan Hayes*, Amelia Morris*, Elina Pang*, Keerthana Paramasivam*, Isabella Quagliato Nogueira*, Jimmy Tan*, Steven Adelsheim, Matthew R Broome, Mary Cannon, Andrew M Chanen, Eric Y H Chen, Andrea Danese, Maryann Davis, Tamsin Ford, Pattie P Gonsalves, Matthew P Hamilton, Jo Henderson, Ann John, Frances Kay-Lambkin, Long K-D Le, Christian Kieling, Niall Mac Dhonnagáin, Ashok Malla, Dorien H Nieman, Debra Rickwood, Jo Robinson, Jai L Shah, Swaran Singh, Ian Soosay, Karen Tee, Jean Twenge, Lucia Valmaggia, Therese van Amelsvoort, Swapna Verma, Jon Wilson, Alison Yung, Srividya N Iyert, Eóin Killackey†

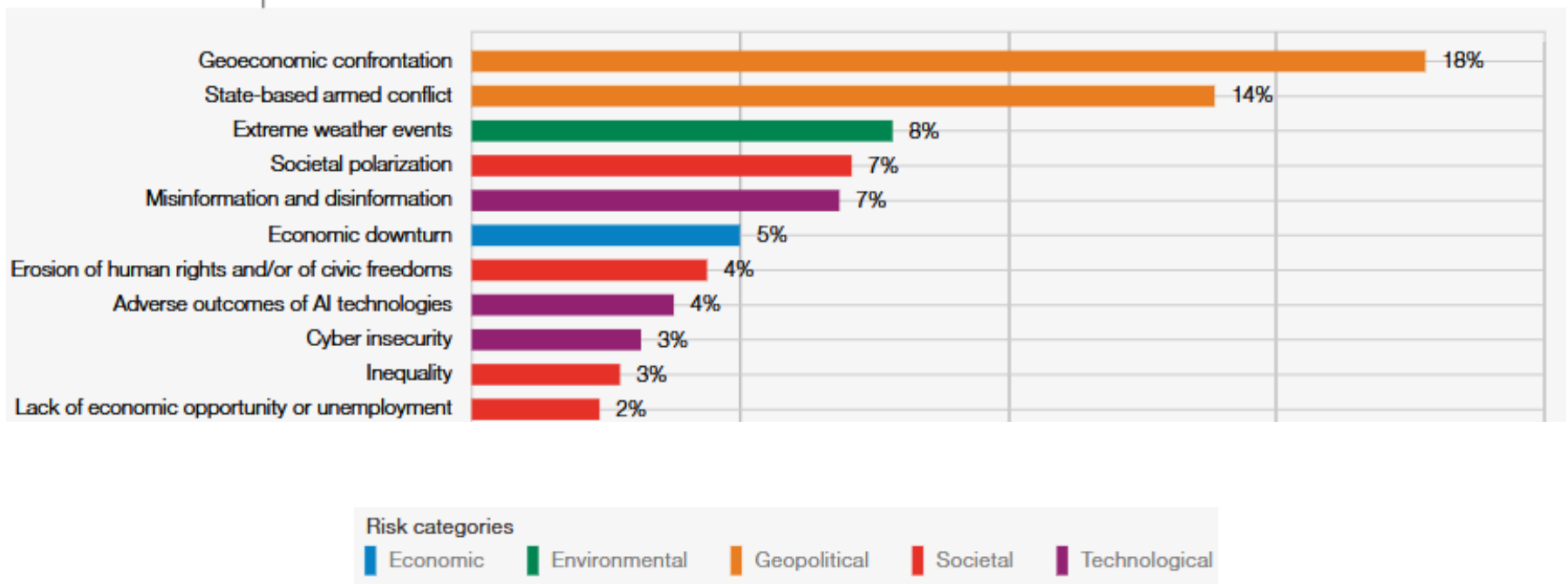
“The damage that some combination of these megatrends is inflicting is deep and widespread within societies and across the globe. Arguably, **young people communicate the warning signs of our modern world, and are indicating that our society and world are in serious trouble.**” (p.761)

Introduction

WEF global risk report 2026

FIGURE 2 | **Current Global Risk Landscape**

"Please select one risk that you believe is most likely to present a material crisis on a global scale in 2026."



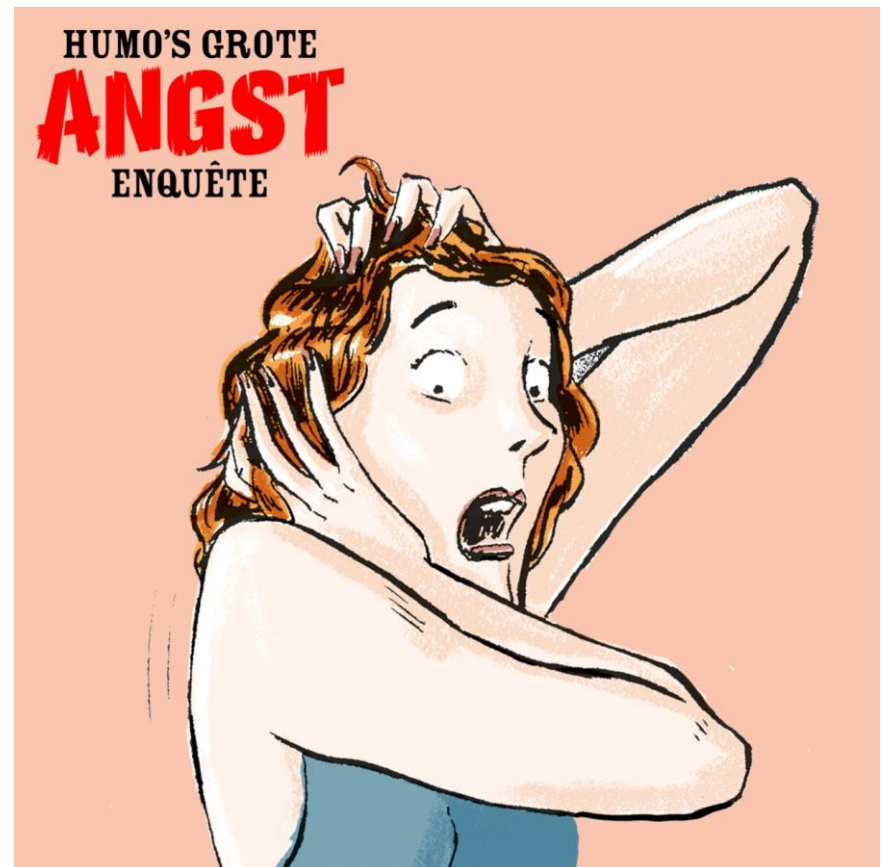
Introduction

Survey results

(HUMO, june 2022)

The Belgians are worried, concerned or afraid about...

Rising prices and the own financial situation	82%
War, terror, and international security	81%
Climate change and extreme weather	73%
Health (incl. mental), pandemics and diseases	70%
Political situation in Belgium and Europe	67%
Refugees and migration	64%
Digitalisation	59%



Introduction

Objectives

Macro-threat perceptions

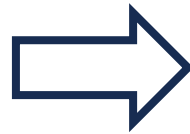
General threat beliefs
(worries, scarcity, instability)

Climate-related emotions

National job insecurity
Income inequality

Geopolitical worries
Dangerous worldviews

AI anxiety
Danger of misinformation



Youth mental health

Depressive symptoms
Anxiety symptoms

Life satisfaction
Subjective well-being

Identity development

Introduction

Objectives

1. Variable-centered approach
 - Controlling for trait anxiety
2. Person-centered approach
 - Profiles?

Methodology

Sample

N = 503 Belgian participants

- Spring 2025 – spring 2026

Age

- Range 16-25 years
- Mean = 19.15

Gender

- 79% women, 19% men, 1% other

Subjective SES

- M = 4.99 (range 1-10)

Methodology

Questionnaires

General threat beliefs

(WOT; 10 items; Gurland & Grolnick, 2005; $\alpha = .77$)

“Kids today face an unpredictable future. There can be prosperity one minute and poverty the next.”

“These are troubling times. Parents these days have reasons to be concerned.”

Climate-related negative emotions

(5 items; Ogunbode et al., 2021; $\alpha = .89$)

“When I think about climate change, I feel tense.”

Methodology

Questionnaires

Perceived national job insecurity

(3 items; Schoss et al., 2023; $\alpha = .80$)

“In Belgium, there is a general feeling that many people will soon lose their jobs.”

Perceived income inequality

(3 items; Sommet et al., 2018; $\alpha = .76$)

“In Belgium, there is a huge gap between the rich and the poor.”

Methodology

Questionnaires

Dangerous worldviews

(SWS; 6 items; Perry et al., 2013; $\alpha = .66$)

“There are many dangerous people in our society who will attack someone out of pure meanness, for no reason at all.”

Geopolitical worries

(6 items; Soncini et al., 2025; $\alpha = .82$)

“I am worried that the current geopolitical situation could lead to a global conflict.”

Methodology

Questionnaires

Perceived danger of misinformation

(3 items; Altay & Acerbi, 2024; $\alpha = .76$)

“How much of a threat do you believe ‘fake news’ is to our society?”

Artificial intelligence anxiety

(AIAS; 10 items; Wang & Wang, 2022; $\alpha = .87$)

“I am afraid that an AI may get out of control and malfunction.”

Methodology

Questionnaires

Depressive symptoms

(PHQ; 8 items; Kroenke et al., 2001; $\alpha = .82$)

Last two weeks...

“Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless.”

Anxiety symptoms

(GAD; 7 items; Plummer et al., 2016; $\alpha = .87$)

Last week...

“Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge.”

Methodology

Questionnaires

Life satisfaction (SWLS; 5 items; Diener et al., 1985; $\alpha = .79$)

“I am satisfied with my life.”

Subjective well-being (5 items; WHO index; $\alpha = .85$)

“I felt active and vigorous.”

Identity development (EPSI; 11 items; Rosenthal et al., 1981)

Synthesis: “I know what kind of person I am.” ($\alpha = .78$)

Confusion: “I feel mixed up.” ($\alpha = .73$)

Trait anxiety (STAI-T; 5 items; Zsido et al., 2020; $\alpha = .86$)

“I worry too much about things that do not really matter.”

Results

Descriptive statistics

	Mean	SD	Range
Anxiety symptoms	1.30	0.77	0-3
Depressive symptoms	1.45	0.69	0-3

Anxiety symptoms

- Minimal: 24.3%
- Mild: 29.6%
- Moderate: 28.0%
- Severe: 18.1%

Depressive symptoms

- No: 11.3%
- Mild: 26.6%
- Moderate: 20.0%
- Moderately severe: 23.3%
- Severe: 8.7%

Results

Descriptive statistics

	Mean	SD	Range
Anxiety symptoms	1.30	0.77	0-3
Depressive symptoms	1.45	0.69	0-3
Life satisfaction	3.02	0.82	1-5
Subjective well-being	2.23	0.97	0-5
Identity synthesis	3.36	0.74	1-5
Identity confusion	2.73	0.80	1-5
Trait anxiety	3.42	0.96	1-5

Results

Descriptive statistics

	Mean	SD	Range
General threat beliefs	3.90	0.58	1-5
Dangerous worldviews	3.46	0.62	1-5
Geopolitical worries	3.85	0.74	1-5
Climate-related emotions	2.94	1.04	1-5
Perceived job insecurity	3.30	0.78	1-5
Perceived economic inequality	3.87	0.80	1-5
Danger misinformation	3.26	0.59	1-4
AI anxiety	3.77	0.80	1-5

Results

Raw correlations

	Anx symp	Depr symp	Life sat	Subj WB	Id synth	Id conf
General threat beliefs	.35**	.32**	-.16**	-.25**	-.05	.26**
Dangerous worldviews	.25**	.21**	-.11*	-.21**	-.07	.17**
Geopolitical worries	.25**	.21**	-.05	-.09	-.02	.20**
Climate-related emotions	.31**	.22**	-.01	-.13**	-.13**	.21**
Perceived job insecurity	.26**	.24**	-.10*	-.13**	.01	.22**
Economic inequality	.19**	.18**	-.11*	-.10*	-.01	.15**
Danger misinformation	.10*	.08	-.05	-.04	.08	.08
AI anxiety	.28**	.25**	.02	-.12**	-.05	.16**

Results

Partial correlations

	Anx sympt	Depr sympt	Life sat	Subj WB	Id synth	Id conf
(Trait anxiety: correlation)	.65**	.57**	-.35**	-.45**	-.37**	.48**
General threat beliefs						
Dangerous worldviews						
Geopolitical worries						
Climate-related emotions						
Perceived job insecurity						
Economic inequality						
Danger misinformation						
AI anxiety						

Results

Partial correlations

	Anx symp	Depr symp	Life sat	Subj WB	Id synth	Id conf
(Trait anxiety: correlation)	.65**	.57**	-.35**	-.45**	-.37**	.48**
General threat beliefs	.18**	.17**				.12**
Dangerous worldviews	.14**	.10*				.07
Geopolitical worries	.18**	.06				.08
Climate-related emotions	.18**	.07				.09*
Perceived job insecurity	.18**	.16**				.14**
Economic inequality	.12**	.13**				.09*
Danger misinformation	.01	.01				.02
AI anxiety	.13**	.11*				.03

Results

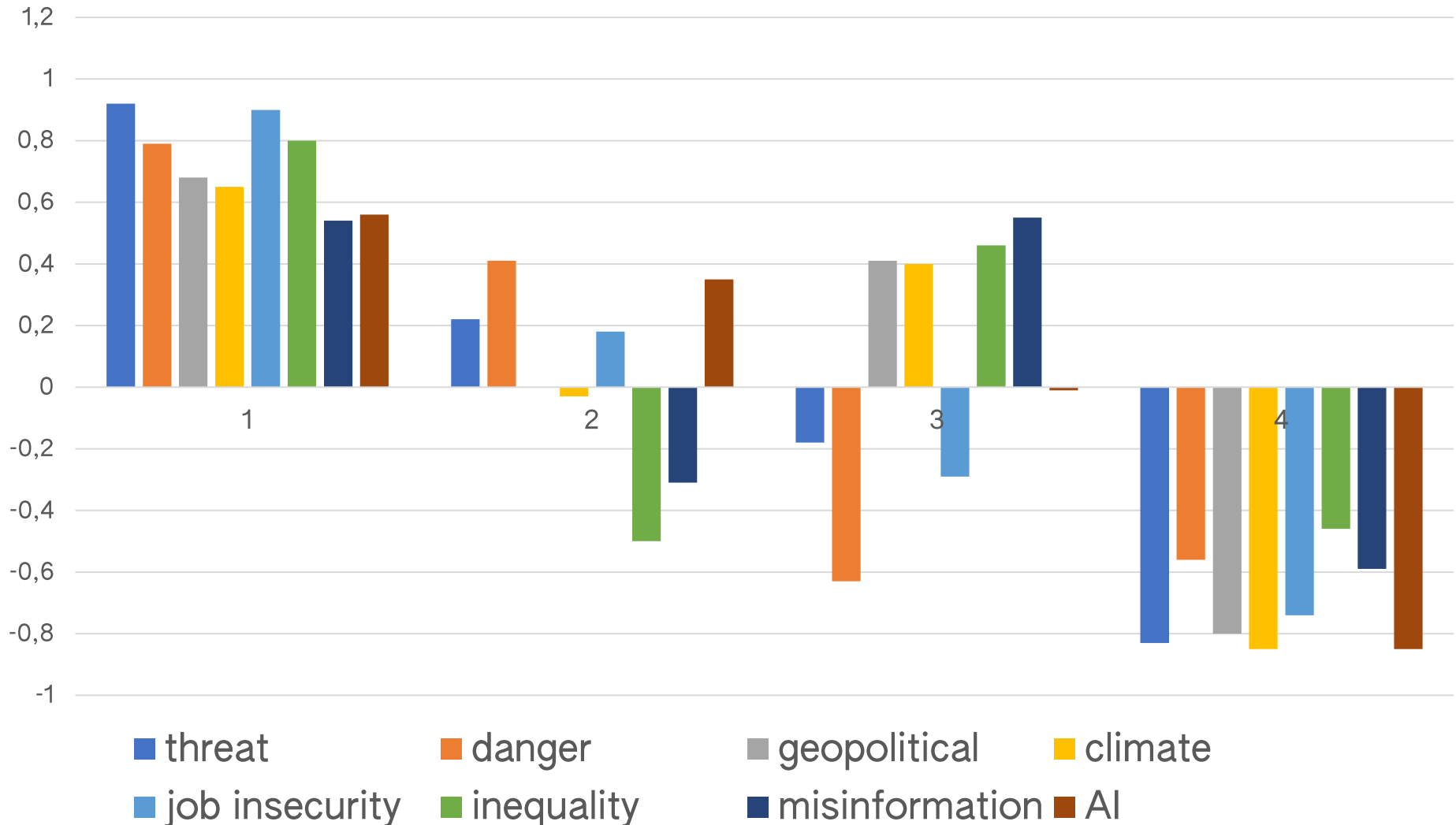
Partial correlations

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(Trait anxiety: correlation)	.65**	.57**	-.35**	-.45**	-.37**	.48**
General threat beliefs	.18**	.17**	-.05	-.12**	.09	.12**
Dangerous worldviews	.14**	.10*	-.03	-.12**	.02	.07
Geopolitical worries	.18**	.06	.05	.04	.09*	.08
Climate-related emotions	.18**	.07	.09*	.00	-.03	.09*
Perceived job insecurity	.18**	.16**	-.03	-.04	.10*	.14**
Economic inequality	.12**	.13**	-.06	-.04	.05	.09*
Danger misinformation	.01	.01	-.01	-.02	.14**	.02
AI anxiety	.13**	.11*	.13**	.01	.07	.03

Results

Cluster analysis

Cluster 1: very stressed out (23.2%)
Cluster 2: danger/AI worries (30.3%)
Cluster 3: societally concerned (23.6%)
Cluster 4: carefree (22.9%)



Results

Cluster differences

	cl.1	cl.2	cl.3	cl.4	<i>p</i>	η^2
Anxiety symptoms	1.71 (a)	1.35 (b)	1.25 (b)	0.91 (c)	<.001	.13
Depressive symptoms	1.76 (a)	1.51 (b)	1.40 (b)	1.18 (c)	<.001	.09
Life satisfaction	2.81 (a)	3.03 (a,b)	3.08 (a,b)	3.12 (b)	.02	.02
Subjective well-being	1.92 (a)	2.09 (a,b)	2.32 (b,c)	2.56 (c)	<.001	.06
Identity synthesis	3.35	3.31	3.36	3.40	.79	.00
Identity confusion	3.01 (a)	2.80 (a,b)	2.73 (b)	2.44 (c)	<.001	.06

Discussion

Preliminary conclusions

Macro-threat perceptions

- Important source of distress (mental health, identity)
- Beyond trait predisposition for anxiety

Cluster analysis

- Two pronounced clusters
- Two clusters with specific constellations

!! Importance of considering macro-context

Thanks!

Questions or thoughts?

www.safesorry.be