

Foundation

# World Risk Poll 2021: A Changed World?

Perceptions and  
experiences of risk  
in the Covid age



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# Preface



**Dr. Ruth Boumphrey**

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The mission of Lloyd's Register Foundation — to engineer a safer world — is fundamentally underpinned by research and evidence, and the World Risk Poll is a powerful tool to understand the nature and scale of safety challenges across the globe. The Poll gives a voice to people around the world, including in places where there is little existing data on risk.

When we published the first edition of the World Risk Poll in 2020, following data collection in 2019, we provided 'one of the last comprehensive snapshots of the world before so much changed' as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

We knew that by the time we came to publish the next edition of the Poll in 2022 — following data collection in 2021 — much may have changed about the way people across the world perceive and experience the most pressing risks to their personal safety.

There were also practical challenges to delivering such a large and ambitious study — the 2021 Poll includes data from more than 125,000 interviews conducted in 121 countries — in the midst of the pandemic.

Looking at this first report of the 2021 World Risk Poll, what strikes me most about the findings is what hasn't changed, as much as what has. People globally still worry about perennial threats such as road crashes, crime and violence more than any other risks, including Covid-19, and this has important implications for how policymakers work with communities to manage emerging public health challenges in the context of their everyday lives.

Nevertheless, the pandemic period has seen a deterioration in overall feelings of safety globally, and we cannot ignore what the Poll suggests about changes in areas such as mental health.

We make our data freely available so that stakeholders across the world, including governments, regulators, businesses, researchers, NGOs and international bodies, can use it to inform and target policies and interventions that make people safer, working with the communities at risk. Please do get in touch if we can help you use this data to create a safer world.

# Executive Summary

In a rapidly changing world, understanding the risks people face, and how they perceive them, is paramount to increasing safety for all — and to opening up the life opportunities feeling safe brings. However, the official data needed to understand the nature and scale of these safety challenges simply does not exist in many parts of the world.

Lloyd's Register Foundation conducted the first World Risk Poll in 2019 to address this knowledge gap with a new source of global data on experience with and perceptions of safety and risk. The second World Risk Poll was conducted during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, and together, the two editions provide invaluable insight into people's changing exposure to, and perceptions of, risk.

## 2021 World Risk Poll methodology

The current results, gathered in 2021, offer a look at how and where the perceived risk landscape has changed in the wake of the pandemic. The 2021 study includes results from 121 countries and territories, polling 125,911 people, down from 142 in 2019 due to Covid-19-related hazards or restrictions. Where possible, interviews were conducted via telephone.

## 2021 key findings

How did people think about their personal safety and the greatest risks to it in 2021?

- Globally, the percentage of people who felt 'less safe' than they did five years prior increased, from 30% in 2019 to 34% in 2021. The percentage who said they felt 'more safe' remained essentially unchanged at 27%.
- Seven percent of people worldwide spontaneously named Covid-19 as the greatest source of risk to their safety, making it the fourth most commonly named threat, behind road-related accidents (13%), crime and violence (12%) and non-Covid-19-specific health issues (10%).





## Insight into action

Despite the uncertainty the pandemic caused, Covid-19 had a limited effect on people's feelings of safety in most regions, demonstrating that even during a global crisis, many people face other safety risks that continue to demand their attention on a daily basis. Strategies for keeping people safe from unusual crises like pandemics should account for how they will intersect with people's vulnerability to the threats they already face and how those other threats may constrain people's willingness or ability to comply with preventative measures.

## Risk perceptions and experiences of harm

As in 2019, the 2021 World Risk Poll assessed people's likelihood to worry about several risk sources relative to experience of those harms.

- At the global level, work-related harm was the only type of hazard for which the percentage 'very worried' about such harm fell below the percentage who had actually experienced it in the past two years. Workers may often underestimate risk from occupational hazards, may not view the consequences as very severe or a combination of both.
- Workers who said they were finding it 'very difficult' to get by on their current income were also more likely to experience harm from workplace hazards than those in more comfortable financial positions.
- In several sub-Saharan African and Asian countries, more than 20% of people said they had suffered serious harm from unsafe food or water. However, concern about these risks is more common among low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa than among low-income countries in Asia.

## Insight into action

Public concern about various risk sources generally increased with people's experiences of harm from those risks. In some places, however, concern about work-related harm and unsafe food and water was low relative to the percentage of people who experienced harm from them — suggesting policymakers could do more to increase awareness of those risks and make it easier for people to avoid or mitigate harm from them.

## Covid-19 and risk perceptions

The finding that just 7% of people worldwide named Covid-19 as the greatest threat to their safety prompts the question: Why was the pandemic not a more prominent risk in more people's minds? Among many of those most vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic, including older adults and people with low income, other risks often remained more salient.

- Though most Covid-19-related deaths occur among the elderly, only 5% of people aged 65 and older worldwide named Covid-19 as the greatest risk to their safety; notably, older people were most likely to cite other personal health conditions, at 18%.
- Despite disproportionately bearing the economic impact of Covid-19, people from lower-income households were less likely than their more affluent counterparts to name Covid-19 as their greatest threat.

## Insight into action

Many of those most vulnerable to Covid-19 were nonetheless forced to consider its risks in the context of other pressing threats to their health and wellbeing. Public health agencies need to work in a joined-up way with other arms of government to help people manage their total risk landscape, empowering them to comply with mitigation strategies without inadvertently increasing their exposure to the more routine threats they face.

## Do policymakers focus on people's greatest sources of risk?

Those working to promote public safety in their country can use data on people's experience with and concerns about various risk sources to improve risk mitigation efforts. Certain risks, such as harm from mental health issues, are increasingly common around the world but often go largely unaddressed.



- The percentage of people worldwide who said they or someone they know experienced serious harm from severe weather events or mental health issues increased significantly between 2019 and 2021.
- Though people in low- and lower-middle-income countries are least likely to have access to mental health services, they were more likely than those in higher-income countries to say they had experienced serious harm from mental health issues in the past two years.
- Experience with serious harm from several risk sources was most common among those in their country's lowest income groups, highlighting equity challenges in public services and infrastructure used to mitigate such risks.

### Insight into action

The rise in experience of mental health issues was seen across regions and nations with different income levels, showing it should be considered in development policies and health improvement programmes for low- and middle-income countries and territories. World Risk Poll results by within-county income groups show how experiences with various harms are unevenly distributed not just across global regions but within populations as well — critical information for national agencies directing resources to promote public health and wellbeing.

### Risk perceptions related to climate change

- In 2021, 67% of people viewed climate change as a threat to their country — a slight decrease from 2019. This percentage includes the 41% who viewed it as a 'very serious threat' — unchanged from 2019.
- People with primary education or less (32%) were much less likely than those with secondary (47%) or post-secondary (50%) education to say climate change is a very serious threat. Twenty-eight percent in the lowest education group said they 'don't know,' compared to 13% of those with secondary education and 7% of those with at least some post-secondary education.

- People who had experienced serious harm from severe weather events were more likely than those who had not to say climate change is a very serious threat. However, that relationship was strongest among people with at least secondary education, suggesting they are more aware of the connection between climate change and severe weather.

## Insight into action

Campaigns to increase climate change awareness and understanding in areas with lower average education levels should carefully consider how to frame the threat in a way that is relevant to people's lived experience. World Risk Poll results suggest more can be done to reach less-educated populations, who may be particularly susceptible to the economic effects of severe weather.



Results from the 2021 study update key findings from the initial World Risk Poll, conducted in 2019. Among those findings:

- 1) People's perceptions of their exposure to risks often differ from their likelihood of experiencing them. At the global level, for example, people rated their likelihood of drowning similarly to that of being in an aeroplane accident, though many more people die from drowning than from aeroplane crashes each year.
- 2) Experience with risk varies widely by global setting. For example, work-related harms more often take the form of physical injury in lower-income economies where workers are more likely to have jobs in agriculture or manufacturing. In high-income economies with large service sectors, work-related harms more commonly involve gender-based violence and harassment.
- 3) Few people around the world trust government or official organisations to keep them safe. For example, only 15% of people worldwide trusted their government's food safety authority as their primary source of information on food safety; many preferred to rely on friends and family or medical professionals.



# Acknowledgements

Lloyd's Register Foundation is grateful to a wide range of organisations and individuals who have contributed to the World Risk Poll in a variety of ways. We have been inspired by the enthusiasm of our strategic impact partners who have invested time in developing the questionnaire and are now actively considering how to embed the data in their work with communities and empower people to take action. You can follow their journeys, and the change created, through the Poll website.

The Technical Advisory Group for the World Risk Poll was convened in early 2019, and we are indebted to the time and effort voluntarily invested by the members in the analysis, planning and reviewing of the report.

And finally, our thanks are extended to the team at Gallup for their efforts in constructing and testing the Poll, and to the local staff in countries across the globe who undertook the field work. Data collection took place amid ongoing COVID-19-related disruptions and restrictions, and we are particularly grateful to individual colleagues at Gallup for continuing to deliver the project in the face of these significant challenges.

# Introduction

In the time between the 2019 and 2021 World Risk Polls, the Covid-19 pandemic introduced a multitude of threats to people's health and livelihoods around the world. Suddenly, in 2020, leaving home and interacting with others carried far greater risks to people's health and, for many, their lives. However, the measures many countries took to mitigate these risks significantly impacted people's lives and often disproportionately affected those from more economically vulnerable groups.

The World Risk Poll was not designed to gauge the effects of Covid-19, but comparisons between the 2021 results and the inaugural results from 2019 offer insight into how the pandemic shifted the risk landscape worldwide. Asked to name, in their own words, the greatest source of risk to their safety in their daily lives, 7% of the 125,911 people surveyed across 121 countries and territories in 2021 named Covid-19 — making it the fourth most commonly named threat.

The 2021 report also updates World Risk Poll results on people's experiences with, and perceptions of, other commonly faced risk sources asked about in 2019 and explores how the relationship between perception and experience may have shifted over time. The results offer new global insights on vulnerability and the capacity to manage some of the most pressing risks people face in their daily lives as policymakers seek new strategies for mitigating those risks in the Covid-19 era and beyond.

## Effect of Covid-19 on data collection

In 2020 — the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic — the Gallup World Poll (of which the World Risk Poll was a part) was conducted almost entirely via telephone, as the pandemic made in-person data collection impossible. As a result, some countries where it was not possible to reach a representative sample by telephone were not included in the 2020 research.

Though the drop in Covid-19 cases and availability of vaccines made it possible to return to in-person data collection in many countries and territories for the 2021 World Risk Poll survey, conditions in some places remained too hazardous, or local restrictions made it impossible to conduct field work. Thus, while the 2019 World Risk Poll included results from 142 countries and territories, the 2021 poll included results from 121. Only those countries and territories surveyed in both years are included in comparisons between results from the two waves of data collection and the corresponding analyses throughout this report.

Countries included in the 2019 World Risk Poll but not in 2021 are: Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Botswana, Chad, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kuwait, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Montenegro, Niger, Palestinian Territories, Rwanda, The Gambia, Turkmenistan and Yemen. Two countries not included in 2019 — Iceland and the Czech Republic — were added in 2021. For a full list of countries and regions included in the 2021 World Risk Poll, please see Appendix 3.



# Chapter 1

## Global perceptions of safety and greatest risks in 2021

The World Risk Poll offers a rare opportunity to assess how Covid-19 may have influenced people's sense of safety around the world and how they viewed the pandemic among the array of other risks they face in their daily lives. This chapter explores these fundamental questions about perceived risk, finding that though Covid-19's impact on these perceptions was limited overall, it was more substantial in regions and countries where the pandemic's health impact was greater and access to healthcare less reliable.

### Key findings

- 1) Globally, the percentage of people who felt 'less safe' than they did five years prior increased somewhat, from 30% in 2019 to 34% in 2021. The percentage who said they felt 'more safe' remained essentially unchanged, at 27%.
- 2) The percentage who felt less safe increased by more than 10 percentage points in three regions, two of which — Northern America and Southeastern Asia — were hit particularly hard by Covid-19. The United States, which accounts for most of Northern America, had experienced record numbers of Covid-19-related deaths in early 2021, prior to data collection<sup>1</sup>. As data were being collected in Southeastern Asia in late summer and early fall of 2021, the region was facing the world's highest death toll from the delta variant<sup>2</sup>. (The third region where the percentage who felt less safe rose more than 10 points was Central/Western Africa, driven largely by Nigeria's 2021 surge in crime and violence).
- 3) Seven percent of people worldwide named Covid-19 on an open-question basis as the greatest source of risk to their safety in 2021. It was the fourth most commonly named threat overall, behind road-related accidents (13%), crime and violence (12%) and non-Covid-19-specific health issues (10%).
- 4) Crime and violence continued to eclipse all other risk sources in two regions: Latin America/Caribbean, where 43% named it as the greatest threat to their safety, and Southern Africa, where 42% did so.

1 Feuer, W., & Rattner, N. (2021, January 27). *U.S. reports record number of Covid deaths in January as new strains threaten progress*. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/01/27/us-reports-record-number-of-covid-deaths-in-january.html>

2 COVID-19: Southeast Asia battles world's highest deaths. (n.d.). *IFRC*. Retrieved 22 June 2022 from <https://www.ifrc.org/press-release/covid-19-southeast-asia-battles-worlds-highest-deaths>

## Insight into action

Research for the 2021 World Risk Poll took place between April 2021 and March 2022 — a year or more into the Covid-19 crisis, when vaccines were being administered in many countries around the world, and new variants of the virus were surging and receding. However, despite the uncertainty, Covid-19 had a limited effect on people’s feelings of safety in most regions and registered as the top threat to that safety among only a limited portion of the global population.

One valuable insight for policymakers is that even during a global crisis, people may face several safety risks that demand their attention. Particularly in regions with widespread poverty and instability, strategies for keeping people safe during unusual crises like pandemics should account for how they will intersect with, and perhaps increase, people’s vulnerability to the threats they already face in their daily lives and how those other threats may constrain people’s willingness or ability to comply with preventative measures.

### World Risk Poll questions examined in this chapter

- Overall, compared to five years ago, do you feel more safe, less safe, or about as safe as you did five years ago?
- In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?

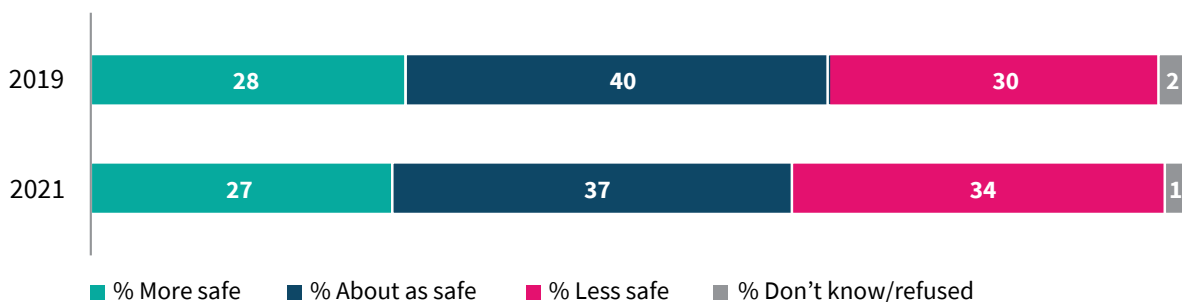
## Perceptions of safety

### The percentage worldwide who said they felt ‘less safe’ than five years ago rose in 2021 — but the change varied widely by region.

Globally, the Covid-19 pandemic seemed to have a modest but significant effect on people’s feelings of personal safety. The 2021 World Risk Poll finds that, among the 119 countries and territories also surveyed in 2019, the percentage of people who said they felt ‘less safe’ than they did five years prior rose from 30% in 2019 to 34% in 2021. The percentage who felt ‘more safe’ remained essentially unchanged, down one point to 27% in 2021.

**Chart 1.1**

#### Perceptions of current safety compared to five years ago, global results in 2019 vs. 2021



Survey question: Overall, compared to five years ago, do you feel more safe, less safe, or about as safe as you did five years ago?\*

Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ±1%.

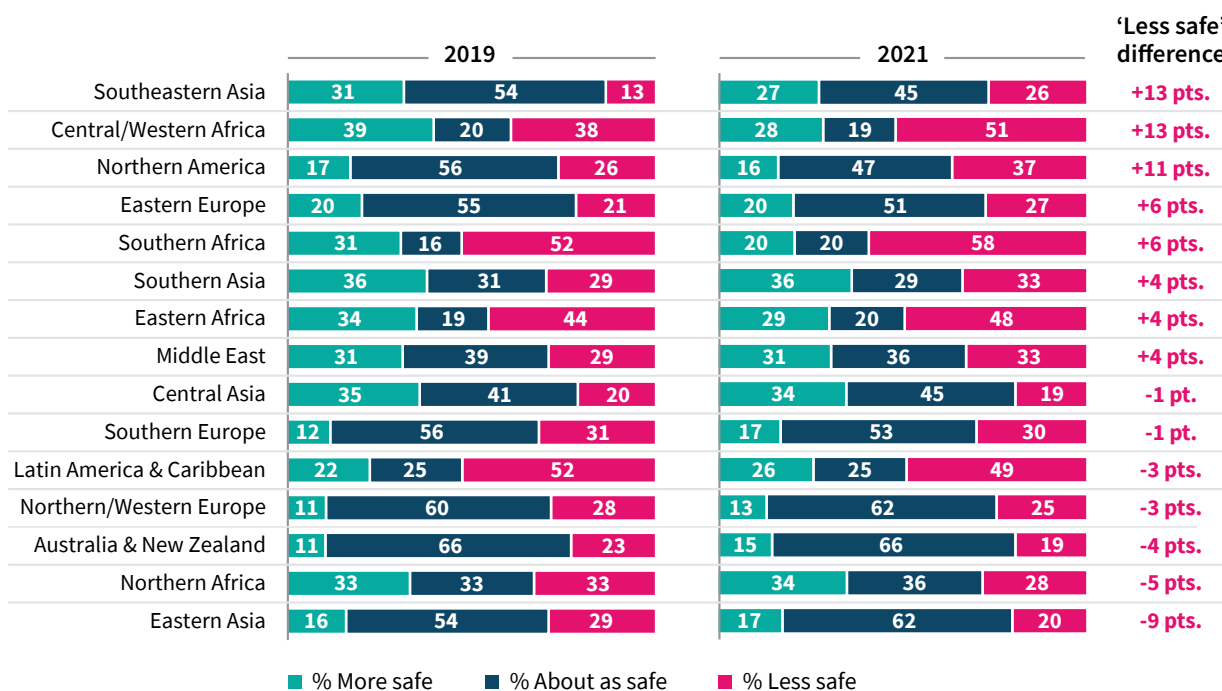
\* Question was not asked in China in 2021.

However, perceptions of being less safe varied by global region, with some seeing more significant increases. In Southeastern Asia, 13% of people said they felt less safe in 2019 compared to five years prior; this figure increased by 13 percentage points to 26% in 2021. In Central/Western Africa, 51% of people felt less safe in 2021, compared with 38% in 2019 — an increase of 13 percentage points — while in Northern America, an 11-percentage-point increase was observed (see Chart 1.2).



Chart 1.2

Perceptions of current safety compared to five years ago, by region in 2019 vs. 2021



Survey question: Overall, compared to five years ago, do you feel more safe, less safe, or about as safe as you did five years ago?\*  
 Don't know/refused responses not shown; percentages may not sum to 100%.  
 \* Question was not asked in China in 2021.

One of the aims of this report is to examine how much the Covid-19 pandemic may have influenced people's feelings of safety relative to their risk exposure in 2021, particularly in comparison to the 2019 World Risk Poll results. Notably, in a few regions — such as Northern/Western Europe and Australia/New Zealand — fewer people said they felt less safe than five years prior in 2021 than did so in 2019.

Though Covid-19 had a devastating impact in Northern/Western Europe and Southern Europe, the percentage in those regions who felt less safe than they did five years prior changed little (in Northern/Western Europe, it even declined slightly, from 28% to 25%). Countries in these regions are highly urbanised and therefore vulnerable to contagion, but their residents are, on average, more likely to be satisfied with their access to healthcare than those in Eastern Europe. In 2021, 78% of people in Northern/Western Europe and 60% in Southern Europe said they were satisfied with the availability of quality healthcare in their area, versus 37% in Eastern Europe. Correspondingly, the percentage of Eastern Europeans who felt less safe rose somewhat, from 21% to 27%.

In the Latin America/Caribbean region, the percentage who felt less safe than five years prior fell slightly, from 52% in 2019 to 49% in 2021. As these figures demonstrate, Latin Americans already had a high baseline level of insecurity, primarily attributable to crime and violence in the region (see page 35).

In regions with a pronounced increase in the number of people who felt less safe, Covid-19's role in that increase likely varied.

- In **Southeastern Asia**, the pandemic was almost certainly a factor — it was one of two regions where people were most likely to name Covid-19 as the greatest threat to their safety, and the delta variant was surging in most Southeastern Asian countries during data collection (see page 18).
- In **Central/Western Africa**, however, there was less reason to view Covid-19 as a primary factor in people's increased likelihood of feeling less safe. The regional increase was driven primarily by results from Nigeria,

the region’s most populous country, where there was a substantial rise — from 35% to 61% (see Table 1.1) — as the country suffered a devastating wave of crime and violence in 2021 that included extremist insurgencies and kidnappings<sup>3</sup>.

- The **United States**, which accounts for about 89% of Northern America’s population, was also hard-hit by the pandemic, reporting more confirmed cases and Covid-19-related deaths than any other country<sup>4</sup>. Though just 5% of Americans cited Covid-19 as the greatest risk they faced, the pandemic may have been a factor in many Americans’ likelihood of saying they felt less safe. Other issues — such as increased racial tensions after the murder of George Floyd in 2020 or the violent attack on the United States Capitol in January 2021 — may also have contributed to Americans’ heightened sense of insecurity.

**Table 1.1**

**Countries with the largest increase in the number of people who felt ‘less safe’ than they did five years ago, 2019–2021**

	2019			2021			‘Less safe’ difference
	% Less safe	% About as safe	% More safe	% Less safe	% About as safe	% More safe	
Myanmar	11	49	38	59	26	12	48 pts.
Armenia	10	39	48	38	28	31	28 pts.
Vietnam	11	37	48	37	25	36	26 pts.
Nigeria	35	16	46	61	12	25	26 pts.
Turkey	34	33	30	50	25	23	25 pts.

Survey question: Overall, compared to five years ago, do you feel more safe, less safe, or about as safe as you did five years ago?\*  
 Don’t know/refused responses not shown; percentages may not sum to 100%.

\* Question was not asked in China in 2021.



**The greatest perceived sources of risk in daily life**

**Road-related accidents and crime remained the most commonly named risk sources, even during the Covid-19 pandemic.**

As in 2019, road-related accidents were the top-named source of risk to safety worldwide in 2021, at 13%, closely followed by crime and violence at 12%. Just 7% of people reported Covid-19 as the greatest source of risk to their safety in daily life. However, 10% cited personal health conditions more generally, similar to the 9% who responded this way in 2019.

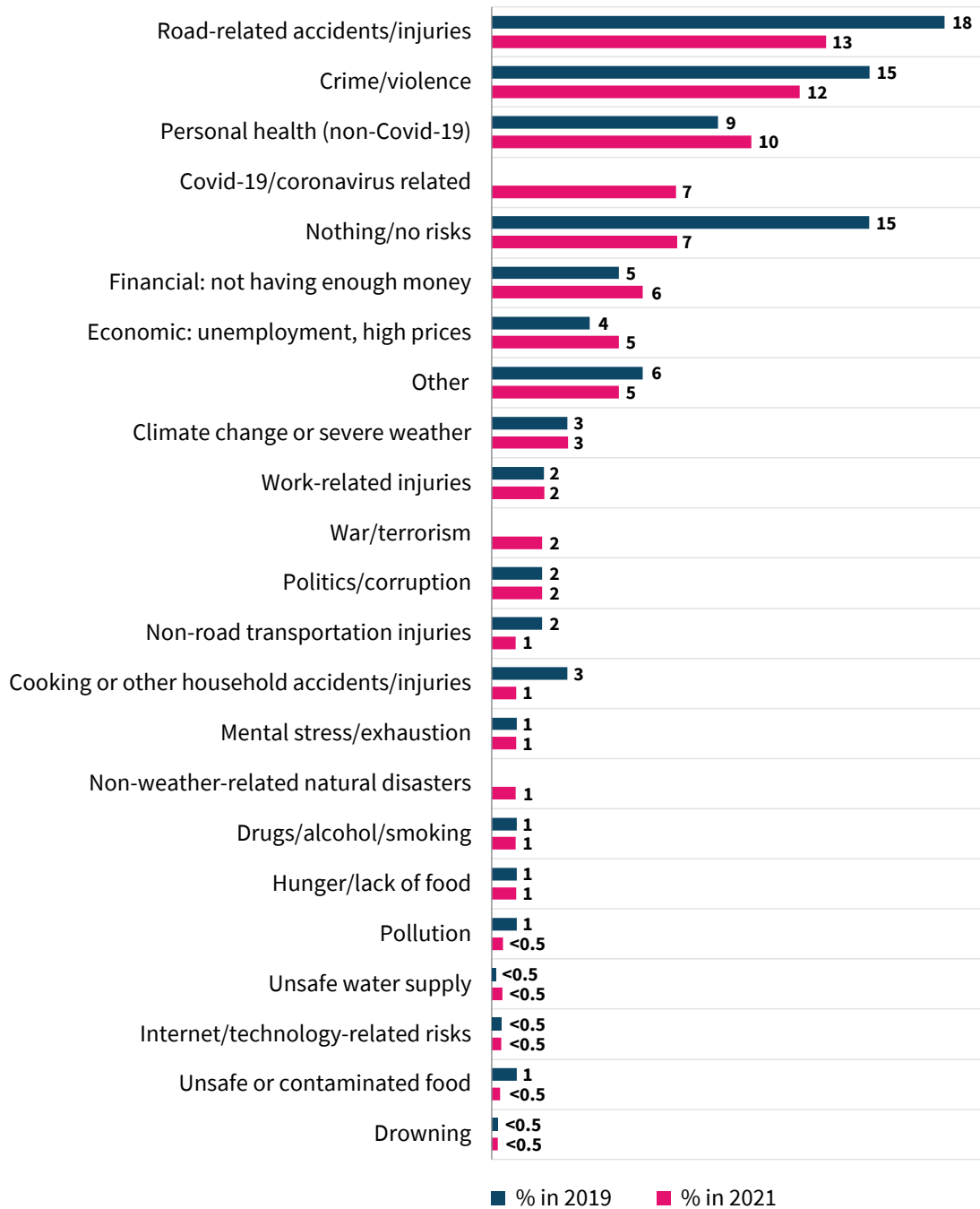
Notably, the percentage saying they faced ‘no risks’ fell from 15% in 2019 to 7% in 2021; this drop was sharpest in some regions, including Southeastern Asia and Southern Africa, where the percentage mentioning Covid-19 was higher than the global average.

3 Tanko, A. (2021, July 19). Nigeria’s security crisis – five different threats. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57860993>

4 Covid-19 map: Coronavirus cases, deaths, vaccinations by country (2022, June 1). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-51235105>

**Chart 1.3**

**Greatest perceived risk, global results in 2019 vs. 2021\***



Survey question: In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?  
 \* Covid-19 and war were not named risks in 2019; 'terrorism' was categorised with 'crime/violence' in 2019.

People’s greatest perceived risk varied somewhat by socio-economic indicators at the global level. For example, while road-related accidents (20%) and crime and violence (13%) were the top-named threats among people with post-secondary education, those with only primary school education were just as likely to name financial concerns (8%) as road-related accidents (8%) or crime and violence (9%). Only 4% of those with post-secondary education cited financial concerns.

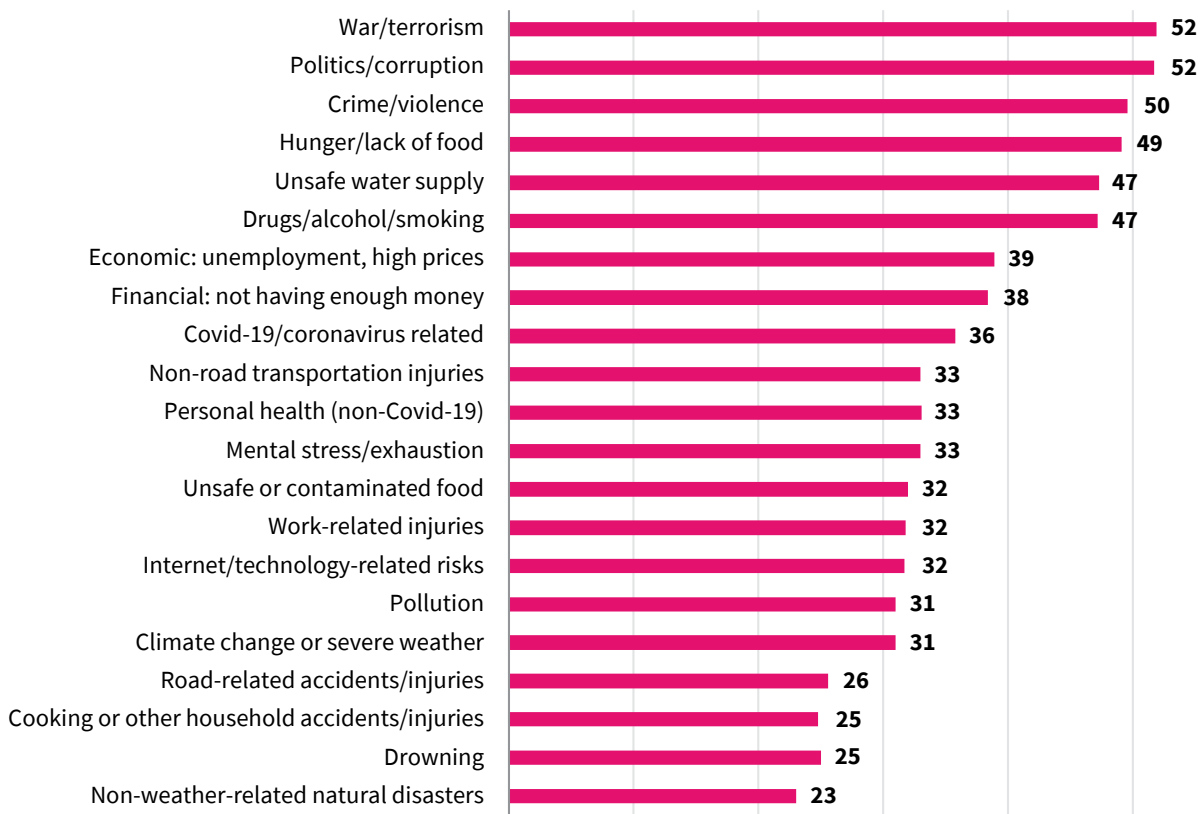
**People who viewed violence or political instability as their greatest risks were the most likely to feel less safe than five years ago.**

Looking at the intersection between those who felt ‘less safe’ and those who named each threat as their greatest risk gives an idea of the salience of each risk source to people’s overall feelings of safety. At least half of those who cited war and terrorism, politics and corruption, or crime and violence as their greatest risk sources said they felt less safe in 2021 — implying a growing sense of dread regarding political instability and governments’ ability to keep people safe.

By contrast, more than one in three (36%) of those who named Covid-19 as their greatest risk source said they felt less safe than they did five years ago. Among those who cited more day-to-day risks, such as road-related accidents or cooking/household accidents, that figure fell to about one in four.

**Chart 1.4**

**Percentage who felt ‘less safe’ than they did five years ago among those who named each potential threat as their greatest risk, global results**



Survey questions: In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?  
 Overall, compared to five years ago, do you feel more safe, less safe, or about as safe as you did five years ago?\*

\* Question was not asked in China in 2021.

**The most-named risk source varied by region; Covid-19 topped the list in Southeastern Asia and Northern Africa.**

While results varied significantly by region, Covid-19 was among the top-three most-named risk sources in only four regions: Northern Africa, Southern Africa, Central Asia and Southeastern Asia. By contrast, road-related accidents, general non-Covid-19 health concerns and crime and violence were among the top-three named risks in 11 of the 15 regions.



**Table 1.2**

**Top-three named risk sources, by region**

Percentage worldwide who named each as their greatest source of risk

	% Covid-19/ coronavirus related	% Personal health, non- Covid-19	% Road- related accidents/ injuries	% Crime/ violence	% Financial: not having enough money	% Economic: unemploy- ment, high prices	% Cooking or other household accidents/ injuries	% Nothing/ no risks
Eastern Africa	3	17	7	18	13	4	<0.5	2
Central/Western Africa	1	10	17	22	11	3	<0.5	1
Northern Africa	16	15	6	10	10	8	1	10
Southern Africa	10	6	7	42	2	3	<0.5	1
Central Asia	7	14	5	2	3	3	<0.5	16
Eastern Asia	7	16	25	5	1	3	<0.5	16
Southeastern Asia	16	12	14	8	7	6	1	9
Southern Asia	8	9	9	4	7	6	1	10
Northern America	5	6	29	11	2	2	<0.5	1
Latin America & Caribbean	3	6	10	43	1	3	1	3
Middle East	8	7	9	12	6	11	1	16
Eastern Europe	5	17	12	9	7	8	<0.5	3
Northern/Western Europe	4	11	21	8	3	4	4	4
Southern Europe	4	13	19	9	4	9	2	5
Australia & New Zealand	7	7	33	11	2	3	11	2

0-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-45

Survey question: In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?



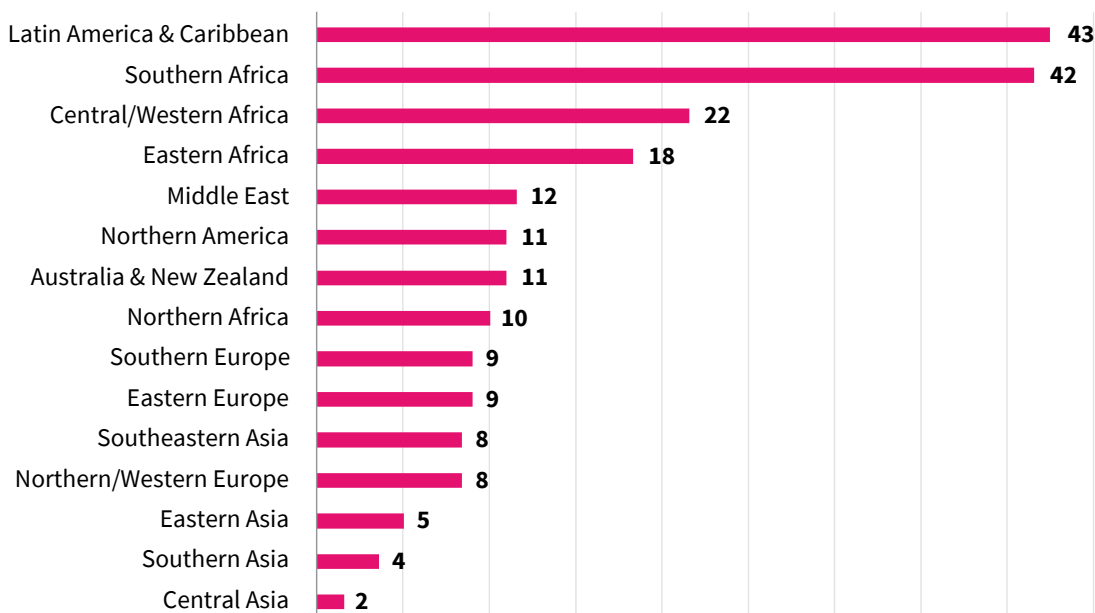
Covid-19 was the most commonly named risk in two regions — Northern Africa and Southeastern Asia. In Northern Africa, Covid-19 concerns were driven primarily by results from two outlying countries: Algeria where 35% cited it as the greatest threat to their safety, and Egypt, where 15% did so. By contrast, in Southeastern Asia — a region where people’s likelihood of saying they felt less safe rose most between 2019 and 2021 — the tendency to name Covid-19 as the top threat to their safety was more evenly spread throughout the region (see page 33).

## Crime and violence remained the most commonly named threat in Latin America/Caribbean and Southern Africa.

As in the 2019 World Risk Poll, crime and violence remained the overwhelming concern in the Latin America/Caribbean and Southern Africa regions in 2021. About four in 10 people in these regions cited crime- or violence-related concerns as the greatest threat to their safety — twice the percentage in any other region.

**Chart 1.5**

**Percentage who named crime and violence as the greatest threat to their safety, by region**



Survey question: In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?

### Many Latin Americans live with the constant threat of crime and violence.

Crime and violence remain endemic to much of Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>5</sup>; in 2015, the region had 22.3 homicides per 100,000 people, versus 5.3 in the world overall<sup>6</sup>. In some of the region’s largest countries, high percentages of people named crime and violence as the greatest threat, including Venezuela, 60%; Ecuador, 50%; Argentina, 49%; Colombia, 47%; and Mexico, 46%.

5 *Stopping crime and violence in Latin America: A look at prevention from cradle to adulthood*. (2018, May 17). The World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2018/05/17/fin-a-la-violencia-en-america-latina-una-mirada-a-la-prevencion-desde-la-infancia-hasta-la-edad-adulta>

6 *Intentional homicides (per 100,000 people) | Data*. (n.d.). The World Bank. Retrieved 20 June 2022 from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/VC.IHR.PSRC.P5>



Widespread concerns about safety from crime and violence are a likely factor, along with economic problems such as a lack of jobs, in the high proportion of people in the region who seek to emigrate. In Gallup's 2021 World Poll, 37% of Latin Americans said they would move permanently to another country if they had the opportunity — more than double the 16% globally who said the same. Younger Latin Americans were particularly likely to name crime and violence as the greatest threat to their safety: 47% of those aged 15-29 did so, versus 35% of those 65 and older.

Men in the Latin America/Caribbean region were slightly less likely than women to name crime and violence as their greatest threat — 41% versus 46%. The likelihood of citing crime and violence was also relatively consistent across income levels in the region (41% in the lowest income quintile vs. 46% in the highest). However, there was more variation by education: 51% of Latin Americans with at least some post-secondary education named crime and violence as their greatest risk, versus 36% of those with primary education or less.

### **Road-related accidents were most commonly named as a risk in high-income countries.**

Road-related accidents were the most-named threat to personal safety in most high-income regions — including Northern/Western Europe, Southern Europe, Northern America and Australia/New Zealand. This response was particularly common in Northern Europe and Australia/New Zealand, topping 30% in Finland

(46%), Iceland (43%), New Zealand (39%), Norway (35%), the Netherlands (35%) and Australia (31%). Road accidents may be particularly top-of-mind for people living in highly urbanised, high-income countries and territories, where vehicle ownership rates and traffic levels are higher. However, as noted in the 2019 report, these countries often have better-designed and maintained roads and highways and more consistently enforced traffic safety laws, helping keep road fatalities lower than in many lower-income regions.

Conversely, traffic deaths are more common in many lower-income countries and territories, where road infrastructure and law enforcement are weaker. For example, Gallup's 2021 World Poll found that 40% of residents in Central/Western Africa, 42% in Eastern Africa and 49% in Latin America/Caribbean were satisfied with the roads and highways in their country, versus 74% in Northern/Western Europe. However, when people in low-income countries and territories were asked about the greatest threat to their safety, concern about road-related accidents was more likely competing against other pressing risks related to poverty and instability.

Notably, in some countries where people named Covid-19 as their greatest threat in 2021 — including several in Southeastern Asia — there was also a decline between 2019 and 2021 in the percentage naming road-related accidents. In two Eastern Asian countries and territories, by contrast, the percentage naming road-related accidents increased by more than 10 percentage points between 2019 and 2021: South Korea (9% to 25%) and Hong Kong SAR of China (7% to 18%).





*In many cases, the results may speak less to an underestimation of Covid-19's direct risks than to the vigilance required to manage constant risks like crime and violence or chronic health conditions.*

## Conclusion

The findings in this chapter demonstrate that while the Covid-19 pandemic somewhat changed the landscape of global risk perceptions between 2019 and 2021, its impact was moderate overall, and day-to-day risks such as road-related injuries, crime and violence, and economic concerns remained top-of-mind for most people.

In many cases, the results may speak less to an underestimation of Covid-19's direct risks than to the vigilance required to manage constant risks like crime and violence or chronic health conditions.

Acknowledging the primacy of these concerns may help policymakers consider how to help people continue to cope with them amid the massive disruption of crises like the pandemic.



# Chapter 2

## Risk perceptions and experiences of harm

A central objective of the World Risk Poll is to measure people's experience with several common sources of risk to their health and wellbeing, and compare these with their level of concern about those risks. The results not only provide vital data that could help policymakers work with communities to reduce harm from the risks they face in their daily lives, but also offer insight as to where people's concerns about a given risk source may align differently with their exposure to it.

### Key findings

- 1) In 2021, almost a quarter (24%) of people worldwide said they or someone they know had experienced serious harm from the work they did; however, just 19% said they were 'very worried' about such harm. This gap, or the ratio of worry-to-experience, was the lowest among the seven types of risk surveyed, suggesting that workers may often underestimate the risks from occupational hazards or they may not view the consequences as that severe, or a combination of both.
- 2) People in high-income countries where harm from occupational risks was particularly common showed a general lack of concern about such risks. In Italy, where worker safety has become a national issue, 36% of workers said they had suffered serious harm from their work in the past two years — by far the highest figure among European countries. However, just 16% of Italian workers were 'very worried' about such hazards.
- 3) Globally, workers who were finding it 'very difficult' to get by on their current incomes were more likely to experience harm from workplace hazards than those in more comfortable financial positions.
- 4) In several African and Asian countries and territories — including Sierra Leone, Ghana, Zambia, India, the Philippines and Afghanistan — the percentages who said they had suffered serious harm from unsafe food or water exceeded 20%, or about one in five people. Levels of worry about these risks tended to be higher in the sub-Saharan African countries, where they are particularly common, than in the Asian countries.

## Insight into action

The more concerned people are about possible sources of risk in their lives, the more likely they are to attempt to mitigate those risks — or put pressure on institutions and policymakers to do so. The World Risk Poll demonstrates that public concern about various risk sources increases with people's experiences of harm from those risks. That is good news, but there are exceptions for policymakers to be aware of. In some countries and territories, concern about several risk sources — including work-related harm and unsafe food — was low relative to the percentage of people who experienced harm from those risks. This finding indicates that more could be done to increase awareness of those common day-to-day sources of risk, such as work-related injuries and contaminated food and water, and to make it easier for people to avoid or mitigate the harm.

### World Risk Poll questions examined in this chapter

- *In general, how worried are you that each of the following things could cause you serious harm? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not worried? 1) The food you eat, 2) The water you drink, 3) Violent crime, 4) Severe weather events, such as floods or violent storms, 5) Being in a traffic or roadside accident, 6) Mental health issues, 7) The work you do*
- *Have you or someone you personally know experienced serious harm from any of the following things in the past two years? 1) Eating food, 2) Drinking water, 3) Violent crime, 4) Severe weather events, such as floods or violent storms, 5) Being in a traffic or roadside accident, 6) Mental health issues, 7) The work you do*

*Note: In the analysis comparing 2019 and 2021 results, 'experienced harm' results include both 'you' and 'someone you personally know' because the 2019 question did not distinguish between the two. For all analyses that include 2021 results only (starting on page 24), 'experienced harm' results include only those who have themselves experienced the harm.*

## Worry about potential harm relative to frequency of threat

The 2021 World Risk Poll asked two questions for each of seven potential sources of risk in people's lives: one regarding the degree to which they worried each risk could cause them serious harm, and a second regarding whether they or someone they personally know had been harmed by each risk. The risk sources surveyed included the food they eat, the water they drink, violent crime, severe weather events, traffic or roadside accidents, mental health issues and their work.

### Globally, worry levels were lowest relative to experience for work-related harms and highest for violent crime.

Some of the risks named in the survey were less likely than others to trigger serious concern relative to their incidence. These comparisons can be expressed as ratios by dividing the percentage who worry about a certain risk source by the percentage who have experienced harm from it. The results convey the gap between worry levels and experienced harm in a way that is easily comparable across types of risk.

For example, as shown in Table 2.1, 19% of people worldwide said they were 'very worried' about work-related harm in 2021, compared to 24% who said they or someone they know had experienced serious harm at work in the past two years. The resulting 0.8:1 worry-to-experience ratio was the lowest among the seven risks studied; for most others, the percentage of those who were very worried was at least on par with the incidence of experience with the threat, meaning the worry levels aligned with experience of harm levels.

At the other end of the spectrum, harm from violent crime had a worry-to-experience ratio of 1.7:1. That is, while 32% of people worldwide were very worried about being harmed by violent crime, a significantly lower 19% said they or someone they know had experienced it — meaning nearly twice as many people worried about violent crime as actually experienced harm from this risk.

Notably, the worry/experience ratios for risk sources asked about in both 2019 and 2021 were generally consistent from year to year, even when the risk source had become more prevalent, as was the case with mental health issues (see page 40 for discussion). The one exception was severe weather events, for which the reported experience rate rose from 22% to 27% worldwide, but worry remained unchanged, at 34%.

**Table 2.1**

**Worry/experience with potential sources of harm, global results in 2019 vs. 2021**

	2019			2021		
	% Very worried	% Have experienced or know someone who has experienced	Ratio	% Very worried	% Have experienced or know someone who has experienced	Ratio
The work you do*	--	--	--	19	24	0.8:1
Mental health issues	19	20	1.0:1	25	25	1.0:1
The food you eat	21	17	1.2:1	22	19	1.2:1
Traffic/roadside accidents*	--	--	--	37	32	1.2:1
The water you drink	18	14	1.3:1	18	14	1.3:1
Severe weather events	34	22	1.5:1	34	27	1.3:1
Violent crime	32	17	1.9:1	32	19	1.7:1

Survey questions: In general, how worried are you that each of the following things could cause you serious harm? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not worried?

Have you or someone you personally know experienced serious harm from any of the following things in the past two years?

\* Not asked in 2019.

To some extent, these differences in worry levels relative to the experience of various threats likely reflect the perceived severity of the potential harm, or the ‘dread effect’<sup>7</sup>. For example, as many people dread the potential consequences of violent crime more than those of other risk sources, such as work-related harm, it is natural that they would be more likely to worry about violent crime. Further, violent crime garners more media attention in many countries and territories than other risk sources; recent studies in European and Northern American countries have demonstrated that media representations of crime may contribute to inaccurate public perceptions of crime rates<sup>8</sup>.

However, serious harm can arise from risks that are perceived to be relatively less harmful, such as work-related risks and contaminated food and water. These risks could be reduced if people were more conscious of the risk each posed and of potential mitigation strategies they were motivated and easily able to follow. However, a larger positive impact could be made by policymakers and public/occupational health professionals enacting measures at the regional or national level to create safer systems that eliminate or control sources of risk.

7 Slovic, P. (2000). *The perception of risk. Risk, society, and policy series*. Earthscan; Fischhoff, B., & Kadavy, J. (2011). *Risk: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

8 *Media portrayals of crime create problems*. (2019, January 7). The John Howard Society of Canada. <https://johnhoward.ca/blog/media-portrayals-crime-create-problems/>

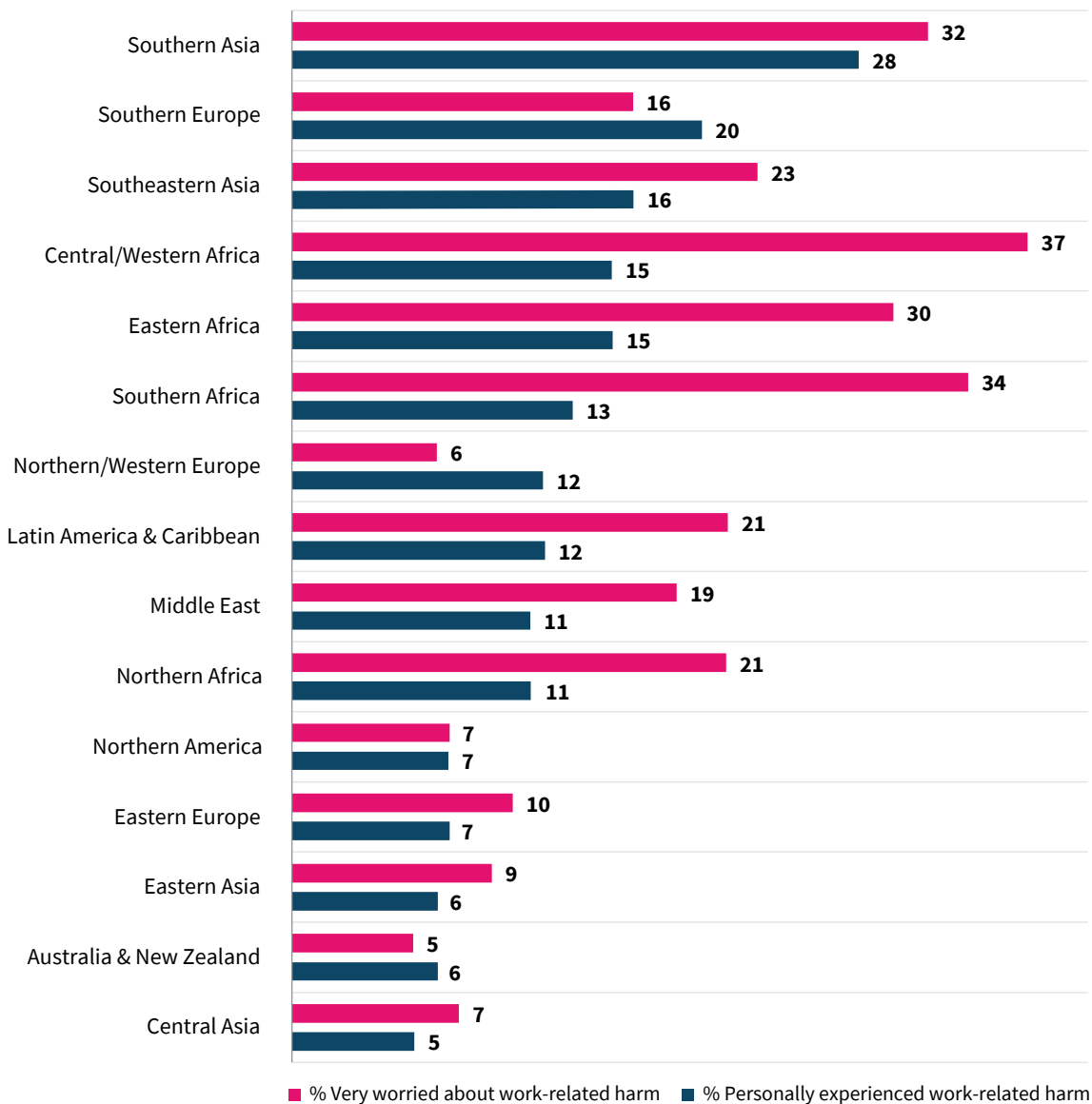
## Worry versus experience: Work-related harm

The World Risk Poll asked people who said they had been employed at all in the past seven days, for an employer or for themselves, about work-related harm. In 2021, worry about such harm was highest in lower-income countries and territories, where agricultural and industrial sectors account for a larger share of employment than in high-income economies. At least 30% of people in four low-income regions — Central/Western Africa (37%), Southern Africa (34%), Southern Asia (32%) and Eastern Africa (30%) — said they were ‘very worried’ about work-related harm, compared to less than 10% in high-income regions like Northern America (7%), Northern/Western Europe (6%) and Australia/New Zealand (5%).

The region where personal experience with work-related harm was highest was Southern Asia (28%), followed by Southern Europe (20%) and Southeastern Asia (16%).

**Chart 2.1**

**Worry vs. personal experience with work-related harm, by region**



Survey questions: In general, how worried are you that [the work you do] could cause you serious harm? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not worried?

Have you experienced serious harm from [work] in the past two years?

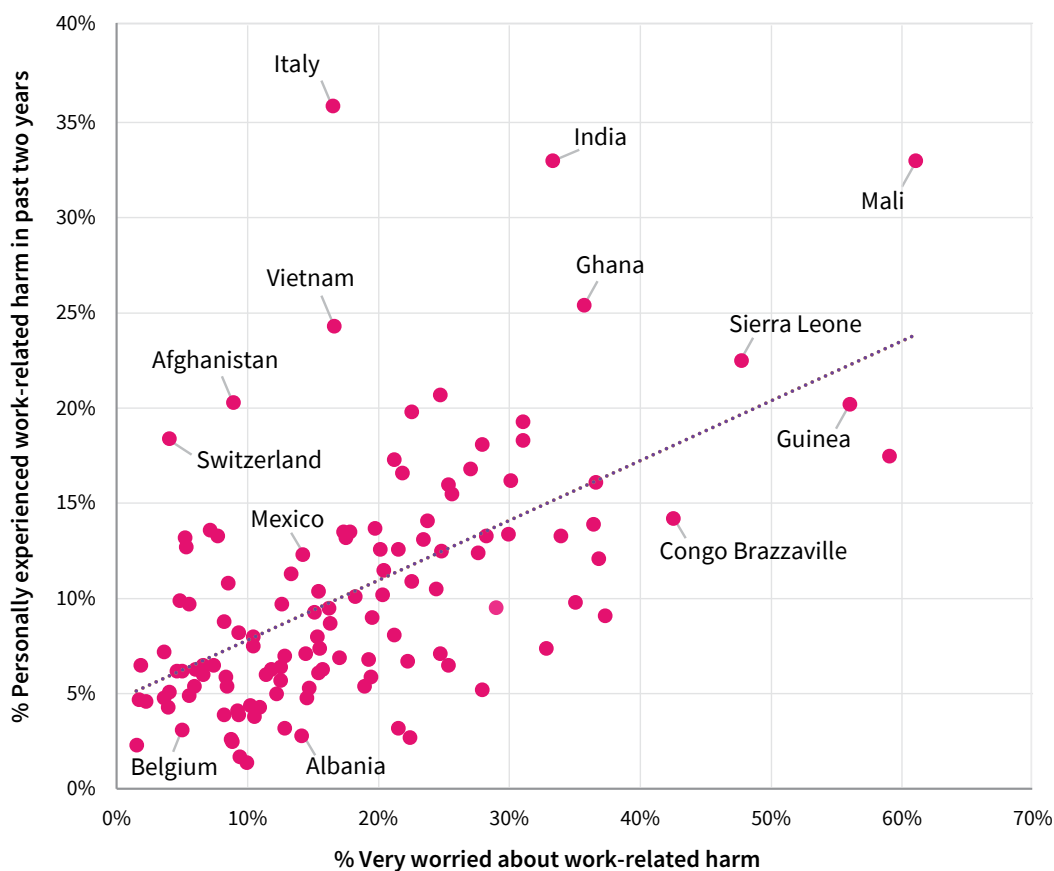


## Worry about work-related harm increased with experience of such harm.

Chart 2.2 shows the relationship between the percentage of workers in each country and territory who were very worried about harm from the work they do and the percentage who said they had actually experienced such harm. In Belgium, where just 3% of workers said they had experienced work-related harm in the past two years, the percentage very worried about such harm was almost twice as high, at 5%. At the other end of the trend line, in Guinea, 20% of workers said they had personally been harmed on the job, and 56% were very worried this would happen.

**Chart 2.2**

### Relationship between worry and personal experience of work-related harm Results among employed people in each country or territory



Survey questions: In general, how worried are you that [the work you do] could cause you serious harm? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not worried?

Have you experienced serious harm from [work] in the past two years?

Chart 2.2 also highlights several exceptions to this pattern. Italy, Switzerland, Afghanistan and Vietnam stand out as countries where the percentage of workers who had personally experienced work-related harm in the past two years was relatively high (18% or more), but relatively few worried about work-related risks.

There are a number of possible explanations for these contrasts, the combination of which likely varies depending on the national context. Workers may underestimate work-related risks; they may be conscious of them but have a low 'dread' factor about the consequences due to social and economic safety nets; they may be resigned to an inevitability of harm; or they may simply worry about more pressing risks. In Afghanistan, for instance, data collection took place during and just after the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Concern about work-related harm

was likely overshadowed by other risks, even among workers who had experienced them; most notably, 60% of Afghans said they were very worried about harm from violent crime.

Nonetheless, in each of these countries, work-related harm represents a significant toll on individuals' health, societal resources and economic output. As such, there is an important role for safety authorities and professionals in implementing steps to improve awareness, increase agency and reduce the systemic risks people face in their work lives.

**More than one-third of Italian workers had experienced work-related harm in the past two years.**

By far the biggest outlier was Italy, where 36% of workers said they had experienced harm from work in the past two years, making it one of just three countries (in addition to India and Mali) where this figure was over 30%. The high incidence of work-related injuries is reflected in growing concern about workplace safety in Italy. In August 2021, the Italian media reported 677 workplace deaths between January and July of that year, prompting Prime Minister Mario Draghi to promise in an August speech to 'do something to improve the unacceptable situation in terms of safety at work'<sup>9</sup>.

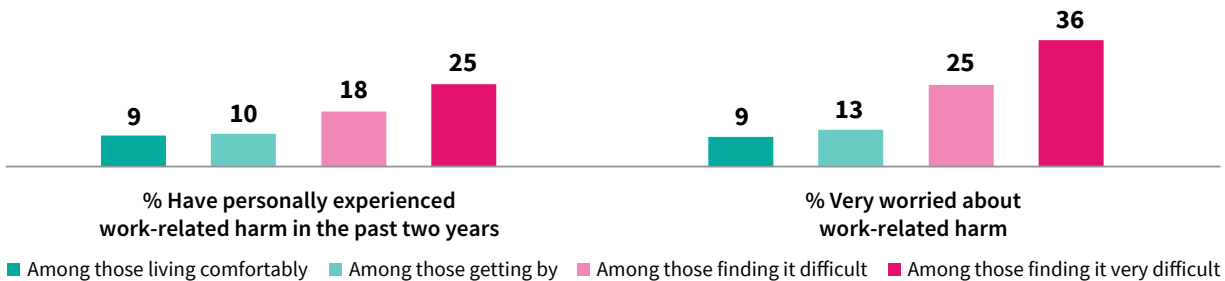
Draghi has worked with unions to tighten safety regulations and hire more safety inspectors<sup>10</sup>, but given that just 16% of Italian workers said they were very worried about work-related harm, raising awareness of the risks they face — and actions that can be taken to mitigate them — may also be a critical step in reducing workers' vulnerability.

**Financially vulnerable workers were most likely to report occupational harms.**

Experience with work-related harm was most common among low-income workers, who are more likely to have jobs involving physical labour, such as agricultural work, or to work in manufacturing settings, where hazards are more common. In 2021, 25% of workers worldwide who said they were finding it 'very difficult' to get by on their current income had personally experienced serious workplace harm in the past two years, versus 9% of those who reported they were 'living comfortably' on their current income and 10% who were 'getting by.' Correspondingly, workers finding it very difficult on their current income were four times as likely as those living comfortably to be very worried about serious harm from the work they do — 36% versus 9%.

**Chart 2.3**

**Worry vs. personal experience of work-related harm, by workers' financial situation**



Survey questions: In general, how worried are you that [the work you do] could cause you serious harm? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not worried?  
 Have you experienced serious harm from [work] in the past two years?  
 Don't know/refused responses not shown.

9 Giuffrida, A. (2021, September 29). Spotlight on workplace safety in Italy amid spate of fatal accidents. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/29/spotlight-on-workplace-safety-in-italy-amid-spate-of-fatal-accidents>  
 10 *Workplace safety, PM Draghi issues statement*. (2021, October 18). Italian Government Presidency of the Council of Ministries. <https://www.governo.it/en/articolo/workplace-safety-pm-draghi-issues-statement/18272>

Such broad discrepancies are particularly troubling, as serious workplace injuries may exacerbate existing economic inequality in many countries and territories by disproportionately affecting the earning potential of low-income workers. In Southern Asia, about one-third of workers who said they found it difficult or very difficult to get by on their current income reported having suffered serious work-related harm in the past two years; in India, that figure was 37%, which translates to about 233 million injured workers.

Importantly, many low-income workers in India — as in many other low- and middle-income countries and territories — work in informal jobs without disability benefits or other forms of social protection. The Covid-19 pandemic further highlighted the plight of such workers in India, leading the World Bank to approve a \$500 million program to help protect them<sup>11</sup>.

However, the vulnerability to workplace injury seen among low-income workers was also common in some high-income countries. In Northern America, 32% of workers who find it very difficult to get by on their current income — including 33% in the United States and 24% in Canada — said they had experienced serious harm from the work they do in the past two years. In the United States, in particular, rising inequality and discrepancies in access to post-secondary education have meant that many workers in manual jobs with greater injury risk are poorly paid<sup>12</sup>.

11 World Bank approves \$500 million program to protect India's informal sector workers. (2021, June 29). The World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/06/29/world-bank-approves-500-million-program-to-protect-india-s-informal-sector-workers>

12 Dorman, P., & Boden, L. (2021, April 19). Risk without reward: The myth of wage compensation for hazardous work. *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/unequalpower/publications/risk-without-reward-the-myth-of-wage-compensation-for-hazardous-work/>



**Table 2.2**

**Percentage who personally experienced serious work-related harm in the past two years, by workers' financial situation within regions**

	% Living comfortably	% Getting by	% Finding it difficult	% Finding it very difficult
Southern Asia	18	23	30	35
Northern America	3	7	12	32
Southern Europe	18	19	25	24
Southeastern Asia	11	14	23	20
Southern Africa	5	10	17	19
Middle East	5	8	12	18
Northern Africa	7	7	11	18
Latin America & Caribbean	6	10	13	17
Central/Western Africa	15	15	16	16
Eastern Africa	11	12	16	16
Northern/Western Europe	12	10	16	16
Eastern Europe	4	7	9	15
Eastern Asia	4	4	9	15
Central Asia	2	4	8	11
Australia & New Zealand	6	7	8	5

0-5   6-10   11-15   16-20   21-25   26-30   31-35

Survey question: Have you experienced serious harm from [work] in the past two years?



## Worry versus experience: Harm from contaminated food and water

Like work-related harm, people were more likely to experience and worry about harm from the food they eat and the water they drink in lower-income countries and territories, where safety regulations are weaker and less consistently enforced. The 2021 World Risk Poll highlights several countries and territories where experience with harm from food and water was particularly common (see Chart 2.4).

**Harm from food:** In eight countries and territories worldwide, at least 20% of people said they had suffered harm from food they had eaten in the past two years: Sierra Leone (28%), Ghana (28%), Zambia (25%), India (25%), Mozambique (25%), the Philippines (21%), Afghanistan (20%) and Algeria (20%).

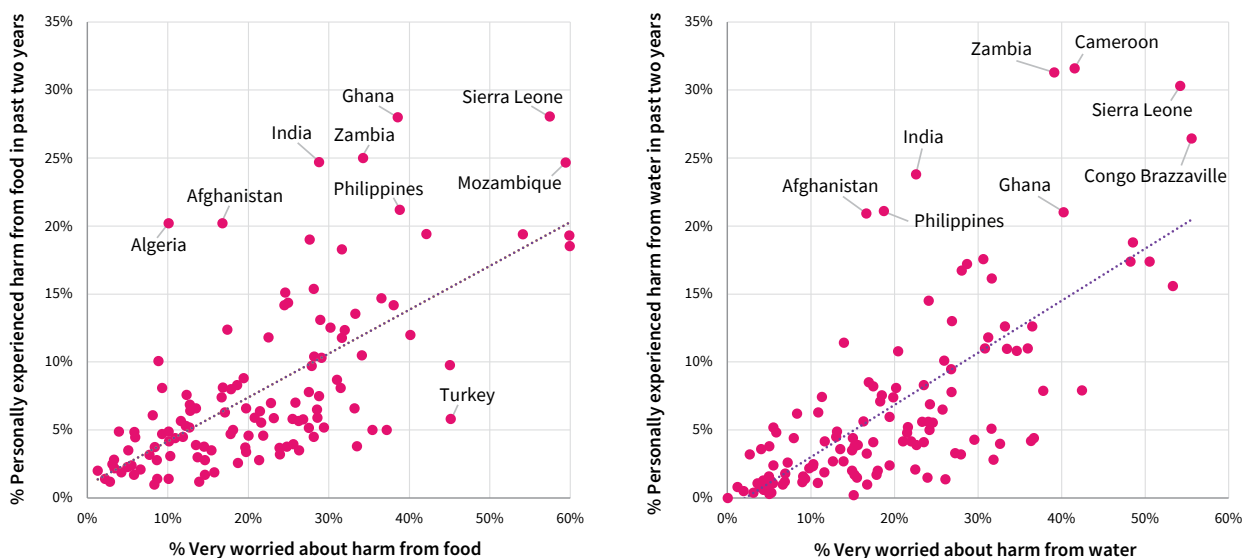
- In most of these countries, concern about food safety was also relatively widespread; the percentage ‘very worried’ about harm from the food they eat surpassed a majority in Mozambique (59%) and Sierra Leone (57%) and exceeded one-third in Ghana (39%), the Philippines (39%) and Zambia (34%).
- In India, Afghanistan and Algeria, however, such concern was less widespread relative to the incidence of food-related harm. In Algeria, though 20% of people said they had experienced harm from food in the past two years, just 10% were very worried about it.

**Harm from water:** In several of the same countries where more than one-fifth of people had experienced harm from food — including Sierra Leone, Zambia, Ghana, the Philippines, India and Afghanistan — similarly high percentages had experienced harm from the water they drink in the past two years. In two additional countries — Cameroon and Congo Brazzaville — more than 25% had experienced harm from water.

- In three sub-Saharan African countries, the percentage very worried about harm from water was close to twice the percentage of those who had personally experienced harm from it. These include Sierra Leone (54% vs. 30%), Congo Brazzaville (56% vs. 26%) and Ghana (40% vs. 21%).
- In the Asian countries where harm from water was particularly common, water safety was less frequently seen as a pressing concern. For example, though 21% of Filipinos said they had personally experienced drinking-water-related harm in the past two years, just 19% were very worried about such harm.

### Chart 2.4

**Relationship between worry and personal experience of food- and water-related harm, by country or territory**



Survey questions: In general, how worried are you that [the food you eat/the water you drink] could cause you serious harm? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not worried?  
Have you experienced serious harm from [eating food/drinking water] in the past two years?



## Conclusion

Though work-related diseases and injuries<sup>13</sup> and illnesses from unsafe food and water<sup>14</sup> remain among the most common preventable types of harm in many countries and territories, they also tend to be less likely to elicit the same levels of public concern as other risks, such as violent crime. In identifying regions, countries and territories where levels of worry about such risks were particularly low relative to people's likelihood of experiencing harm from them, the World Risk Poll highlights instances where interventions from policymakers and public health professionals, combined with awareness-raising campaigns by advocacy organisations partnering with local communities on these issues, may have a substantial impact on reducing harm to people and improving safety.



- 13 WHO/ILO: *Almost 2 million people die from work-related causes each year*. (2021, September 17). World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news/item/17-09-2021-who-ilo-almost-2-million-people-die-from-work-related-causes-each-year>
- 14 *Food safety: Key facts*. (n.d.). World Health Organization. Retrieved 10 June 2022 from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/food-safety>; *Drinking-water: Key facts*. (n.d.). World Health Organization. Retrieved 10 June 2022 from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/drinking-water>

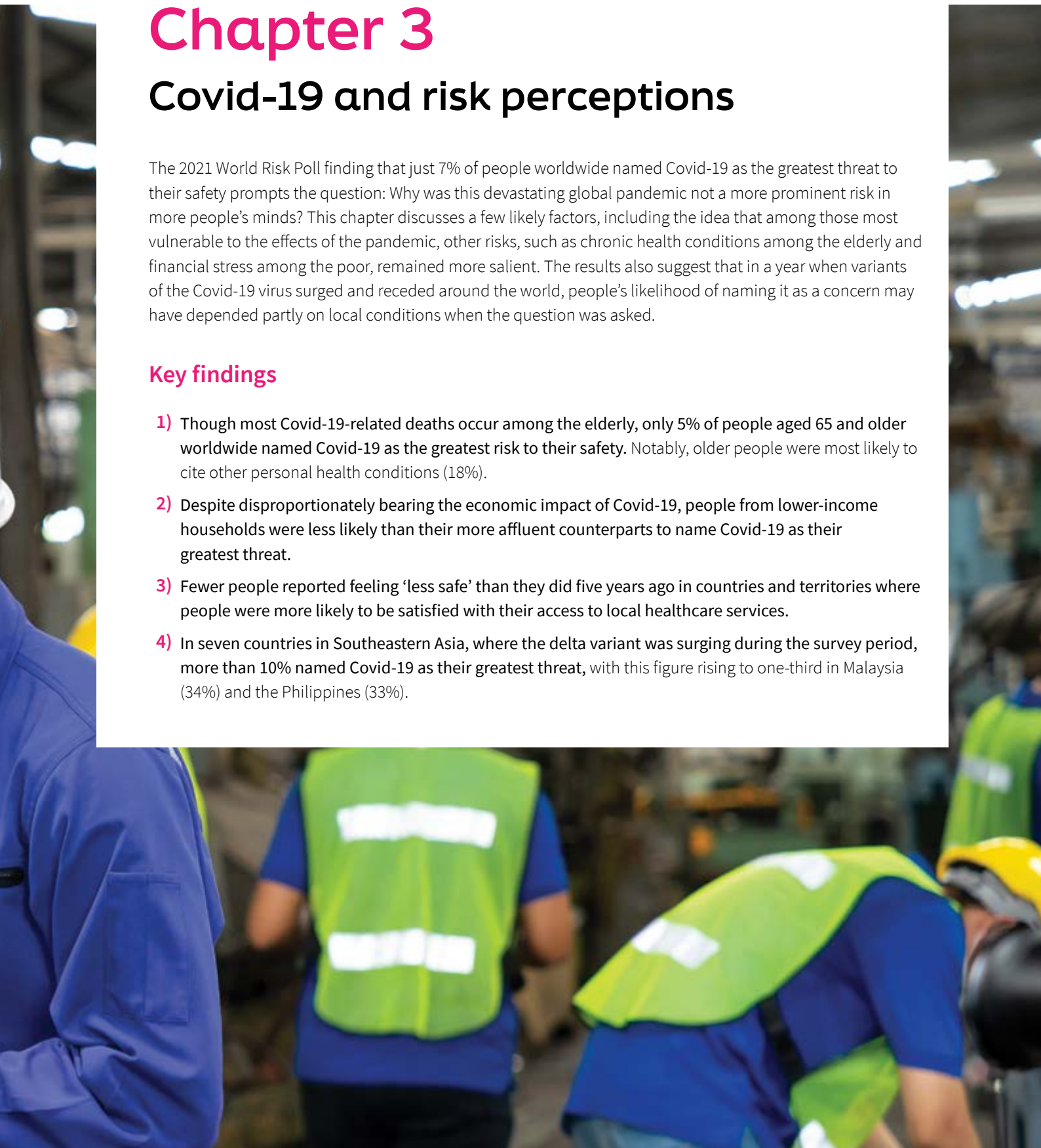
# Chapter 3

## Covid-19 and risk perceptions

The 2021 World Risk Poll finding that just 7% of people worldwide named Covid-19 as the greatest threat to their safety prompts the question: Why was this devastating global pandemic not a more prominent risk in more people's minds? This chapter discusses a few likely factors, including the idea that among those most vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic, other risks, such as chronic health conditions among the elderly and financial stress among the poor, remained more salient. The results also suggest that in a year when variants of the Covid-19 virus surged and receded around the world, people's likelihood of naming it as a concern may have depended partly on local conditions when the question was asked.

### Key findings

- 1) Though most Covid-19-related deaths occur among the elderly, only 5% of people aged 65 and older worldwide named Covid-19 as the greatest risk to their safety. Notably, older people were most likely to cite other personal health conditions (18%).
- 2) Despite disproportionately bearing the economic impact of Covid-19, people from lower-income households were less likely than their more affluent counterparts to name Covid-19 as their greatest threat.
- 3) Fewer people reported feeling 'less safe' than they did five years ago in countries and territories where people were more likely to be satisfied with their access to local healthcare services.
- 4) In seven countries in Southeastern Asia, where the delta variant was surging during the survey period, more than 10% named Covid-19 as their greatest threat, with this figure rising to one-third in Malaysia (34%) and the Philippines (33%).



## Insight into action

A key challenge in managing the response to the Covid-19 pandemic is that those most vulnerable to the pandemic’s devastating health and economic effects are also more likely to be managing other serious risks to their health and wellbeing. This implies that for many, Covid-19 risks sit within a ‘hierarchy’ of other risks that may be more urgent for people to manage and overcome. To have more impact, public health agencies need to work more with other arms of government to empower people to adopt mitigation strategies without inadvertently increasing their exposure to the other pressing risks in their daily lives. Additionally, partnering more closely with community leaders could help ensure people understand the risks posed by the pandemic and that there is community buy-in to achievable and relatable mitigation strategies.

## World Risk Poll questions examined in this chapter

- *In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?*

## The perceived risk of Covid-19

### Why was Covid-19 not more frequently named as people’s greatest source of risk in 2021?

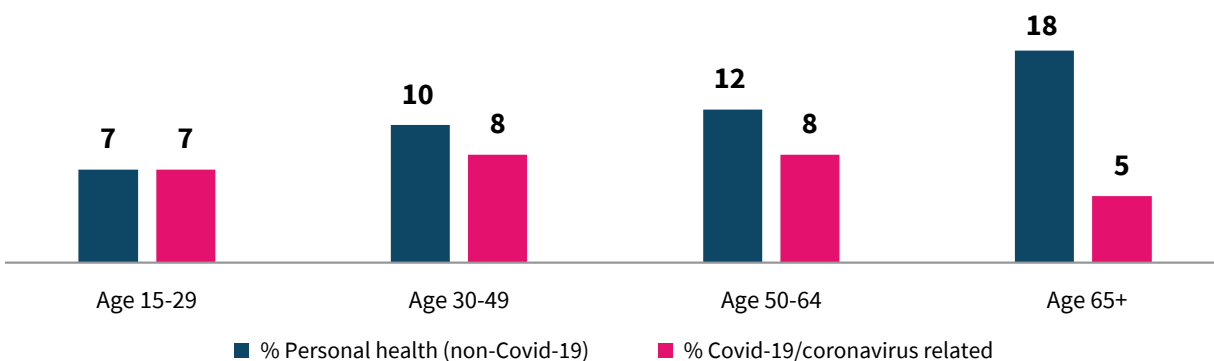
Covid-19 is a global health emergency on a larger scale and with a higher death toll than any since the flu pandemic of 1918<sup>15</sup>. Given its consequences and the widespread disruption caused by Covid-19, it may be somewhat surprising that just a fraction of the global population (7%) named it as their greatest source of risk.

One likely factor is that those most vulnerable to Covid-19 — including the elderly and people with less reliable access to healthcare — were also more likely to be dealing with other ‘competing’ threats to their safety.

Though most Covid-19-related deaths occur among the elderly, people aged 65 and older worldwide were somewhat less likely than those under age 65 to name Covid-19 as the greatest risk to their safety. This finding may be partly due to the elderly being more likely than younger people to cite other personal health issues as their greatest risk (Chart 3.1). In some cases, however, concern about chronic health conditions was likely heightened by Covid-19 because common conditions like diabetes or asthma put people at greater risk for severe illness from the disease.

**Chart 3.1**

### Greatest perceived risk, by age group



Survey question: In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?

<sup>15</sup> *Outbreak: 10 of the worst pandemics in history*. (n.d.). MPH Online. Retrieved 10 June 2022 from <https://www.mphonline.org/worst-pandemics-in-history/>

Similarly, though studies have shown that people around the world with low incomes have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, 6% of those in their country's bottom income quintile named Covid-19 as their greatest source of risk, versus 9% of those in the top income quintile.

These gaps were larger in most regions where people were more likely to name Covid-19 as the greatest risk to their safety in 2021. The largest disparity was in Northern Africa, where 10% of those in the bottom income quintile named Covid-19, versus 18%-19% in the top three quintiles. Correspondingly, Northern Africans in low-income households were much more likely to name financial issues as the greatest source of risk to their safety.



**Table 3.1**

**Percentage who named Covid-19 as their greatest threat, by region and within-country income quintiles**

	Overall	Bottom 20% income	Second 20%	Middle 20%	Fourth 20%	Top 20% income
Southeastern Asia	16	14	16	16	16	18
Northern Africa	16	10	13	19	18	18
Southern Africa	10	8	10	9	9	13
Middle East	8	9	8	10	9	7
Southern Asia	8	4	8	7	9	11
Central Asia	7	5	7	6	9	9
Eastern Asia	7	7	8	5	9	8
Australia & New Zealand	7	10	6	3	7	8
Northern America	5	3	6	6	4	7
Eastern Europe	5	5	5	6	4	5
Northern/Western Europe	4	4	4	3	4	4
Southern Europe	4	4	5	4	4	3
Eastern Africa	3	2	2	4	2	4
Latin America & Caribbean	3	4	2	3	2	2
Central/Western Africa	1	<0.5	<0.5	<0.5	1	1

0-5    6-10    11-15    16-20

Survey question: In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?

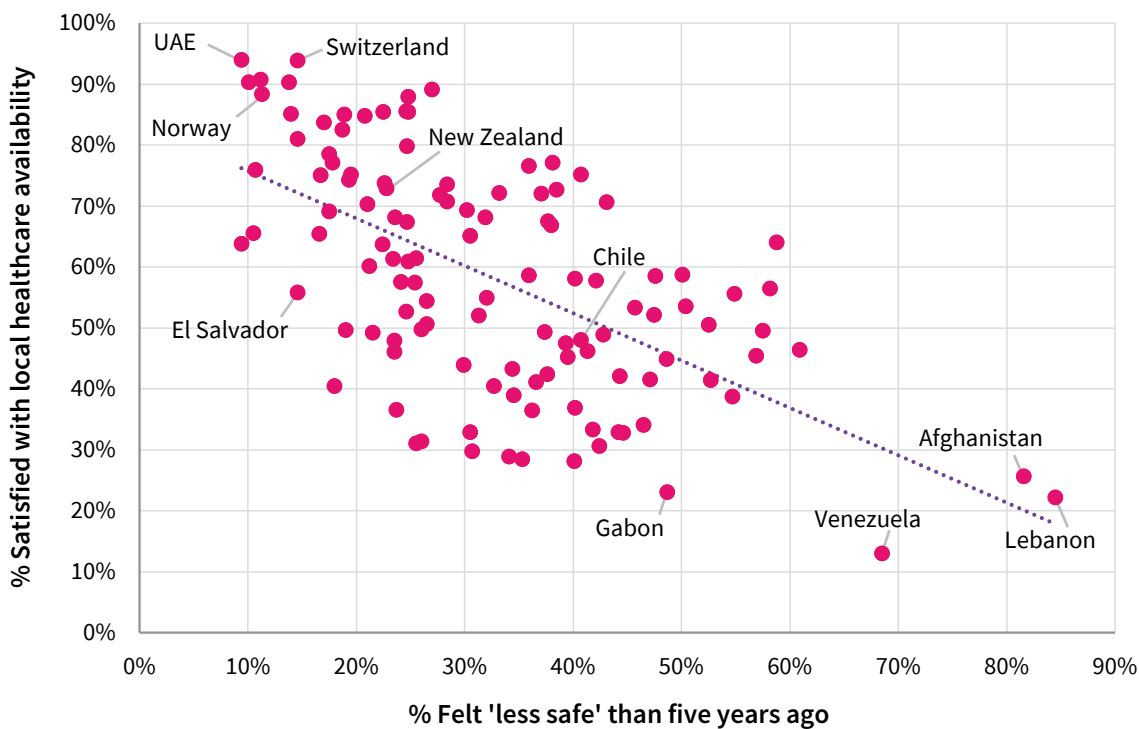


**The likelihood of feeling ‘less safe’ than five years ago was lowest in countries with higher healthcare satisfaction.**

In a year when health systems were tasked with administering Covid-19 vaccines while managing new outbreaks from the delta and omicron variants, the World Risk Poll results suggest that widespread confidence in the capacity of local healthcare systems helped bolster feelings of overall safety. In countries and territories where people were more likely to say they were satisfied with the availability of quality healthcare in their area, they were less likely to say they felt less safe than they did five years ago.

**Chart 3.2**

**Relationship between satisfaction with healthcare availability and feeling ‘less safe’ than five years ago, by country or territory**



Survey questions: Overall, compared to five years ago, do you feel more safe, less safe, or about as safe as you did five years ago?\*

In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of quality healthcare?

\* Question was not asked in China in 2021.

To some extent, satisfaction with healthcare systems may be a proxy for people’s perceptions of their country’s broader institutional capacity and stability. As in 2019, people’s likelihood of saying they felt less safe than they did five years ago was also related to external indicators of government effectiveness and political stability. The three countries where more than two-thirds of people felt less safe in 2021 — Venezuela, Lebanon and Afghanistan — have in recent years been subject to catastrophic political and economic instability (Venezuela<sup>16</sup> and Lebanon<sup>17</sup>) or chronic civil conflict (Afghanistan<sup>18</sup>).

16 Venezuela crisis: How the political situation escalated. (2021, August 12). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36319877>

17 Leonhardt, D., & Yar, S. (2021, October 14). Lebanon’s Crisis. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/14/briefing/lebanon-financial-crisis-lira.html>

18 *War in Afghanistan*. (n.d.). Global Conflict Tracker. Retrieved 14 June 2022 from <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/war-afghanistan>



## Covid-19 was most commonly seen as the greatest threat to safety in Southeastern Asia and Northern Africa.

According to 2022 estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO), excess deaths associated with Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021 (i.e., deaths directly or indirectly associated with the pandemic) were concentrated in Southeastern Asia, Europe and the Americas<sup>19</sup>. The WHO report also notes that 81% of excess deaths occurred in middle-income countries, which tend to have larger elderly populations than the world's poorest countries<sup>20</sup>, but where healthcare systems have less capacity than in high-income countries.

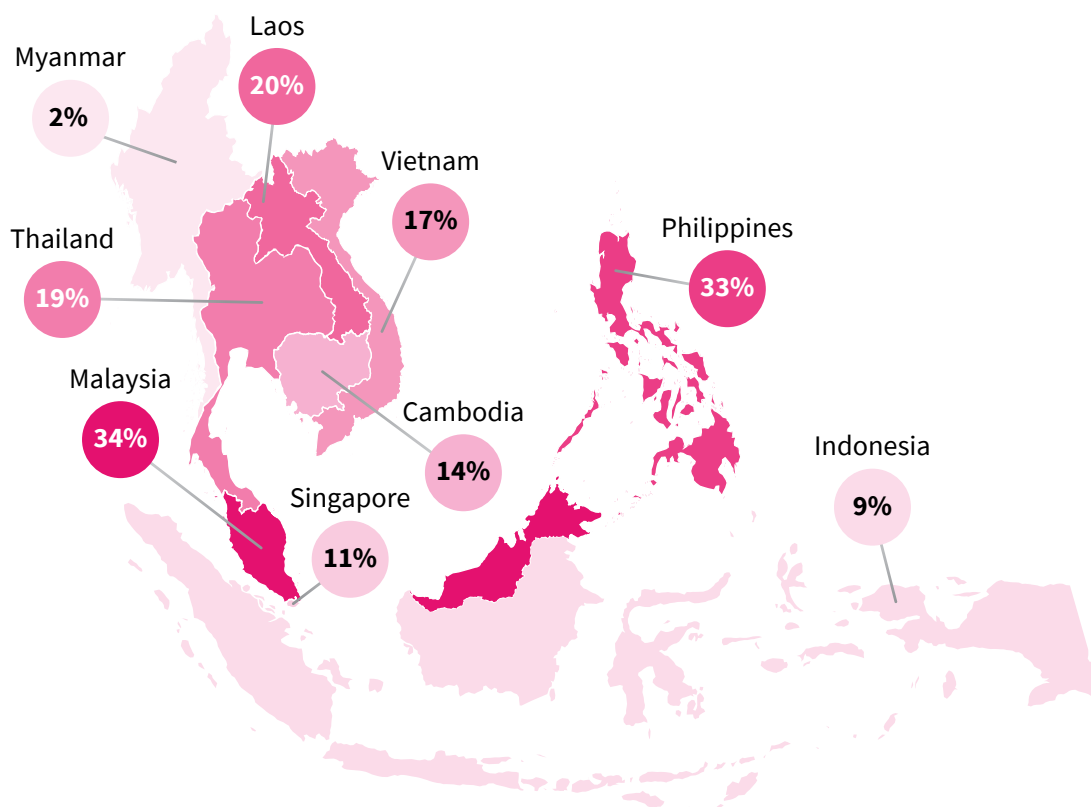
As discussed in Chapter 1, more than 10% of people named Covid-19 as the greatest threat to their safety in Southeastern Asia (16%) and Northern Africa (16%). Both regions are characterised by middle-income economies, many of which experienced severe fallout from surging delta variant cases around the time of data collection.

### Southeastern Asia

In seven of Southeastern Asia's nine countries, more than 10% of people named Covid-19 as their greatest source of risk, with this figure rising to one-third in Malaysia (34%) and the Philippines (33%). Data collection in most Southeastern Asian countries occurred in late summer and early autumn of 2021, when the delta variant was sweeping much of the region. Some Southeastern Asians may also have been predisposed toward greater apprehension about Covid-19 due to the region's previous experience with the deadly 2002-2004 SARS outbreak.

Map 3.1

### Percentage who named Covid-19 as the greatest threat to their safety in Southeastern Asia



Survey question: In your own words, what is the greatest source of risk to your safety in your daily life?

19 14.9 million excess deaths associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. (2022, May 5). World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2022-14.9-million-excess-deaths-were-associated-with-the-covid-19-pandemic-in-2020-and-2021>

20 Udoakang, A., Oboh, M., Henry-Ajala, A., Anyigba, C., Omoleke, S., Amambua-Ngwa, A., Paemka, L., Awandare, G., & Quashie, P. (2021, October 7). *Low COVID-19 impact in Africa: The multifactorial Nexus* [version 1]. Open Research Africa. <https://openresearchafrica.org/articles/4-47>

### Northern Africa

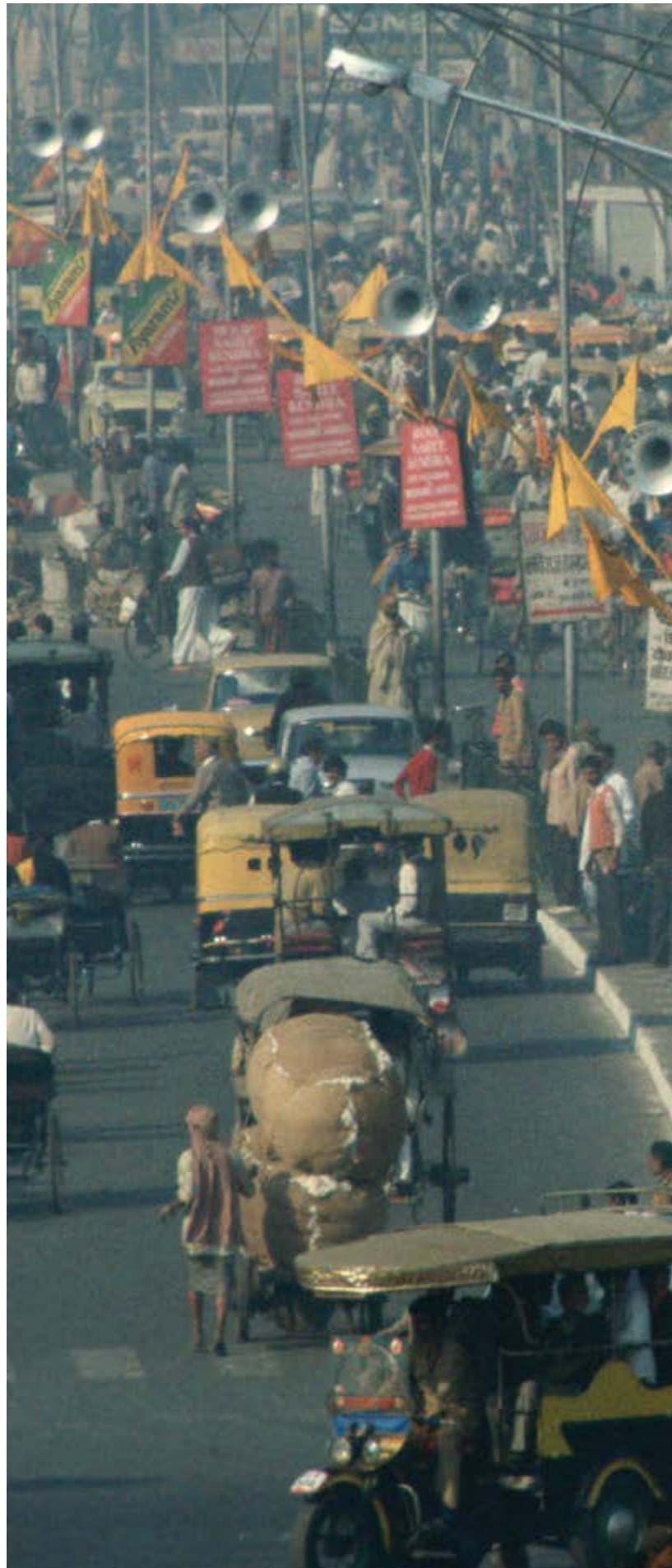
Within Northern Africa, the percentage of people who named Covid-19 as the greatest threat to their safety was highest in Algeria — the only country outside Southeastern Asia where one-third of people or more named Covid-19, at 35%. Data collection took place in Algeria in July and early August of 2021, amid a devastating surge in delta variant cases that overwhelmed the country's healthcare system<sup>21</sup>.

### Conclusion

In the first few months of 2020, Covid-19 represented a largely unknown risk and a pervasive source of anxiety in many countries and territories, as healthcare systems faced overwhelming cases of severe illness and countless businesses were forced to close their doors. By the time World Risk Poll data collection began in the spring of 2021, however, much of the global population had adjusted to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, vaccines were being distributed (though more quickly and comprehensively in high-income than low-income countries<sup>22</sup>), and many businesses that closed in 2020 reopened.

As risk scholars have noted, the perception of risk from extreme events is heightened if people believe their exposure to those risks is outside their control<sup>23</sup>. While the pandemic remained a global threat as the 2021 World Risk Poll was being conducted, it likely seemed more manageable than it had the previous year, allowing many to return their primary focus to more long-standing risks they face in their daily lives. Places where residents more frequently named Covid-19 as their greatest risk were often battling a variant surge that brought the crisis back to the forefront of many people's minds.

- 21 In Algeria, the health system is overwhelmed by the delta variant. (2021, July 29). *The Maghreb Times*. <https://themaghrebtimes.com/in-algeria-the-health-system-is-overwhelmed-by-the-delta-variant/>
- 22 Uribe, J. P. (2021, December 15). *Supporting vaccine rollout in developing countries*. World Bank Blogs. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/health/supporting-vaccine-rollout-developing-countries>
- 23 Slovic, P., & Weber, E. U. (2002, April 12-13). *Perception of risk posed by extreme events* [Paper presentation]. Risk Management Strategies in an Uncertain World, Palisades, NY, United States. [https://www.ideo.columbia.edu/chrr/documents/meetings/roundtable/white\\_papers/slovic\\_wp.pdf](https://www.ideo.columbia.edu/chrr/documents/meetings/roundtable/white_papers/slovic_wp.pdf)





# Chapter 4

## Do policymakers focus on people's greatest sources of risk?

The World Risk Poll can serve as a barometer for those working to promote public safety in their country by providing benchmark data on people's experience with and concerns about various risk sources against which to compare current risk mitigation efforts. Certain risks, such as harm from mental health issues, are increasingly common at the global level but go largely unaddressed in many countries and territories.

### Key findings

- 1) The percentage of people worldwide who said they or someone they know experienced serious harm related to two areas increased significantly between 2019 and 2021: severe weather events (from 22% to 27%) and mental health issues (from 20% to 25%).
- 2) Though low- and lower-middle-income countries and territories are least likely to devote substantial resources to mental health services, people in those countries were more likely than those in higher-income countries and territories to say they had experienced serious harm from mental health issues in the past two years.
- 3) Experience with serious harm from several risk sources was most common among those in their country's lowest income groups, highlighting equity challenges in access to public services and infrastructure used to mitigate such risks at the societal level.



## Insight into action

Comparison of the 2021 World Risk Poll results to those from 2019 reveals that experience with mental health issues and severe weather has risen significantly at the global level. The rise in mental health issues was seen across regions and nations with different income levels, showing that mental health is not just a 'Western' problem; it should be considered in development policies and holistic health improvement programmes for low- and middle-income countries.

Public health professionals and safety leaders should be aware of such changes in their country, as well as the overall incidence and distribution of harm from various sources across different sections of the population — especially when considering directing resources to promote public health and wellbeing.

## World Risk Poll questions examined in this chapter

- *In general, how worried are you that each of the following things could cause you serious harm? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not worried? 1) The food you eat, 2) The water you drink, 3) Violent crime, 4) Severe weather events, such as floods or violent storms, 5) Being in a traffic or roadside accident, 6) Mental health issues, 7) The work you do*
- *Have you or someone you personally know experienced serious harm from any of the following things in the past two years? 1) Eating food, 2) Drinking water, 3) Violent crime, 4) Severe weather events, such as floods or violent storms, 5) Being in a traffic or roadside accident, 6) Mental health issues, 7) The work you do*
- *Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so*

*Note: In the analysis comparing 2019 and 2021 results, 'experienced harm' results include both 'you' and 'someone you personally know' because the 2019 question did not distinguish between the two. For all analyses that include 2021 results only (starting on page 41), 'experienced harm' results include only those who have themselves experienced the harm.*

## Addressing risks

### Are policymakers doing enough to address risks most likely to affect people?

Experiences of harm from violent crime and unsafe food or water changed little at the global level between 2019 and 2021 (see Table 2.1). However, there were five-point increases in the percentages who said they experienced serious harm from severe weather events (from 22% in 2019 to 27% in 2021) and mental health issues (20% to 25%). Both increases may have been influenced by conditions that impacted people worldwide: the rising incidence of droughts, floods and other weather-related hazards associated with climate change<sup>24</sup>, and the knock-on impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions and lockdowns on mental health<sup>25</sup>.

24 *State of the global climate report 2021* [WMO-No. 1290]. (2022). World Meteorological Organization. [https://library.wmo.int/doc\\_num.php?explnum\\_id=11178](https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=11178)

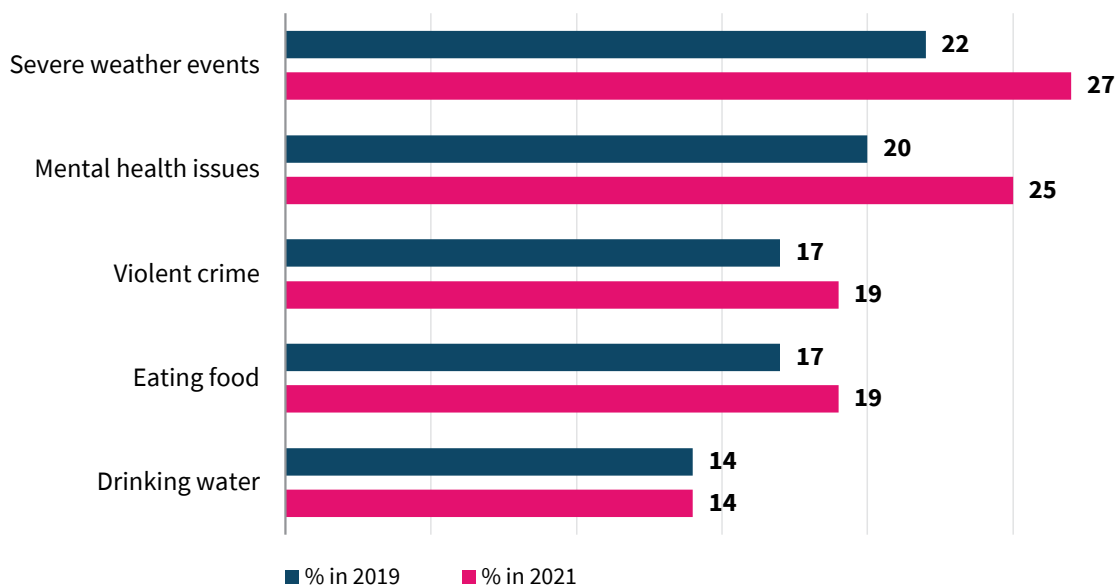
25 *COVID-19 pandemic triggers 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide*. (2022, March 2). World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide>





**Chart 4.1**

**Percentage who experienced or personally know someone who experienced serious harm in the past two years from various risk sources, global results in 2019 vs. 2021**



Survey question: Have you or someone you personally know experienced serious harm from any of the following things in the past two years?

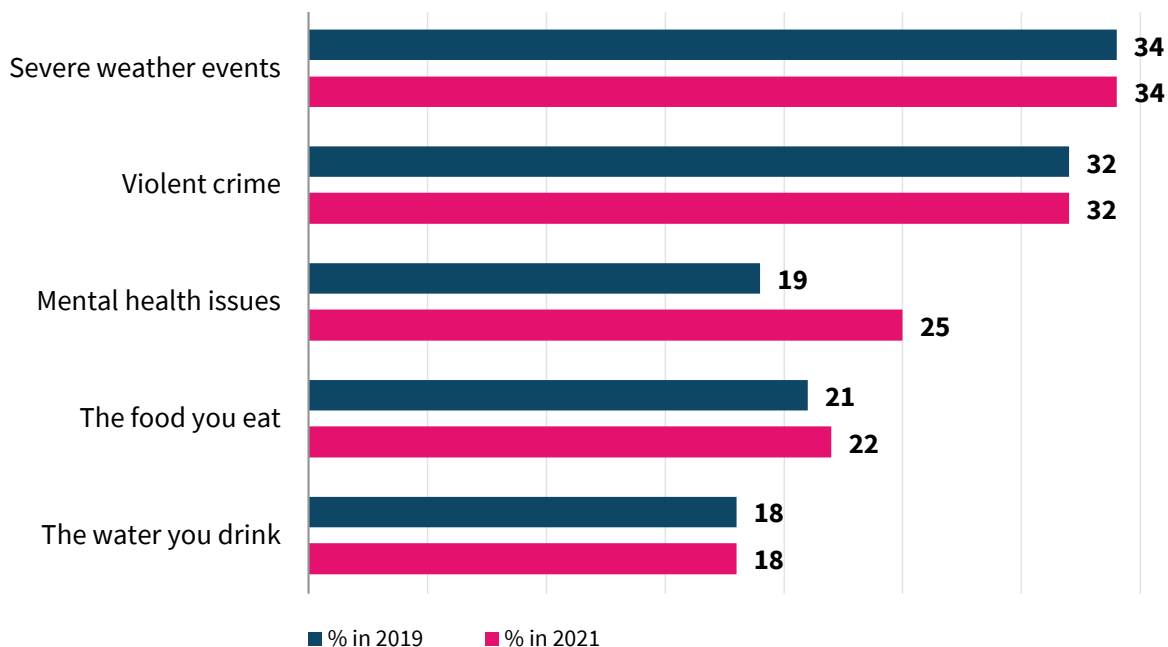
People’s level of concern was stable for four of the five risk sources asked in both 2019 and 2021. In 2021, at least a third of people worldwide continued to be ‘very worried’ about harm from severe weather events (34% in both years) and violent crime (32% in both years), while about one in five remained very worried about harm from the food they eat (22% vs. 21%) or the water they drink (18% in both years).



Notably, the global percentage who were very worried about serious harm from mental health issues rose with the percentage who had experienced such issues, from 19% in 2019 to 25% in 2021.

**Chart 4.2**

**Percentage 'very worried' they could be harmed by various risk sources, global results in 2019 vs. 2021**



Survey questions: In general, how worried are you that each of the following things could cause you serious harm? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not worried?

**Risks underestimated by policymakers: Mental health issues**

The increased incidence of harm from mental health issues highlights a risk policymakers in many countries and territories underestimate or lack the capacity to address. In 2021, 12% of people worldwide said they had experienced harm from mental health issues in the past two years, while an additional 13% said someone they personally know had. The combined 25% represents a significant increase from the 20% who responded this way in 2019.

Access to mental health services varies widely by region; a 2020 Wellcome/Gallup study on mental health found that people in high-income countries who had experienced anxiety or depression were more likely than those in low-income countries or territories to have talked to a mental health professional or taken prescribed medication<sup>26</sup>. That finding coincides with other recent studies on the need to strengthen mental health services in many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)<sup>27</sup>.

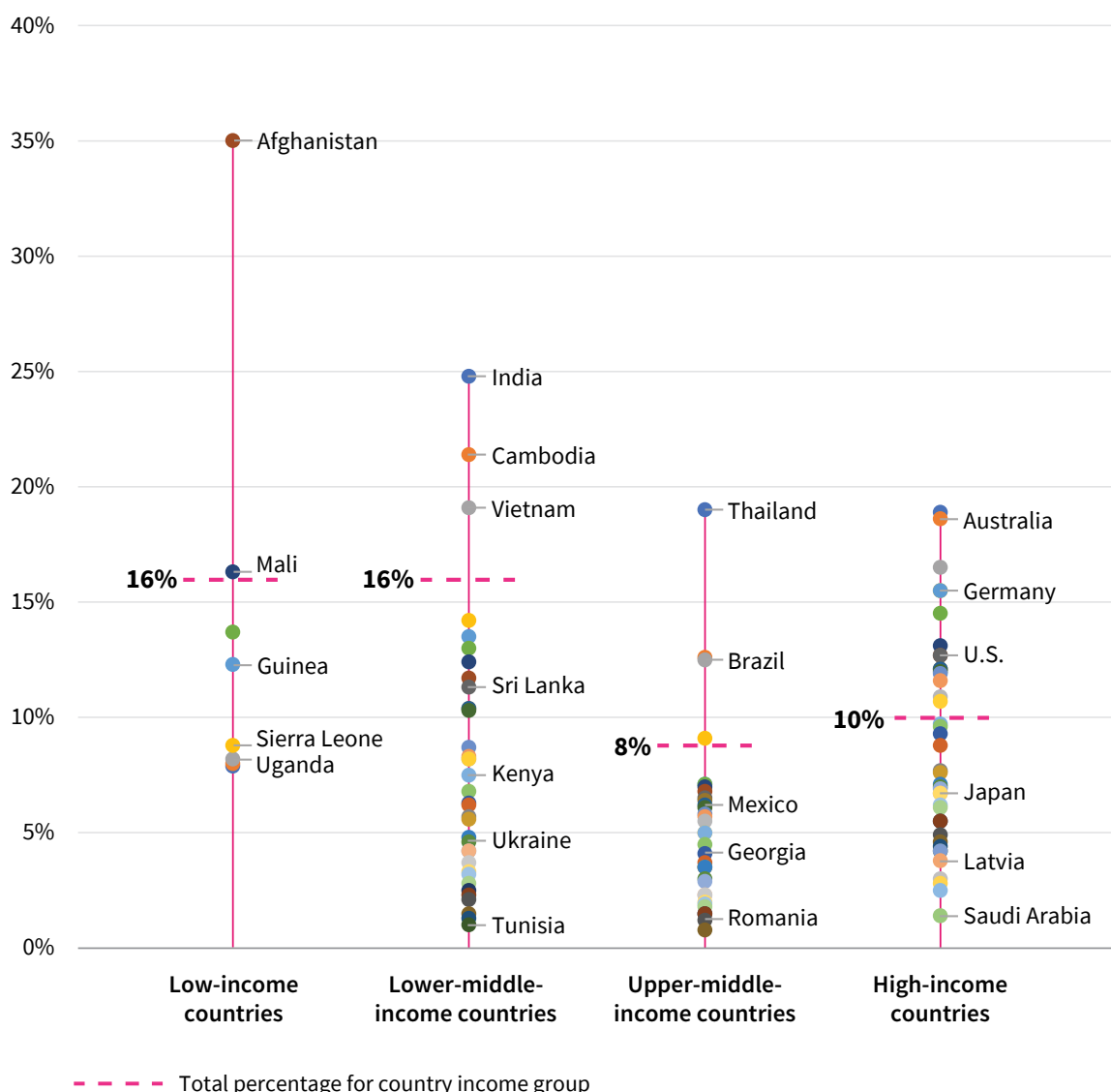
The 2021 World Risk Poll finds that people in lower-income countries and territories were at least as likely as those in high-income countries to say they have experienced harm from mental health issues (see Chart 4.3). In LMICs, public health professionals, policymakers and international bodies that fail to recognise improved mental health outcomes as an important development goal may not be aligned with people's needs and their wellbeing.

26 Wellcome Foundation & Gallup, Inc. (2020). *The role of science in mental health: Insights from the Wellcome Global Monitor*. <https://cms.wellcome.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/wellcome-global-monitor-mental-health.pdf>

27 Rathod, S., Pinninti, N., Irfan, M., Gorczynski, P., Rathod, P., Gega, L., & Naeem, F. (2017). Mental health service provision in low- and middle-income countries. *Health Services Insights*, 10, 117863291769435. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5398308/>

**Chart 4.3**

**Percentage who personally experienced serious harm from mental health issues in the past two years, by World Bank country income group**



Survey question: Have you experienced harm from [mental health issues] in the past two years?

### Risks underestimated by the public: Climate change

People may underestimate risks if they are difficult to recognise or if they lack information about how serious those threats may be. While climate change is predicted to affect the entire world, the degree of impact will vary significantly based on several factors, including geography, national infrastructure and overall level of economic development. However, it is also apparent that individuals' ability to contextualise this risk is significantly influenced by their educational attainment.

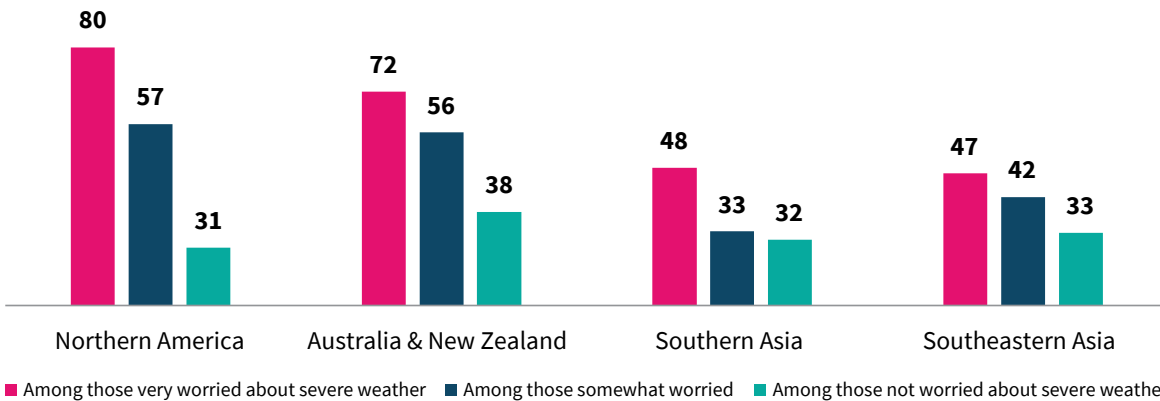
In regions with higher educational attainment, such as Northern America and Australia/New Zealand, about half of people said climate change is a 'very serious threat.' This percentage varied widely with people's likelihood of worrying they could be seriously harmed by severe weather events, suggesting widespread awareness of the link between the two. However, a 2021 qualitative study of United States residents found that people's understanding of climate change terminology was also a factor in the effectiveness of [climate change] communications.

The authors emphasised the need to ‘simplify wording, make links to climate change explicit and describe underlying processes’<sup>28</sup>.

Efforts to clearly explain the relevance of climate change in simple terms may be even more important in global regions where education levels are lower and fewer people have access to information about the issue. In Southern Asia and Southeastern Asia, concern about climate change was less common overall, and even among people who were very worried about harm from severe weather events, less than half recognised climate change as a serious threat. Given that collective global efforts will be required to combat the effects of climate change, much more needs to be done to help those most vulnerable to the effects recognise its relevance to their lives.

**Chart 4.4**

**Percentage who viewed climate change as a ‘very serious threat,’ by level of worry about personal harm from severe weather events, selected regions**



Survey questions: In general, how worried are you that [severe weather events] could cause you serious harm? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not worried?  
 Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.  
 Don't know/refused responses not shown.

**Income-based differences in experience with and concern about risk sources highlight equity challenges for policymakers.**

In some cases, the disconnect between risk mitigation policies and public risk perceptions can be specific to vulnerable populations, such as people with low incomes, highlighting equity challenges facing policymakers and safety professionals. The likelihood of having experienced harm in the past two years from most of the risk sources in Chart 4.5 was highest among those in the lowest income quintiles in their country, demonstrating that these individuals often lack access to public services and infrastructure used to mitigate risks at the societal level.

World Risk Poll findings further show that four of the risk sources examined have at least a 10-percentage-point gap between people in the top and bottom income quintiles in their country who were very worried about that risk:

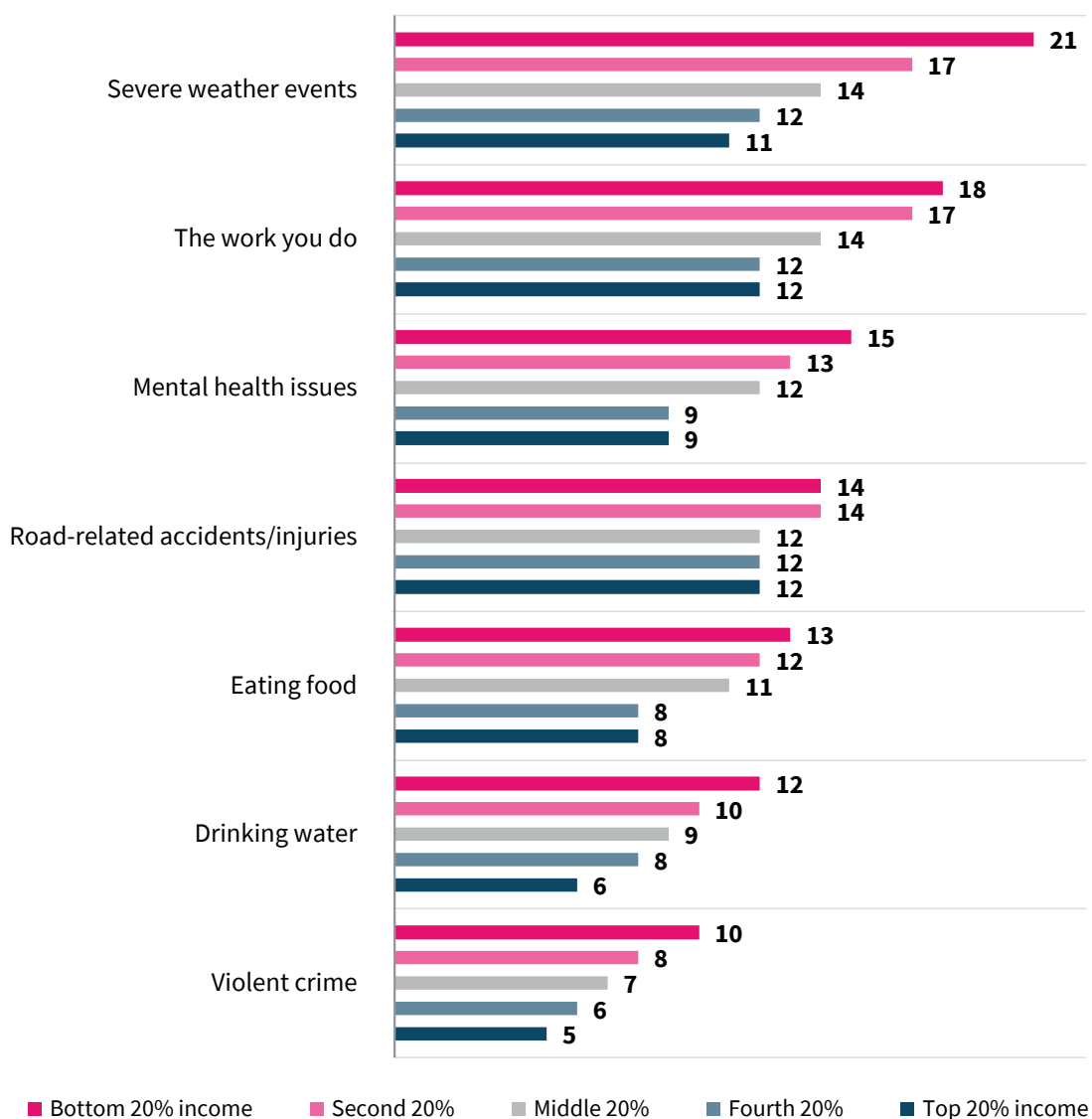
- road-related accidents/injuries (32% in the top quintile vs. 42% in the bottom quintile)
- severe weather events (29% in the top quintile vs. 40% in the bottom quintile)
- mental health issues (19% in the top quintile vs. 29% in the bottom quintile)
- work-related harm (13% in the top quintile vs. 24% in the bottom quintile)

28 Bruine de Bruin, W., Rabinovich, L., Weber, K., Babboni, M., Dean, M., & Ignon, L. (2021). Public understanding of climate change terminology. *Climatic Change* 167(3-4), 37. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-03183-0>



**Chart 4.5**

Percentage who personally experienced harm from each risk in the past two years, by within-country income quintiles



Survey question: Have you experienced serious harm from any of the following things in the past two years?



In some regions, income-based differences in vulnerability to certain risk sources were more extreme. For example:

- In the **Southern Africa** region, people in their country's bottom income quintile were about three times as likely as those in the top income group to say they had suffered serious harm from violent crime in the past two years — 29% versus 10%, respectively. Particularly in **South Africa**, where class-based residential segregation is common, prior research has shown that violence is more common in low-income districts. One 2020 study found that perceptions of neighbourhood violence are related to lower psychological wellbeing among low-income South Africans, helping perpetuate cycles of poverty<sup>29</sup>.
- In **Eastern Asia**, 18% of people in their country's bottom income quintile said they had experienced serious harm from a severe weather event, compared with just 6% of those in the top quintile. In **China**, which comprises the majority of the region's population, there remains a substantial economic divide between the booming coastal cities in the east and the vast, largely rural inland regions to the west<sup>30</sup>. Chinese people in the more agriculturally based Western regions are also more vulnerable to economic shocks from severe weather events such as floods and droughts<sup>31</sup>.

## Conclusion

The 2021 World Risk Poll finds that at the global level, experience of harm related to two areas — mental health issues and severe weather — increased significantly since the initial study in 2019. However, addressing those risks often means overcoming very different perceptual barriers. In the first case, a lack of prioritisation and recognition by policymakers of the seriousness and pervasiveness of mental health issues means that provision of mental health services in many countries and territories will remain inadequate. In the case of severe weather events, public perceptions that do not recognise the potential catastrophic effects of climate change may represent a barrier to positive change — particularly in democratic countries where lack of public concern may translate to a lack of pressure on leaders to take action.

- 29 Alloush, M., & Bloem, J. R. (2020, February 19). *Neighborhood violence, poverty, and psychological well-being*. [https://arefiles.ucdavis.edu/uploads/filer\\_public/1a/30/1a300656-db08-46ec-a81d-b9e7cc8bab69/alloush\\_violencesouthafrica.pdf](https://arefiles.ucdavis.edu/uploads/filer_public/1a/30/1a300656-db08-46ec-a81d-b9e7cc8bab69/alloush_violencesouthafrica.pdf)
- 30 Textor, C. (2021, November 25). *Regional disparities in China – statistics & facts*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/topics/7157/regional-disparities-in-china/#dossierKeyfigures>
- 31 China faces worst crop conditions ever due to climate change. (2022, March 22). *Bloomberg News*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-23/climate-change-threatens-china-s-crop-yield-food-security>





# Chapter 5

## Risk perceptions related to climate change

The global risk posed by climate change is widely recognised, and warnings about its effects are increasingly dire: A recent joint statement by more than 200 medical journals called the rapidly warming climate the ‘greatest threat’ to global public health<sup>32</sup>. The World Risk Poll tracks the extent to which people around the world view climate change as a serious threat to their country, providing a barometer of the public’s sense of urgency to address the issue at a national level.

### Key findings

- 1) In 2021, 67% of people viewed climate change as a threat to their country, down slightly from 69% in 2019. However, the percentage who saw climate change as a ‘very serious threat’ remained unchanged at 41%.
- 2) The likelihood of people viewing climate change as a very serious threat to their country was much lower among those with primary education or less (32%) than among those with secondary (47%) or post-secondary (50%) education. More than a quarter of people in the lowest education group (28%) said they ‘don’t know,’ compared to 13% among those with secondary education and 7% with at least some post-secondary education.
- 3) People who had experienced serious harm from severe weather events were more likely than those who had not to say climate change is a very serious threat. However, that relationship was strongest among people with at least secondary education, suggesting they are more aware of the connection between the two.

32 Sommer, L. (2021, September 7). Climate change is the greatest threat to public health, top medical journals warn. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/07/1034670549/climate-change-is-the-greatest-threat-to-public-health-top-medical-journals-warn>

## Insight into action

The finding that people with less education were considerably less likely to view climate change as a serious threat speaks to the need for advocates in low-education settings to carefully consider how to frame the threat in a way that is relevant to people’s lives and wellbeing — particularly as the threat of Covid-19 recedes in much of the world. The World Risk Poll results suggest more can be done to reach less-educated populations, who may be particularly susceptible to the economic effects of severe weather, with information about what they can do to support and demand community and country-level strategies aimed at mitigating and increasing resilience to climate change.

## World Risk Poll questions examined in this chapter

- *Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don’t know, please just say so.*

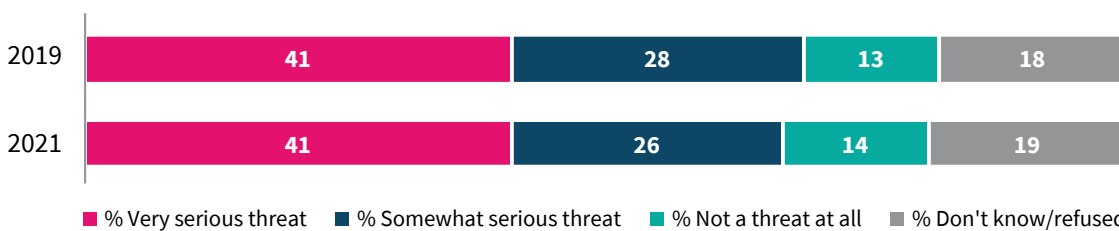
## Climate change concerns

### Though the majority of people viewed climate change as a risk, less than half said it is a 'very serious threat' to their country.

Perceptions of the threat posed by climate change were similar across the 119 countries and territories surveyed for both the 2019 and 2021 waves of the World Risk Poll. The percentage who said climate change posed a ‘very serious threat’ to people in their country over the next 20 years was unchanged in 2021, at 41%. About one-third of people in both years either said climate change was not a threat to their country or that they did not know.

**Chart 5.1**

### Perceptions of climate change as a threat, global results in 2019 vs. 2021



Survey question: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don’t know, please just say so.  
 Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ±1%.

Though the perception of climate change as a very serious threat varied widely by global region, these figures were also largely consistent from 2019 to 2021.

### Perception of climate change as a threat increased with education levels.

The current World Risk Poll builds on findings from the 2019 study regarding the impact of education on attitudes toward climate change risks<sup>33</sup>. As in 2019, people in high-income regions were most likely to view climate change as a threat, in part because countries and territories in those regions have higher average education levels.

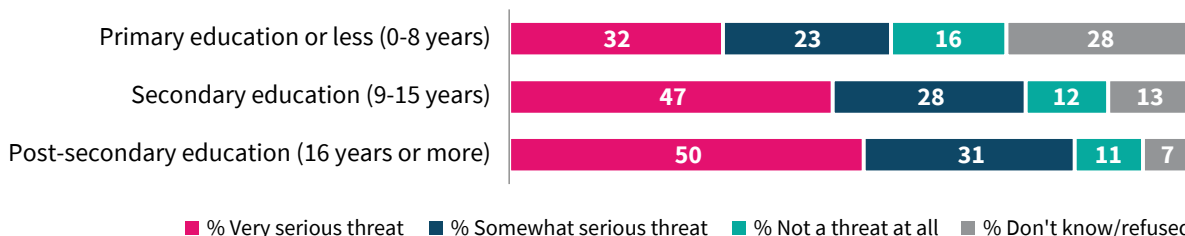
<sup>33</sup> Lloyd’s Register Foundation & Gallup, Inc. (2020). *The Lloyd’s Register Foundation World Risk Poll: Full report and analysis of the 2019 poll.* [https://wrp.lrfoundation.org.uk/LRF\\_WorldRiskReport\\_Book.pdf](https://wrp.lrfoundation.org.uk/LRF_WorldRiskReport_Book.pdf)



In 2021, 50% of people worldwide with at least some post-secondary education and 47% with secondary education called climate change a very serious threat to their country, compared to 32% among those with primary education or less. Those in the lowest education group were much more likely than those with higher education levels to say they do not know, at 28%.

**Chart 5.2**

**Perceptions of climate change as a threat, by education level**



Survey question: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.  
 Due to rounding, percentages may sum to 100% ±1%.

However, there were exceptions. For example, just 15% of people across the Latin America/Caribbean region did not recognise climate change as a very or somewhat serious threat. These figures were much higher in Eastern Europe (26%), Northern America (24%) and Australia/New Zealand (19%), showing a greater level of awareness in Latin America and the Caribbean.



By contrast, in two regions — Northern Africa and Eastern Asia — more than four in 10 people did not recognise climate change as a threat to their country in the coming decades. In both regions, these high figures can be attributed in part to a lack of awareness among people with lower levels of education.

**Northern Africa:** 57% of those with primary education or less said climate change is not a risk or that they do not know, versus 37% of those with secondary education and 26% with at least some post-secondary education.

**Eastern Asia:** China was one of 12 countries and territories worldwide where more than 30% of people said they do not know whether climate change is a threat to their country. With China’s massive population, the 31% who responded this way represent about 360 million people. As among Northern Africans, the percentage of Chinese people who did not see climate change as a threat was 57% among those with primary education or less, while falling to 25% among those with post-secondary education.

**Table 5.1**

**Percentage who did not view climate change as a threat, by region in 2019 vs. 2021**

	2019			2021		
	% Not a threat	% Don't know	% Total*	% Not a threat	% Don't know	% Total*
Northern Africa	18	22	39	23	24	46
Eastern Asia	11	25	36	13	27	41
Southern Asia	17	19	37	17	20	37
Central/Western Africa	14	18	32	14	22	36
Central Asia	20	17	37	17	20	36
Southern Africa	11	17	28	9	27	35
Eastern Africa	12	21	33	11	23	34
Middle East	13	19	32	16	18	34
Southeastern Asia	13	21	34	13	20	33
Eastern Europe	10	16	26	11	16	26
Northern America	20	6	25	16	8	24
Australia & New Zealand	14	5	19	11	8	19
Latin America & Caribbean	7	7	15	8	6	15
Northern/Western Europe	7	3	11	8	2	10
Southern Europe	5	2	7	5	3	7



Survey question: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

\* Total may be ± 1% of the sum of the previous two columns due to rounding.



## Education strengthens the perceived link between climate change and severe weather.

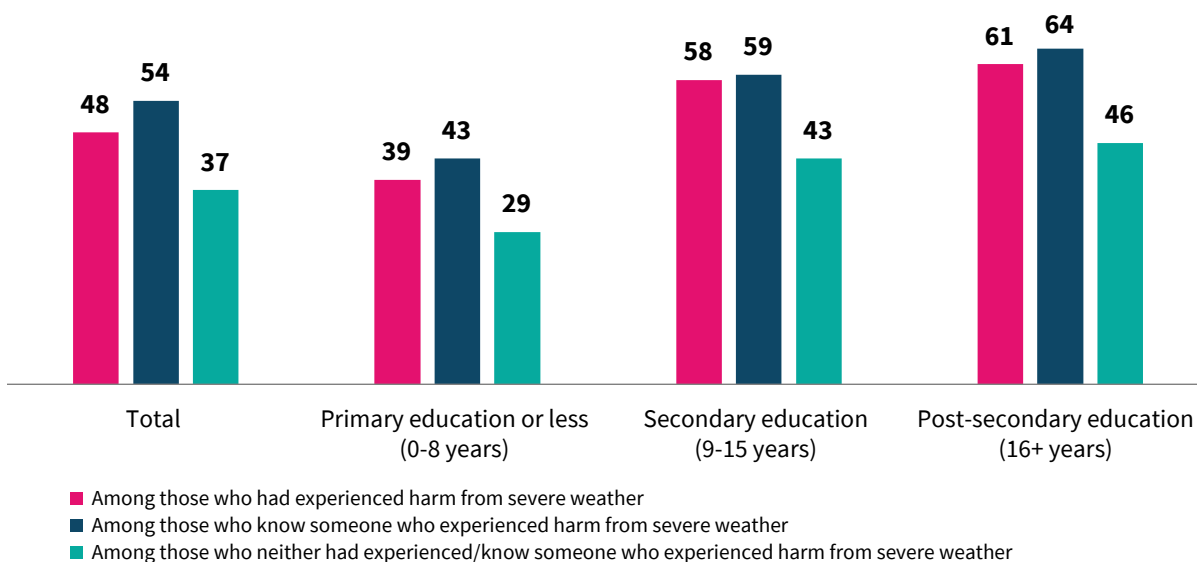
The 2021 World Risk Poll also confirms the 2019 finding that people who had experienced or personally know someone who experienced harm from severe weather events were more likely to view climate change as a serious threat than those who had not. This finding coincides with a 2014 study of United Kingdom residents showing that perceived changes in wet-weather events such as flooding were positively associated with climate change beliefs to a greater extent than perceptions of unusually high heat. The authors concluded that communicating the link to severe weather is particularly important and that ‘those wishing to engage with the public on the issue of climate change should not limit their focus to heat’<sup>34</sup>.

Worldwide, 48% of those who had experienced harm from severe weather in the past two years, and 54% of those who know someone who had, said climate change is a very serious threat; among those with no personal connection to harm from severe weather, that figure dropped to 37%.

However, the global link between severe weather and climate change perceptions was strongest in regions with higher average education levels, where people are more likely to be aware of the link between the two. Among people with primary education or less, experience with harm from severe weather was less strongly related to views of climate change; even among those who had personally experienced such harm, just 39% viewed climate change as a very serious threat to people in their country. By contrast, about six in 10 people with secondary education or more who had experienced harm from severe weather said climate change is a very serious threat to their country.

**Chart 5.3**

**Percentage who viewed climate change as a ‘very serious threat,’ by education level and experience with harm from severe weather**



Survey question: Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, A., Bruine de Bruin, W., & Dessia, S. (2014). Climate change beliefs and perceptions of weather-related changes in the United Kingdom. *Risk Analysis*, 34(11), 1995-2004. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/risa.12234>

## Conclusion

The United Nations' Climate Action website proclaims that 'education is key to addressing climate change'<sup>35</sup>. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change tasked parties at the convention with undertaking educational and public awareness campaigns and securing public participation in spreading information on the issue. For example, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) supports initiatives to increase 'climate literacy' among young people, while the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) works closely with a network of weather presenters with a daily reach of 375 million to provide their audiences with climate change information<sup>36</sup>.

As in 2019, the 2021 World Risk Poll findings demonstrate the powerful influence of education on global perceptions of climate change. The data highlight the challenge of reaching people who may be vulnerable to risk from extreme weather but have low average education levels, such as agricultural communities in low- and middle-income countries and territories. However, this challenge is not insurmountable, and communication and awareness campaigns could be tailored to suit those communities to explain the impact of climate change in terms that are relevant to their lives. Indeed, in some countries, basic aspects of climate change are incorporated into early education at a level that suits primary and intermediate school years<sup>37</sup>. Spreading awareness of how climate change may directly impact people's lives may be crucial in broadening local efforts to reduce carbon emissions and build resilience to the effects of rising temperatures.

35 *Education is key to addressing climate change*. (n.d.). United Nations. Retrieved 14 June 2022 from <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/climate-solutions/education-key-addressing-climate-change>

36 *Ibid*.

37 ALLEA – All European Academies. (2020, May). A snapshot of climate change education initiatives in Europe: Initial findings and implications for future climate change education. [https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ALLEA\\_Climate\\_Science\\_Education\\_2020-1.pdf](https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/ALLEA_Climate_Science_Education_2020-1.pdf); Horowitz, J. (2019, November 5). Italy's students will get a lesson in climate change. Many lessons, in fact. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/05/world/europe/italy-schools-climate-change.html>



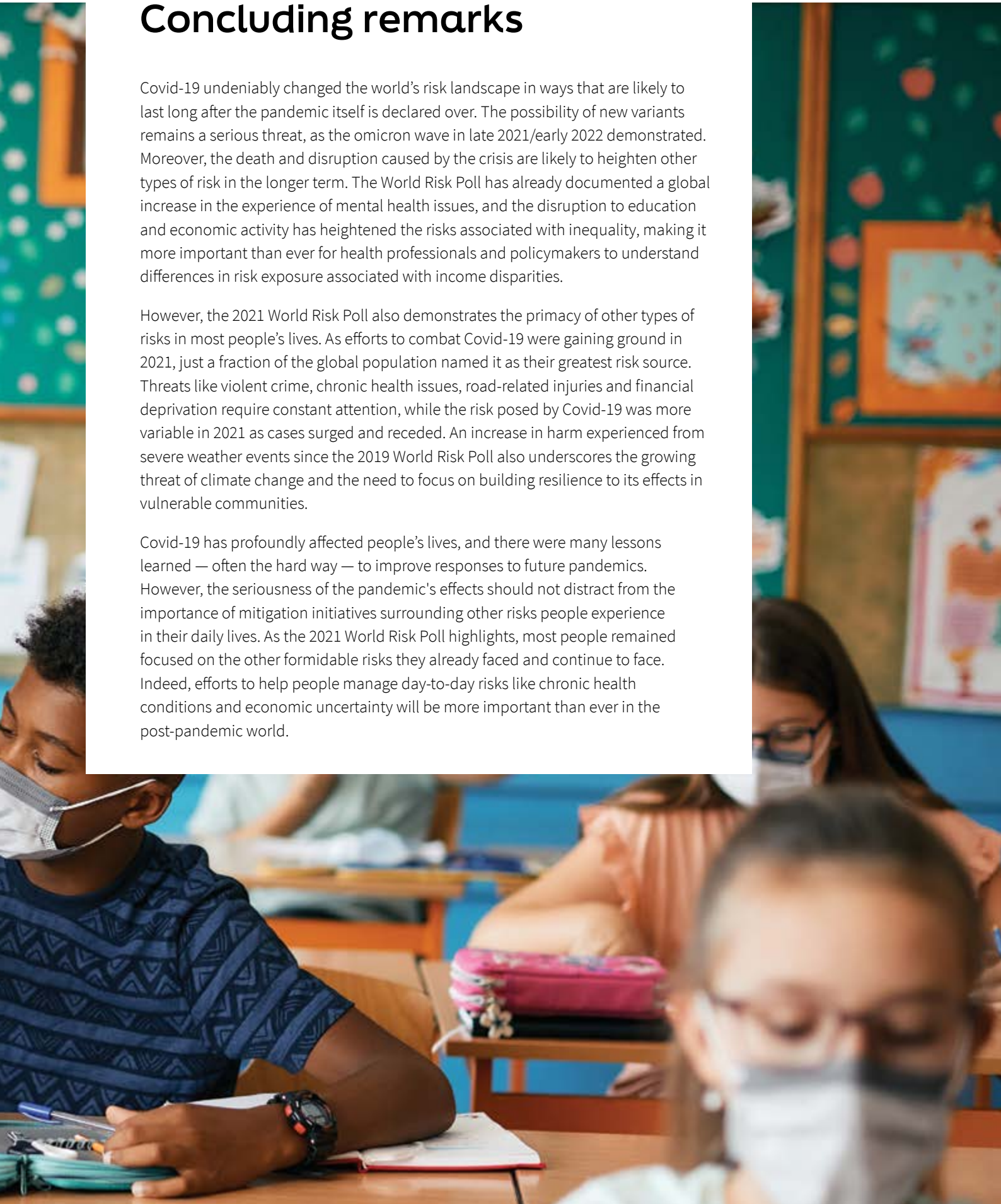


## Concluding remarks

Covid-19 undeniably changed the world's risk landscape in ways that are likely to last long after the pandemic itself is declared over. The possibility of new variants remains a serious threat, as the omicron wave in late 2021/early 2022 demonstrated. Moreover, the death and disruption caused by the crisis are likely to heighten other types of risk in the longer term. The World Risk Poll has already documented a global increase in the experience of mental health issues, and the disruption to education and economic activity has heightened the risks associated with inequality, making it more important than ever for health professionals and policymakers to understand differences in risk exposure associated with income disparities.

However, the 2021 World Risk Poll also demonstrates the primacy of other types of risks in most people's lives. As efforts to combat Covid-19 were gaining ground in 2021, just a fraction of the global population named it as their greatest risk source. Threats like violent crime, chronic health issues, road-related injuries and financial deprivation require constant attention, while the risk posed by Covid-19 was more variable in 2021 as cases surged and receded. An increase in harm experienced from severe weather events since the 2019 World Risk Poll also underscores the growing threat of climate change and the need to focus on building resilience to its effects in vulnerable communities.

Covid-19 has profoundly affected people's lives, and there were many lessons learned — often the hard way — to improve responses to future pandemics. However, the seriousness of the pandemic's effects should not distract from the importance of mitigation initiatives surrounding other risks people experience in their daily lives. As the 2021 World Risk Poll highlights, most people remained focused on the other formidable risks they already faced and continue to face. Indeed, efforts to help people manage day-to-day risks like chronic health conditions and economic uncertainty will be more important than ever in the post-pandemic world.



# Appendix 1: Lloyd’s Register Foundation World Risk Poll Questionnaire

**1. Overall, compared to five years ago, do you feel more safe, less safe, or about as safe as you did five years ago?**

	CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE:
More safe	1
Less safe	2
About as safe	3
(DK)	98
(Refused)	99

*(READ:) Now, I have a few questions about risk. By RISK, I mean something that may be dangerous or that could cause harm or the loss of something. Risk could also result in a reward or something good*

**2. In your own words, what is the greatest source of RISK TO YOUR SAFETY in your daily life?**

*(INTERVIEWER: Capture verbatim response)*

*(Allow ONE response)*

*(INTERVIEWER: If the respondent says "nothing", that they have no risks or that they don't know,*

*PROBE: "If you had to pick one big risk to your safety, what would it be?"*)

	CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE:
Write in:	
(DK)	98
(Refused)	99

**2.1. (INTERVIEWER: Do NOT read response options. Code respondent's verbatim response using the list of pre-coded options below. Refer to previous screen for verbatim.)**

	CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE:
TRANSPORTATION: road-related accidents/injuries (such as using a bicycle, car, motorbike, truck, van, bus, etc.)	1
TRANSPORTATION: other transportation-related accidents/injuries (such as subway, train, plane, etc.)	2
CRIME/VIOLENCE	3
WAR/TERRORISM	4
HEALTH: personal health condition/illness	5
HEALTH: drugs, alcohol, smoking	6

	CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE:
HEALTH: COVID-19/Coronavirus related	7
HEALTH: mental stress/exhaustion	8
FINANCIAL: not having enough money to pay for the things you need	9
ECONOMY: economy-related, such as unemployment, high prices	10
POLITICS: politics/political situation/corruption	11
TECHNOLOGY: internet/technology related risks	12
WATER: water supply or drinking unclean water	13
FOOD-RELATED: eating unsafe or contaminated food	14
FOOD-RELATED: insufficient or lack of food (hunger)	15
COOKING or other household accidents/injuries	16
WORK: work-related accidents: physical injuries	17
ENVIRONMENT: pollution	18
ENVIRONMENT: climate change or severe weather-related events, such as floods, drought, wildfires, etc.	19
ENVIRONMENT: non-weather-related disasters, such as earthquakes or volcanoes	20
DROWNING	21
Other	22
Nothing/No risks	23
Don't know	98
Refused	99

(READ:) Now, on a different topic...

3. Do you think that climate change is a very serious threat, a somewhat serious threat, or not a threat at all to the people in this country in the next 20 years? If you don't know, please just say so.

	CIRCLE ONE RESPONSE:
Very serious threat	1
Somewhat serious threat	2
Not a threat at all	3
Don't know	98
(Refused)	99

**4. In general, how WORRIED are you that each of the following things could cause you serious harm? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not worried?**

*(Read Items)*

		Very worried	Somewhat worried	Not worried	(DK)	(Refused)
4A	The food you eat	1	2	3	98	99
4B	The water you drink	1	2	3	98	99
4C	Violent crime	1	2	3	98	99
4D	Severe weather events, such as floods or violent storms	1	2	3	98	99
4E	Being in a traffic or roadside accident	1	2	3	98	99
4F	Mental health issues	1	2	3	98	99
4G	The work you do	1	2	3	98	99

**5. Have you or someone you PERSONALLY know, EXPERIENCED serious harm from any of the following things in the past TWO years? *(Read Items)***

*(INTERVIEWER: If respondent says, "yes" to any, READ: Did this happen to you, someone you personally know or both in the past TWO years?)*

		Yes, personally experienced	Yes, know someone who has experienced	Both	No	(DK)	(Refused)
5A	Eating food	1	2	3	4	98	99
5B	Drinking water	1	2	3	4	98	99
5C	Violent crime	1	2	3	4	98	99
5D	Severe weather events, such as floods or violent storms	1	2	3	4	98	99
5E	Being in a traffic or roadside accident	1	2	3	4	98	99
5F	Mental health issues	1	2	3	4	98	99
5G	Work	1	2	3	4	98	99



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## Appendix 3: Regions

### 2021 World Risk Poll regions and countries

Australia & New Zealand	Australia; New Zealand
Central Asia	Armenia; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Tajikistan; Uzbekistan
Central/Western Africa	Benin; Burkina Faso; Cameroon; Congo Brazzaville; Gabon; Ghana; Guinea; Ivory Coast; Mali; Nigeria; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Togo
Eastern Asia	China; Hong Kong SAR of China; Japan; Mongolia; South Korea; Taiwan
Eastern Africa	Kenya; Mauritius; Mozambique; Tanzania; Uganda; Zambia; Zimbabwe
Eastern Europe	Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Hungary; Kosovo; Moldova; Poland; Romania; Russia; Slovakia; Ukraine
Latin America & Caribbean	Argentina; Bolivia; Brazil; Chile; Colombia; Costa Rica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; El Salvador; Honduras; Jamaica; Mexico; Nicaragua; Panama; Paraguay; Peru; Uruguay; Venezuela
Middle East	Iran; Iraq; Israel; Jordan; Lebanon; Saudi Arabia; Turkey; United Arab Emirates
Northern/Western Europe	Austria; Belgium; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Iceland; Ireland; Latvia; Lithuania; Netherlands; Norway; Sweden; Switzerland; United Kingdom
Northern Africa	Algeria; Egypt; Morocco; Tunisia
Northern America	Canada; United States
Southern Asia	Afghanistan; Bangladesh; India; Nepal; Pakistan; Sri Lanka
Southeastern Asia	Cambodia; Indonesia; Laos; Malaysia; Myanmar; Philippines; Singapore; Thailand; Vietnam
Southern Africa	Namibia; South Africa
Southern Europe	Albania; Bosnia Herzegovina; Croatia; Cyprus; Greece; Italy; Malta; North Macedonia; Portugal; Serbia; Slovenia; Spain







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