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Research article

Probing the Personal and Social Worries of Belarusians: A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to identify the worries of Belarusian citizens in the context of economic, political, cultural, and global changes. Based on data obtained from semi-structured interviews in December 2024 ($N = 43$, including 29 women and 14 men, aged 18 to 66 years, all were citizens of Belarus), current worries were identified, including concerns about the health of loved ones, economic instability, uncertainty about the future and the fate of children, as well as national and global threats such as migration, loss of traditions, environmental disasters, and the development of artificial intelligence. Content analysis of the participants' responses allowed them to be structured for the next stage of quantitative analysis, limiting subjectivity in the interpretation of the wording and comparing the results across the entire sample. The results have revealed marked gender differences: women are more likely to express anxiety about socio-economic and existential issues, while men are more likely to express anxiety about cultural identity and uncertainty. Of particular importance are the cultural and linguistic situation and the identities of Belarusians at different levels, which influence the perception of threats. The authors emphasize the importance of further studying the interrelationships between worries, values and psychological health in order to understand social attitudes in the country. The article fills an existing gap in research on the worries of Belarusians and offers a systematic approach to their analysis.

Key words: personal and social worries, Belarus, anxieties, threats, identities, global risks, values, psychological health

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Introduction

According to psychologist Paul Ekman's theory of emotions (Ekman, 2007), fear is one of the seven basic universal emotions inherent in all humans without exception. Ekman argues that fear arises when there is a threat of harm, whether

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physical, emotional, or psychological, real or imagined (Ekman, 2007). However, the experience of fear that interests Ekman's classical theory does not primarily concern social fears and worries, which we associate with the perception of threats and challenges affecting society as a whole. Nevertheless, similar emotions, triggered by large economic, political, religious, ethnic, technological, and other contexts that emanate threat, have been widely studied (Burger et al., 2023; Hinks, 2024; Jetten et al., 2021; Manning et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2024). Moreover, in addition to the “frightening” agenda shaped by events within any given state, the unstable geopolitical situation in the world against the backdrop of global risks (Mutz, 2024) leads to the fact that the population of different countries are experiencing increased social worries that reflect social moods in society and signal real or potential threats to the satisfaction of natural needs for psychological well-being. Indeed, social worries are described in social psychology in the context of their impact on psychological health and the development of psychological problems such as distress, psychosomatic disorders, anxiety, and depression.

Of course, the triggers and processes that are responsible for creating social worry in different countries around the world do not bypass Belarus either. Ultimately, this leads to the emergence of both more standard worries (manifested in various states) and those specific to Belarus. However, despite the fact that worry and its impact have been actively studied in Russia and European countries (Ermolaev et al., 2021; Hajek et al., 2023), such research is scarce in Belarus. One of the most striking studies of fears and anxieties of Belarusians is a relatively old work by sociologist L. Galich (2017), which found that the strongest worries of Belarusians are related to the future of their children.

Meanwhile, Belarus is far more valuable for socio-psychological research. For example, the works of N. Bekus (2010, 2014, 2023) examine in detail the concept of identities characteristic of Belarus and associated with linguistic, national, political, and other manifestations. In particular, the author writes about the “official” and “alternative” “Belarusianness” specific to Belarus, which encompasses language policy, historical memory, and so on.

Given that Belarusian society is characterized as bilingual, adherent to two branches of Christianity, and possessing specific features related to the region of residence and informational and political orientation, studying social fears in Belarus is particularly valuable. Furthermore, the relevance of this study is reinforced by the need for contemporary research on social worries characteristic of Belarusian residents in the current conditions. In terms of novelty, this work will fill a gap in research on the current worries of Belarusian residents by conducting empirical research and compiling relevant ratings.

Literature review

One of the influential theories devoted to the study of worries was developed by K. Boehnke, S. Schwartz and colleagues (Boehnke et al., 1998; Chodorow, 1989; Hamilton et al., 1988; Poikolainen et al., 2004). It is based on the concept of macro- and microworries, which differ in the object of concern and the area of life with

which the concern is associated (Boehnke & Schwartz, 1997). Thus, micro-worries are associated with an individual's personal problems, while macro-worries involve broader social contexts. According to the authors (Boehnke & Schwartz, 1997), microworries associated with personal problems correlate with poorer mental health, whereas macroworries, reflecting perceptions of social threats, on the contrary, are associated with better mental health or, at least, do not have a significant impact on it. Thus, worrying about oneself and one's loved ones has more negative consequences for mental health than worrying about social and global issues.

As a result, in line with theory, micro- and macroworries can be defined as follows: it is an emotionally disturbing awareness that the condition of the object of worry does not correspond to the desired one.

As already mentioned, macroworries imply concern about social or global contexts saturated with threats that affect the lives of large groups of people. At the same time, such macroworries/social fears are a relatively recent phenomenon (Bauman, 2006; Bude, 2014; Furedi, 1997), associated with the concepts of risk societies and liquid modernity (Bauman, 2006; Beck, 1992, 2008; Giddens, E., 1984; Giddens, A., 1991). Thus, many sociologists argue that “liquid fear” has become the dominant tone of modern society (Bauman, 2006; Bude, 2014; Furedi, 1997). In Bauman's terms (Bauman, 2006), this refers to a vague and uncertain “liquid” fear that is “fed” by constant uncertainty in late modern societies, where reliability and confidence are eroded by constant changes and revisions of reference points.

Some authors even argue that modern society is characterized by “multiple crises” (Brand, 2009) or “poly-crisis” (Lawrence et al., 2024). These terms denote a state in which crises of increasing severity follow one another at an accelerating rate, thus becoming a conditional state of society (Mutz, 2024).

In turn, sociologist A. Giddens, using terms similar to Bauman's theory of “liquid fear,” writes about a “risk society”. This society (Giddens, A., 1991), in which, in his opinion, modern humanity finds itself, undermines previous economic and political stability, as a result of which no country, generation, or individual is immune from the crisis uncertainties that exist in the spheres of labor, education, new technologies, the ecological state of the environment, and the healthcare system (Galich, 2017).

Of course, the numerous crises discussed in public discourse, whether wars or environmental disasters, can cause worry (Mutz, 2024). Thus, in this article, by ‘global risks’ we mean probable events, phenomena, or conditions that can simultaneously cause serious damage to many countries or sectors of the global economy (Nestik & Zadorin, 2020); global risks cause mass (collective) worries — non-specific worries (anxiety, apprehension, concern) that affect a significant number of people influenced by threats common to these people (non-individual) (Nestik & Zadorin, 2020).

Worries, including social ones, serve as unmistakable indicators of the needs and values that people lack and that they need to satisfy and achieve (Barinov, 2019). For example, the worry of war is based on the need for security, the worry of impoverishment is based on the existential threat, and the worry of civil war is based on the need to live in a stable and unified state.

Given the importance of the topic, the research community around the world is responding to the need to study fears and their impact on people's lives. Studies in different regions of the world reveal different sources of fear and worry (Nestik & Zadorin, 2020). In Latin America, South Africa, India, and China, global climate change¹ is the biggest concern, surpassing other threats for the inhabitants of these countries.² This worry is associated with poorer mental health, increased anxiety, depression, and stress.

Meanwhile, in the Middle East, the United States, and Europe, people most often point to international terrorism as the most serious threat.³ Poland and Ukraine stand out for their concerns about Russia's influence, reflecting the particular geopolitical dynamics in these regions.⁴ For Israel, the central security issue is Iran's nuclear program, which causes significant worry among the population.⁵

In 2018, a study conducted by ComRes for the Global Challenges Foundation found that risks associated with climate change, natural disasters and catastrophes, as well as politically motivated violence and epidemics, were most significant for respondents from Australia, Brazil, China, Germany, India, Russia, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States,⁶ highlighting the commonality of global threats.

Worry about crime has also been widely studied. In European countries, high crime rates have been found to correlate positively with levels of worry among the population and negatively with subjective well-being (Bug et al., 2015; Powdthavee, 2005). However, the perception of crime also plays an important role: it reduces life satisfaction even in the absence of personal experience of victimization (Brenig & Proeger, 2018; Manning et al., 2022).

A separate area of research examines worries related to the development of digital technologies and artificial intelligence. These include the threat of job loss, loss of control over technologies, and privacy violations (Frey & Osborne, 2017; Li & Huang, 2020; Sehwat, 2017)

Thus, research shows that, across countries, worries caused by economic, political, environmental, and technological changes have a considerable impact on people's mental health, especially in contexts of social instability.

In contrast, in the context of Belarus, there is a lack of regular and diverse research. According to L. Galich (2017), one of the significant concerns among Belarusians is worry about the safety and future of their children. The study has

¹ *Globally, people point to ISIS and climate change as leading security threats.* (2017, August 1). Pew Research Center. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/08/01/globally-people-point-to-isis-and-climate-change-as-leading-security-threats/>.

² *Climate change seen as top global threat.* (2015, July 14). Pew Research Center. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/07/14/climate-change-seen-as-top-global-threat/>.

³ *Climate change seen as top global threat.* (2015, July 14). Pew Research Center. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/07/14/climate-change-seen-as-top-global-threat/>.

⁴ *Climate change seen as top global threat.* (2015, July 14). Pew Research Center. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/07/14/climate-change-seen-as-top-global-threat/>.

⁵ *Climate change seen as top global threat.* (2015, July 14). Pew Research Center. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/07/14/climate-change-seen-as-top-global-threat/>.

⁶ Global Challenges Foundation. (2018). *Attitudes to global risk and governance survey 2018.* Stockholm. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: <https://globalchallenges.org/app/uploads/2023/06/Survey--Attitudes-to-Global-Risk-and-Governance-Models-2018.pdf>.

found that approximately one in four Belarusians (25.2%) often experiences this feeling. This reflects the fundamental human need to protect one's offspring and ensure a stable future for the next generation.

Worries related to economic instability have also been revealed. In particular, about 17.0% of Belarusians surveyed are very concerned about the prospect of becoming poor and destitute, and 19.8% are very worried about this. The problem of unemployment is also a cause for concern among a significant part of the population: 33.7% of the respondents are concerned about it. Another common worry among Belarusians is the prospect of loneliness and helplessness in old age, feared by 33.5% of the respondents. Worries related to personal safety from external threats are also present: 25.5% of Belarusians fear becoming victims of crime. A similar number (25.5%) fear becoming victims of accidents at work, in transport, etc. (Galich, 2017).

Similar trends have been shown by the MASMI survey for the period 2021–2024, identifying the following key worries and concerns among the Belarusian population.

In 2021, the survey showed that 95% of Belarusians were concerned about the economic situation in the country and expressed worries about rising prices⁷. Worries about the economic situation continued to dominate in 2022. The main factor causing concern and prompting people to cut back on spending was rising prices (82% of the respondents).⁸

In 2024, economic concerns were compounded by worries about the rapid development of information technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), which was in line with global trends. The MASMI study revealed that the main IT worry for Belarusians was dependence on AI, feared by 21% of respondents. Second in importance (19% of the respondents) was the fear of uncontrolled AI development, and third in importance was the fear of AI replacing people in the workplace (18% of the respondents). The prospect of AI surpassing human intelligence in terms of the quality of its results (16% of the respondents) and the speed of AI implementation (12% of the respondents) also caused significant concern.⁹

Thus, according to the MASMI study, economic concerns related to rising prices¹⁰, declining incomes, and the need to economize remained the top worries for

⁷ MASMI. (2021, June 17). *How are Belarusian consumers feeling in 2021? A MASMI study*. Belretail. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: <https://belretail.by/news/kak-chuvstvuyut-sebya-belarusskie-potrebiteli-v-godu-issledovanie-masmi> (In Russian).

⁸ *Fear, anxiety, a sense of powerlessness: How Belarusians are coping with the crisis and what they are saving on in difficult times*. (2022, July 27). Myfin.by. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: <https://myfin.by/article/money/na-cem-ekonomat-belorusy-v-krizis-rezultaty-oprosa> (In Russian).

⁹ *Study: AI dependence is the main IT concern of Belarusians*. (2024, July 25). Economic newspaper. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: <https://neg.by/novosti/otkrytyj-issledovanie-zavisimost-ot-ii-glavnaya-it-trevoga-belorusov/> (In Russ.); PRIME PRESS. (2024, July 25). *Study: AI dependence is Belarusians' top IT anxiety*. Business News. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: https://primepress.by/news/kompanii/issledovanie_zavisimost_ot_ii_glavnaya_it_trevoga_belorusov-52260/ (In Russ.).

¹⁰ MASMI. (2024, March 7). *Belarusians are optimistic about 2024 and plan to take more vacations. MASMI research*. Belretail. Retrieved June 20, 2025, from: <https://belretail.by/article/belorusyi-s-optimiz-mom-smotryat-na-god-i-planiruyut-bolshe-otdyihat-issledovanie-masmi> (In Russ.).

Belarusians from 2021 to 2024. These were compounded by new challenges posed by technological developments, particularly artificial intelligence, and its potential impact on employment and social structure.

The problem of this study is that the existing and reviewed research works provide scattered and fragmentary data on the worries of Belarusians, making it impossible to form a broader spectrum of what concerns the residents of Belarus at the individual and societal levels. In accordance with Uri Bronfenbrenner's concept of ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), which identifies three levels of the environment that influence the individual, we will distinguish:

– Micro-level — the immediate environment and everyday life of the individual;

– Meso-level — the socio-political and economic situation in the country;

– Macro-level — global processes and threats.

This structure allows for a systematic identification of the localization and content of worries, grouping them into a three-level classification that corresponds to the basic theoretical framework for studying worries and anxieties presented in the works of K. Boehnke and S. Schwartz (Boehnke et al., 1998; Boehnke & Schwartz, 1997; Schwartz et al., 2000).

With this in mind, a pilot survey of Belarusians' worries was conducted, the purpose of which was to identify the most significant anxieties related to their personal lives, Belarusian society and the world at large.

Methods

Participants

The sample included 43 citizens of Belarus (29 females and 14 males), aged 18 to 66 years, permanently residing in the country. The sample primarily consisted of individuals aged 18 to 35 years (24 people), with the majority residing in the Minsk region (21 people). Taking into account the size of the sample's localities, the majority resided in the regional center (22 people), followed by the district center (19 people).

The sampling strategy was non-random based on the principles of accessibility and voluntariness (convenience sample). Participation was unpaid.

Techniques

The *qualitative part* of the study included semi-structured interviews with the participants using the authors' interview guide with questions about worry. The interview guide is as follows:

1) Regarding your daily life, what current or potential phenomena and events have caused you the most worry, concern, or fear (or have caused you the most worry, concern, or fear in the past year)?

2) Regarding the situation in Belarus, what current or potential events cause you personally (or have caused you in the past year) the greatest worry and concern?

3) Regarding the world as a whole, what causes you personally the greatest worry and concern (or has caused you in the past year)?

The guide was developed using the principles of conversational design aimed at obtaining relevant data on the respondents' experiences through a structured discussion script built around topics broken down into questions that move from the general to the specific or from the simple to the complex. This allowed for a semi-structured conversation, beginning with contextual questions (e.g., about everyday life) and moving on to more focused and emotional aspects (e.g., about global threats). Probing and prompting questions were also asked during the interviews to explore the topic in greater depth. Thus, the guide's development process was aimed at achieving the research goal.

The interview also included a number of questions regarding the respondent's socio-demographic data: gender, age, place of residence (region), populated area (examples: regional center, district center, village council center, smaller settlement). Informed consent was obtained from the participants before the study began. The interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. The survey was conducted in December 2024.

Then, a content analysis of the respondents' answers was conducted. The analysis identified words and phrases that were recurred in the respondents' answers when they described their personal and social worries.

The next stage of the study involved transformation for subsequent *quantitative analysis*. For each key worry identified through the qualitative analysis of the interviews, binary variables were created. A value of 0 in these variables indicated that the respondent did not mention this worry, while a value of 1 indicated its presence in the responses. This approach made it possible to standardize heterogeneous qualitative data, eliminate the subjectivity in wording, and enable the comparison, contrast, and systematic analysis of information in the sample.

Data analysis

Thus, the study was conducted using a mixed methodology:

– *qualitative* — semi-structured interviews and their content analysis;

– *quantitative* — descriptive statistics and frequency distribution analysis.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the mean values and standard deviations using Jamovi software version 2.6.44.0. Frequency analysis was used to construct the worry ranking, and the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to check the normality of the data distribution. No additional statistical analysis was performed.

Results

It is worth noting that the study often exhibits significant asymmetry, and the standard deviations for most worries are quite high. Overall, these indicators confirm that the distribution of worries in the sample is binary, with pronounced heterogeneity in perceptions and significant differences in the frequency of worries across the categories. The Shapiro-Wilk test for all the variables with $p < 0.001$ rejects the hypothesis of normality, which is also explained by the binary nature of the data.

The *M* and *SD* values reported in the text reflect the mean proportion of the respondents who mentioned a specific fear and the standard deviation of these

binary variables. Thus, descriptive statistics are used to describe the prevalence of each fear in the sample.

It should be emphasized that statistical comparisons between the male and female respondents were descriptive in nature. Separate frequencies and proportions of fear mentions, as well as 95% confidence intervals for the mean values, were calculated for the male and female subsamples. Formal significance tests for between-group differences (e.g., *chi-square* tests, *F*-tests, *t*-tests, etc.) were intentionally not used due to the small size of the male subsample ($N = 14$), which reduces the statistical power and reliability of the estimates. Therefore, gender differences were interpreted with the caveat that they were purely experimental.

Overall, the results of descriptive statistics have confirmed the prevalence of a number of key worries in the sample and the variability of perceptions of different worries for different levels of worry and anxiety.

Personal worries (micro-level)

Initially, data on personal worries and anxieties of the participants were analyzed. Descriptive statistics showed that the highest average value was for worry about the health of loved ones, indicating a high prevalence of this worry in the sample ($M = 0.674$, $SD = 0.474$, $W = 0.591$, $p < 0.001$). Mean values of approximately 0.4–0.6 were observed for worries related to poverty ($M = 0.628$, $SD = 0.489$, $W = 0.613$, $p < 0.001$), worries about children and grandchildren ($M = 0.442$, $SD = 0.502$, $W = 0.632$, $p < 0.001$), and uncertainty about the future ($M = 0.488$, $SD = 0.506$, $W = 0.637$, $p < 0.001$).

For each of the personal worries studied, the frequency of its manifestation in the sample was assessed. The frequency data are presented as the number of mentions of worry by the respondents, forming a rating (Table 1 presents top 15 personal worries (micro-level)).

Table 1

TOP 15 – ranking of personal worries (micro-level) of Belarusians ($N = 43$), December 2024

Worry (variable)	Number of mentions	Mentions in the sample, %
Health of loved ones	29	67.40
Lack of money	27	62.80
Obscurity, uncertainty about the future	21	48.80
Worry for children, grandchildren	19	44.20
Inability to realize one's potential	18	41.90
Vulnerability to the authorities	14	32.60
Fear of terrorist attacks	12	27.90
Meaninglessness of life	9	20.90
Deterioration of family relationships	8	18.60
Fear of death	6	14.00
Actions of enemies and ill-wishers	5	11.60
Threat of job loss	4	9.30
Loneliness, abandonment	3	7.00
Nothing causes worries	2	4.70
Difficult to answer	1	2.30

The analysis showed that the most widespread worries were related to the health of loved ones (67.4%), economic difficulties (62.8%), and uncertainty about

the future (48.8%). A significant proportion of the participants expressed worries in these areas, indicating high levels of worry. However, worries about job loss (9.3%), enemy actions (11.6%), and loneliness (7.0%) were less pronounced. It is worth noting that only a small proportion of the respondents reported no worries (4.7%) or found it difficult to answer (2.3%). Overall, the data have revealed a wide range of social and psychological concerns among the study group, highlighting the prevalence of anxiety, especially regarding loved ones as well as economic instability.

As for the distribution of personal worries between the male and female respondents, the women experience most personal worries significantly more often than the men. The mean values show that the women more often than the men reported worrying about the health of their loved ones ($M_{\text{women}} = 0.793$, $M_{\text{men}} = 0.429$). In contrast, the men show higher mean values for “unknown/uncertain future” ($M_{\text{men}} = 0.571$ vs. $M_{\text{women}} = 0.448$) and comparable values for worry about poverty ($M_{\text{women}} = 0.621$, $M_{\text{men}} = 0.643$). The 95% confidence intervals for the mean values overlap for most indicators, but for worrying about the health of loved ones, the confidence interval for the women (0.636–0.950) is significantly higher than for the men (0.132–0.725), indicating a more consistent prevalence of this worry among the women in the sample (Table 2).

Table 2

**Ranking of personal worries among Belarusian men and women
(N = 43, 29 women and 14 men), December 2024**

Women (W)			Difference (W – M), p-p.	Men (M)			Difference (W – M), p-p.
Worry	Number of mentions	%		Worry	Number of mentions	%	
Health of loved ones	23	53.5	+39.5	Lack of money	9	20.9	+21.0
Lack of money	18	41.9	+21.0	Obscurity, uncertainty about the future	8	18.6	+11.6
Worry about children and grandchildren	16	37.2	+30.2	Vulnerability to the authorities	6	14.0	+4.6
Inability to realize one's potential	14	32.6	+23.3	The health of loved ones	6	14.0	+39.5
Obscurity, uncertainty about the future	13	30.2	+11.6	Meaninglessness of life	4	9.3	+2.3
Fear of terrorist attacks	9	20.9	+13.9	Inability to realize one's potential	4	9.3	+23.3
Vulnerability to the authorities	8	18.6	+4.6	Worry for children and grandchildren	3	7.0	+30.2
Deterioration of family relationships	6	14.0	+9.3	Fear of terrorist attacks	3	7.0	+13.9
Fear of death	5	11.6	+9.3	Threat of job loss	2	4.7	0.0
Meaninglessness of life	5	11.6	+2.3	Deteriorating family relationships	2	4.7	+9.3
Actions of enemies and ill-wishers	4	9.3%	+7.0	Fear of death	1	2.3%	+9.3

Table 2, ending

Women (W)			Difference (W – M), p.p.	Men (M)			Difference (W – M), p.p.
Worry	Number of mentions	%		Worry	Number of mentions	%	
Threat of job loss	2	4.7	0.0	Actions of enemies and ill-wishers	1	2.3	+7.0
Loneliness, abandonment	2	4.7	+2.4	Loneliness, abandonment	1	2.3	+2.4
Nothing causes worries	1	2.3	0.0	Nothing causes worries	1	2.3	0.0
Difficult to answer	1	2.3	+2.3	Difficult to answer	0	0.0	+2.3

Note. The left side of the table is sorted by decreasing frequency of mentions among the women, the right side by decreasing frequency of mentions among the men; “Difference (W – M)” is in percentage points (p.p.), with positive values indicating more frequent mentions among the women.

In the sample, the women significantly more often express worry about the health of their loved ones. The men more often report worry about an uncertain future and are comparable to the women in terms of worry about financial difficulties.

It should also be noted that the small size of the male subsample ($n = 14$) reduces the power and stability of the estimates for the men; the observed differences need to be confirmed in a larger and more balanced sample.

Worries for Belarus (meso-level)

The main observations regarding the analysis of worries related to Belarus are as follows. The variable “Price increases, impoverishment of the population” has the highest mean value ($M = 0.674$, $SD = 0.474$, $W = 0.591$, $p < 0.001$), which indicates a high proportion of the respondents expressing concern about the economic situation.

The zone of significant concern (mean values of approximately 0.2–0.4) includes such worries as the threat of attack by other states ($M = 0.372$, $SD = 0.489$, $W = 0.613$, $p < 0.001$), interethnic conflicts ($M = 0.233$, $SD = 0.427$, $W = 0.524$, $p < 0.001$), restrictions on leaving the country ($M = 0.442$, $SD = 0.502$, $W = 0.632$, $p < 0.001$), economic crisis ($M = 0.419$, $SD = 0.499$, $W = 0.627$, $p < 0.001$), loss of cultural traditions ($M = 0.442$, $SD = 0.502$, $W = 0.632$, $p < 0.001$), population migration ($M = 0.465$, $SD = 0.505$, $W = 0.635$, $p < 0.001$), Western sanctions ($M = 0.233$, $SD = 0.427$, $W = 0.524$, $p < 0.001$), etc.

Some worries were hardly ever mentioned (e.g., the threat of mass starvation ($M = 0.0233$, $SD = 0.152$, $W = 0.140$, $p < 0.001$) and the threat of Belarusization ($M = 0.00$), reflecting the low significance of these issues in the minds of the respondents.

Thus, overall, economic worries predominate (67.4%), followed by migration-cultural and political worries (approximately 44–46% and about 40%, respectively), then external threats (37.2% and below), while a number of potential worries are perceived as less significant.

The top 15 worries for their country (meso-level) are presented in Table 3.

Table 4 shows an analysis of the frequency of worries by gender.

Table 3

**TOP 15 – Belarusians’ worries for their country (meso-level)
(N = 43), December 2024**

Worry (variable)	Number of mentions	Mentions in the sample, %
Rising prices, impoverishment of the population	29	67.40
Migration of the population outside the country	20	46.50
Restrictions on leaving the country	19	44.20
Loss of Belarusian cultural traditions	19	44.20
Use of the Belarusian army in foreign conflicts	19	44.20
Economic crisis, decline in production	18	41.90
Threat of dictatorship and mass repression	17	39.50
Reputation of Belarus and Belarusians in Western countries	16	37.20
Threat of attack by other states	16	37.20
Low prevalence of the Belarusian language in all spheres of life	16	37.20
Presence of foreign troops, related infrastructure, and weapons on the territory of Belarus	16	37.20
Slowing of the Internet, restriction of access to information resources	14	32.60
Loss of independence and sovereignty	11	25.60
Environmental problems	11	25.60
Interethnic conflicts	10	23.30

Table 4

**Ranking of worries among Belarusian men and women for their country
(N = 43, 29 women and 14 men), December 2024**

Women (W)			Difference (W – M), p.p.	Men (M)			Difference (W – M), p.p.
Worry	Number of mentions	%		Worry	Number of mentions	%	
Rising prices, impoverishment of the population	20	46.5	+25.6	Rising prices, impoverishment of the population	9	20.9	+25.6
Use of the Belarusian army in foreign conflicts	15	34.9	+25.6	Loss of Belarusian cultural traditions	8	18.6	+14.0
Threat of attack by other states	13	30.2	+23.2	Restrictions on leaving the country	7	16.3	+11.6
Migration of the population outside the country	13	30.2	+13.9	Migration of the population outside the country	7	16.3	+13.9
Economic crisis, decline in production	12	27.9	+13.9	Threat of dictatorship and mass repression	7	16.3	+7.0
Restrictions on leaving the country	12	27.9	+11.6	Economic crisis, decline in production	6	14.0	+13.9
Presence of foreign troops, related infrastructure, and weapons on the territory of Belarus	11	25.6	+14.0	Low prevalence of the Belarusian language in all spheres of life	6	14.0	+9.3
Loss of Belarusian cultural traditions	11	25.6	+14.0	Belarus’ reputation in Western countries	6	14.0	+9.3

Table 4, ending

Women (W)			Difference (W – M), p.p.	Men (M)			Difference (W – M), p.p.
Worry	Number of mentions	%		Worry	Number of mentions	%	
Slowing of the Internet, restriction of access to information resources	10	23.3%	+14.0	Presence of foreign troops, related infrastructure, and weapons on the territory of Belarus	5	11.6	+14.0
Low prevalence of the Belarusian language	10	23.3%	+9.3	Use of the Belarusian army in foreign conflicts	4	9.3	+25.6
Threat of dictatorship and mass repression	10	23.3%	+7.0	Slowing of the internet, restriction of access	4	9.3	+14.0
Reputation of Belarus and Belarusians in Western countries	10	23.3%	+9.3	Low birth rate and population decline	4	9.3	+4.7
Increase in alcoholism and drug addiction	8	18.6%	+16.3	Threat of attack by other states	3	7.0	+23.2
Interethnic conflicts	8	18.6%	+13.9	Environmental problems	3	7.0	+11.6
Environmental problems	8	18.6%	+11.6	Influx of migrants from other countries	3	7.0	+2.3

Note. The left side of the table is sorted by decreasing frequency of mentions among the women, the right side by decreasing frequency of mentions among the men; “Difference (W – M)” is in percentage points (p.p.), with positive values indicating more frequent mentions among the women.

In the female subsample, the leading concern is the economic factor, i.e., rising prices/impovertishment (46.5%), followed by military-political and foreign policy threats: the use of the army abroad (34.9%), the threat of attack by other states, and population migration (30.2% each). The women also mention the presence of foreign troops, internet restrictions, and the loss of cultural traditions more often than the men in all these areas; there is a consistent positive difference of several percentage points in favor of the women, indicating a more pronounced combination of economic and existential anxiety among the female part of the sample.

For the men, the top list is less concentrated and has lower percentages for each item: the leading concern is also rising prices (20.9%), followed by the loss of traditions (18.6%), restrictions on leaving the country and migration (16.3% each), and the threat of dictatorship/repression (16.3%). At the same time, the men have a significantly higher relative share of “cultural-political” concerns (loss of traditions, reputation, dictatorship) and a lower share of purely economic/military concerns compared to the women. However, it should be noted that the small size of the male subsample ($n = 14$) reduces the accuracy of the estimates and makes the differences sensitive to the small number of responses; therefore, the findings should be considered preliminary and confirmed on a larger sample.

Global worries (macro level)

The highest mean values are for a number of environmental and anthropogenic problems: “planetary waste pollution,” ($M = 0.628$, $SD = 0.489$, $W = 0.613$, $p < 0.001$) and “chemical and radiation contamination” ($M = 0.605$, $SD = 0.495$, $W = 0.621$, $p < 0.001$). High mean values are also observed for worries related to international security and natural disasters, i.e., “international terrorism” ($M = 0.558$, $SD = 0.502$, $W = 0.632$, $p < 0.001$) and “natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, forest fires)” ($M = 0.558$, $SD = 0.502$, $W = 0.632$, $p < 0.001$). The same values are found for “mass epidemics (AIDS, COVID-19)” ($M = 0.535$, $SD = 0.505$, $W = 0.635$, $p < 0.001$) and “destruction of many species of animals and plants” ($M = 0.535$, $SD = 0.505$, $W = 0.635$, $p < 0.001$), indicating the sustained significance of environmental and global epidemiological risks in the minds of the respondents.

The moderate concern zone (mean values of approximately 0.4–0.5) includes worries related to nuclear war ($M = 0.512$, $SD = 0.506$, $W = 0.637$, $p < 0.001$), deforestation ($M = 0.488$, $SD = 0.506$, $W = 0.637$, $p < 0.001$), and destruction of natural resources ($M = 0.442$, $SD = 0.502$, $W = 0.632$, $p < 0.001$). Moderate values are also observed for indirect technological risks: “human dependence on AI and neural networks” ($M = 0.419$, $SD = 0.499$, $W = 0.627$, $p < 0.001$) and “uncontrolled development of AI and neural networks” ($M = 0.372$, $SD = 0.489$, $W = 0.613$, $p < 0.001$), which indicates noticeable, but not dominant, worry about the consequences of digital transformation.

Confidence intervals (CIs) for the mean values indicate the relative accuracy of the estimates for the most frequently reported worries: for “planetary waste pollution” (the 95% CI of the mean values lies approximately in the range of 0.477–0.778) and for “chemical and radiation contamination” (approximately 0.452–0.757), reflecting a stable and significant proportion of the sample concerned about these risks.

The top 15 global worries (macro level), according to frequency analysis, are presented in Table 5.

The most common worries among the respondents are related to environmental and anthropogenic threats: 62.8% mention waste pollution of the planet, 60.5% mention chemical or radiation contamination, and about 56% mention natural disasters and climate change. These figures indicate a high level of concern about the environment at both the local and global levels.

The second most frequently mentioned group of threats includes global socio-political and military threats: international terrorism is mentioned by 55.8% of participants, and nuclear war by 51.2%, reflecting significant public concern about political instability and military risks. Worries about pandemics and mass epidemics account for 53.5% of the sample and are related to recent global epidemiological crises, while concerns about digital technologies and artificial intelligence (lack of control, dependence, unemployment) are much less common (in the range of 41.9–23.3%), which may indicate a lower priority or limited awareness compared to environmental and military threats.

Table 5

**TOP 15 – ranking of global worries (macro level) among Belarusians
(N = 43), December 2024**

Worry (variable)	Number of mentions	Mentions in the sample, %
Planetary waste pollution	27	62.8
Chemical and radiation contamination of air, water, and food	26	60.5
International terrorism	24	55.8
Natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, forest fires, etc.)	24	55.8
Climate change on the planet	24	55.8
Mass epidemics, the spread of AIDS, COVID-19	23	53.5
Destruction of numerous species of animals and plants	23	53.5
Nuclear war	22	51.2
Destruction of forests on the planet	21	48.8
Destruction of natural resources that provide energy and food	19	44.2
Human dependence on artificial intelligence and neural networks	18	41.9
Uncontrolled development of artificial intelligence and neural networks	16	37.2
Depletion of the ozone layer in the atmosphere	14	32.6
Overpopulation of the planet	12	27.9
Rising unemployment due to the introduction of artificial intelligence and neural networks	10	23.3

Questions about space disasters and a complete lack of fears are rare (11.6% and 7.0%, respectively), confirming that only a small number of the respondents are concerned about these issues.

Table 6 shows an analysis of the frequency of fears by gender.

Table 6

**Ranking of global worries among Belarusian men and women
(N = 43, 29 women and 14 men), December 2024**

Women			Difference (W – M), p.p.	Men			Difference (W – M), p.p.
Worry	Number of mentions	%		Worry	Number of mentions	%	
Planetary waste pollution	22	51.2	+39.6	Nuclear war	6	14.0	+23.2
Natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, forest fires, etc.)	21	48.8	+41.8	Chemical and radiation contamination of air, water, and food	6	14.0	+32.5
Chemical and radiation contamination of air, water, and food	20	46.5	+32.5	The destruction of forests on the planet	6	14.0	+20.9
International terrorism	20	46.5	+37.2	Climate change on the planet	6	14.0	+27.9
Mass epidemics, the spread of AIDS, COVID-19	19	44.2	+34.9	Planetary waste pollution	5	11.6	+39.6
Climate change on the planet	18	41.9	+27.9	The destruction of many species of animals and plants	5	11.6	+30.3
Destruction of numerous species of animals and plants	18	41.9	+30.3	Mass epidemics, the spread of AIDS, COVID-19	4	9.3	+34.9

Table 6, ending

Women			Difference (W – M), p.p.	Men			Difference (W – M), p.p.
Worry	Number of mentions	%		Worry	Number of mentions	%	
Human dependence on artificial intelligence and neural networks	16	37.2	+32.5	International terrorism	4	9.3	+37.2
Nuclear war	16	37.2	+23.2	The destruction of natural resources that provide energy and food	4	9.3	+25.6
Uncontrolled development of artificial intelligence and neural networks	15	34.9	+32.6	Natural disasters (floods, earthquakes, forest fires, etc.)	3	7.0	+41.8
Destruction of forests on the planet	15	34.9	+20.9	Overpopulation of the planet	3	7.0	+13.9
Destruction of natural resources that provide energy and food	15	34.9	+25.6	No worries	3	7.0	7.0
Depletion of the ozone layer in the atmosphere	12	27.9	+23.2	Human dependence on artificial intelligence and neural networks	2	4.7	+32.5
Rising unemployment due to the introduction of artificial intelligence and neural networks	10	23.3	+23.3	Difficult to answer	2	4.7	2.4
Overpopulation of the planet	9	20.9	+13.9	Space disaster (collision with a meteorite)	1	2.3	+7.0

Note. The left side of the table is sorted by decreasing frequency of mentions among the women, the right side by decreasing frequency of mentions among the men; “Difference (W – M)” is in percentage points (p.p.), with positive values indicating more frequent mentions among the women.

The female subsample consistently records higher levels of concern across all the key rating items compared to the male subsample. This indicates a marked tendency among women to perceive global environmental and catastrophic risks as priorities. The male subsample is characterized by lower absolute shares of mentions for most worries and a more even distribution of worries across different categories, which may reflect both real gender differences in threat perception priorities and the impact of the small size of the male subsample.

Discussion

The study results have shown that the most common personal worries among Belarusians are related to the well-being of their loved ones and financial security. Concerns about the health of relatives were expressed by 67.4% of the respondents, lack of funds is a concern for 62.8%, and uncertainty about the future worries 48.8%. A significant proportion of the sample (44.2%) is worried about the fate of their children and grandchildren, which echoes the study by Galich (2017).

At the meso-level of analysis, dominant macrosocial fears have been identified, reflecting the current state of Belarusian society. Economic concerns occupy a leading position: rising prices and impoverishment of the population are a concern for 67.4% of the respondents. As the MASMI 2021-2024 studies have shown, economic issues will remain the main source of anxiety for Belarusians for a long time to come, exacerbated by steadily rising prices and the need to cut costs. The second group of significant fears at the meso-level relates to migration and cultural concerns: the population is concerned about the outflow of people from the country (46.5%), restrictions on freedom of movement (44.2%), and the loss of Belarusian cultural traditions (44.2%). These data are particularly significant in the context of research by N. Bekus (2010, 2014, 2023), who analyzes the multi-layered structure of Belarusian identity, including linguistic, national, and political components.

Socio-political and military threats also attracted the attention of a significant portion of the sample: concerns were expressed regarding the use of the Belarusian army in foreign conflicts (44.2% of the respondents), the threat of war (37.2%), and the presence of foreign troops and military infrastructure (also 37.2%).

The macro-level analysis has revealed that Belarusians are most concerned about environmental and anthropogenic risks. The second significant group consisted of socio-political and military threats: international terrorism and nuclear war worry 55.8% and 51.2% of the respondents, respectively, reflecting society's high geopolitical sensitivity.

The data analysis has demonstrated marked gender asymmetries in the hierarchy of personal concerns. The women were statistically significantly more likely than the men to express concern for the health of loved ones. The men, on the other hand, demonstrated higher mean scores when assessing concerns about the "unknown and uncertain future".

It is worth noting that the women were more sensitive to a number of national worries. The largest differences were observed in concerns about rising prices. The women were also more concerned about the use of the army in foreign conflicts, fears of attack by other states, and population migration. The male subsample was generally more focused on cultural and political aspects: the loss of national traditions, Belarus' reputation in the West, and fears of dictatorship ranked relatively higher in their hierarchy. The female subsample also consistently demonstrated higher levels of anxiety across all the key global fear items.

It is important to note that, according to the model developed by K. Boehnke and S. Schwartz, people's value orientations significantly influence their perception of threats (Boehnke & Schwartz, 1997; Schwartz et al., 2000). Studies have confirmed that values, as desirable transsituational guiding priorities in a people's life, determine the visibility of threats that potentially undermine their satisfaction (Boehnke & Schwartz, 1997; Schwartz et al., 2000). Furthermore, value priorities not only highlight significant threats for attention, but also help people interpret threatening situations and regulate the intensity of their worry in response to them.

Therefore, adding value dimensions to the respondents' worries is considered extremely necessary in the future.

In addition, it is necessary to investigate the moderating effect of the level of expression of various social identities of Belarusians on the relationship between social worries and mental health, since studies of worries show (Mutz, 2024) that identity influences the list of perceived threats and the intensity of their experience. The importance of such research is due to the rich spectrum of factors, that determine Belarusian identity, including religious (73% of Belarusians consider themselves Orthodox Christians, 12% are Catholics, 11% identify themselves with other faiths)¹¹, linguistic (54% of the population consider Belarusian their native language, while 42% prefer Russian¹²), national (84.89% are Belarusians, 7.51% are Russians, 3.06% are Poles¹³) and some others.

Limitations. This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the sample was pilot and selected by convenience, limiting the generalizability of the results to the entire population of Belarus. Second, the small overall sample size ($N = 43$) and the particularly small male subsample ($N = 14$) reduce the statistical power of the analysis and hinder the reliable detection of subtle intergroup differences.

Third, the data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and subsequent content analysis, during which the respondents' statements were converted into fear categories and binary variables. Despite the use of a systematic coding procedure, this approach inevitably involves an element of exploratory interpretation and does not reflect the intensity of fear experiences, but only the fact that they were mentioned. This limits the ability to quantitatively assess the severity of anxieties and their dynamics.

Conclusion

Based on the data obtained on the greatest worries, a ranking of worries was compiled, from the most frequently mentioned and expressed to the least significant and rarely mentioned. This procedure made it possible to understand which pool of worries among Belarusians could be studied in more detail.

The goal of the study was achieved: the most pressing fears of Belarusians related to their personal lives, Belarus, and the world at large were identified and initially analyzed. The study revealed key issues such as the health of loved ones, economic instability, and cultural identity.

¹¹ Pew Research Center. (2017, May 10). *Religion and nationality in Central and Eastern Europe: National and religious identities converge in a region once ruled by atheism*. World Dynamics: Figures. Facts. Trends. Retrived August 20, 2025, from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/05/CEUP-Overview-Russian-FOR-WEB.pdf> (In Russ.).

¹² National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus. (2019). *Results of the 2019 Population census of the Republic of Belarus* (vol. 2). Minsk. Retrived August 20, 2025, from: https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/public_compilation/index_41896/ (In Russ.).

¹³ National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus. (2020). *Ethnic composition of the population of the Republic of Belarus: Statistical Bulletin*. Minsk. Retrived August 20, 2025, from: <https://www.belstat.gov.by/upload/iblock/df5/df5842f32b1b8a711043f8f54856f5c8.pdf> (In Russ.).

The results obtained have both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the study complements research on macro- and microworries by demonstrating how they manifest themselves in the specific Belarusian context, characterized by a distinct identity configuration. Practically, the identified worry profiles can be used in the work of governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in sociological monitoring of public sentiment to more accurately identify prevailing anxieties in society.

Based on this pool of worries, it is possible to create a methodology for assessing the severity of certain worries, which can then be applied in quantitative empirical studies.

Given the limitations of the study, the results obtained should be considered pilot ones. However, this opens up a broad field for studying the role of worries in the lives of Belarusians, especially in their mental health, as most international studies show that they have a huge impact.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Исследовательская статья

Зондирование личностных и социальных страхов белорусов: качественно-количественное исследование

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Аннотация. Цель исследования — выявить личностные и социальные страхи белорусских граждан в контексте экономических, политических, культурных и глобальных изменений. На основе данных полуструктурированных интервью, проведенных в декабре 2024 г. ($N = 43$, 29 женщин и 14 мужчин, в возрасте от 18 до 66 лет, граждане Беларуси), выявлены актуальные страхи, включая беспокойство за здоровье близких, экономическую нестабильность, неопределенность будущего и судьбу детей, а также национальные и глобальные угрозы, такие как миграция, утрата традиций, экологические катастрофы и развитие искусственного интеллекта. Контент-анализ ответов респондентов позволил структурировать их для следующего этапа количественного анализа — бинарного кодирования, которое ограничило субъективность в интерпретации формулировок. Сравнение результатов по выборке показало выраженные гендерные различия: женщины чаще выражают тревогу по социально-экономическим и экзистенциальным вопросам, а мужчины — по вопросам культурной идентичности и неопределенности. Особое значение имеют культурная и языковая ситуации, а также особенности идентичности белорусов, которые связаны с восприятием угроз. Авторы подчеркивают важность дальнейшего изучения взаимосвязей между страхами, ценностями и психологическим здоровьем населения для понимания социальных настроений в стране. Исследование заполняет существующий пробел в изучении личностных и социальных страхов белорусов и предлагает системный подход для их анализа.

Ключевые слова: личностные и социальные страхи, Беларусь, тревоги, угрозы, идентичности, глобальные риски, ценности, психологическое здоровье

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