

Social Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Xenophobic Tendency and Their Consequences

COVID-19 Pandemisinin Toplumsal Etkileri: Zenofobik Eğilimler ve Sonuçları

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Öz

Koronavirüs hastalığı-19 (COVID-19) pandemisi sürecinde, toplumlarda çeşitli alanlarda sorunlar yaşanmıştır. Özellikle sağlık ve ekonomi alanındaki sorunlar önemli noktalara ulaşmış ve bu alanlardaki çalışmalar yoğunlaşmıştır. Öte yandan pandeminin toplumda bireyler arasında psikososyal sorunları da artırdığı görülmüştür. Virüsün yayılmasıyla birlikte insanların yaşam koşulları değişmiştir. Alınan fiziksel mesafe önlemleri kapsamında yaşamları kısıtlanmış ve bu durum çeşitli psikolojik sorunların ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur. Yaşam koşullarındaki olumsuzluklar ve maruz kalınan sorunlar, insanları günah keçisi aramaya yönlendirmiştir. Sonuç olarak toplumda yabancı olarak değerlendirilen göçmenlere yönelik olumsuz tutumlar yaygınlaşmaya başlamıştır. Yabancılara karşı korku, nefret ve ön yargı olarak değerlendirilen zenofobi artmıştır. Mevcut çalışmada COVID-19 pandemisi sürecinde zenofobik eğilimlere yol açan faktörler, zenofobik eğilimlerin etkileri ve zenofobik eğilimleri önlemeye yönelik çeşitli adımların değerlendirilmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bu amaçla ilgili literatür gözden geçirilmiştir. Toplumda zenofobik eğilimlerin yaygınlaşması, sosyal uyumun sağlanması konusunda önemli bir risk olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bu nedenle zenofobik eğilimlerin önlenmesi gerekmektedir. Bu kapsamda pandemi sürecinde göçmenlere dair asılsız bilgilerin ve ön yargıların önüne geçilmesi için gerekli adımlar atılmalıdır. Özellikle medyanın ve politikacların etkisi dikkate alınmalıdır. Göçmenlerin yaşadığı sosyal ve ekonomik eşitsizlikler giderilmelidir. Toplumdaki sosyal ve adli kurumlara, eğitim ve sağlık hizmeti sunan kuruluşlara erişimleri kolaylaştırılmalıdır. Zenofobik eğilimlerin göçmenler üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerini azaltmak için etkin ruh sağlığı hizmeti sunulmalıdır.

Anahtar sözcükler: COVID-19, göçmenler, zenofobi, pandemi, sinofobi

Abstract

The Coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19) pandemic process caused problems in various fields in societies. Particularly the problems in the field of health and economy reached a certain point, and studies in these areas have intensified. In addition, the pandemic also increased psychosocial problems among individuals in the society. With the spread of the virus, people's living conditions changed. Their lives were restricted due to the physical distancing measures taken, and this led to the occurrence of various psychological problems. The negativities in their living conditions and the problems they are exposed to led people to look for scapegoats. Therefore, negative attitudes towards migrants who are regarded as foreigners began to spread in the society. Considered as fear, hatred and prejudice towards foreigners, xenophobia increased. In the present study, it is aimed to evaluate the factors that lead to xenophobic tendencies, the effects of xenophobic tendencies and various steps to prevent xenophobic tendencies during the COVID-19 pandemic process. In this regard, the relevant literature has been reviewed. The spread of xenophobic tendencies in the society is seen as an important risk in ensuring social cohesion. Thus, xenophobic tendencies should be prevented. As such, necessary steps should be taken to prevent unfounded information and prejudices about migrants during the pandemic process. Particular attention should be paid to the influence of the media and politicians. Social and economic inequalities experienced by migrants should be eliminated. Their access to social and judicial institutions, and educational and healthcare establishment in the society should be facilitated. Effective mental health services should be provided in order to reduce the negative impacts of xenophobic tendencies on migrants.

Keywords: COVID-19, migrants, xenophobia, pandemic, sinophobia

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THE COVID-19 pandemic has heavily affected almost all countries around the world [World Health Organization (WHO) 2020]. The effects of the pandemic are being felt in many areas socially, economically, politically, and mentally (Akat and Karataş 2020, Banerjee and Rai 2020). Clearly defined as common infectious diseases, pandemics have historically been addressed in conjunction with political and economic affairs, foreign interventions, conflict and concerns about social control in society (Leach 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the mutual solidarity and support of states, societies, and individuals from different socio-economic statuses on the one hand, and has also caused widespread fears and concerns triggering the existing culture of mistrust and discrimination, especially against migrants [International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2020a]. Social and economic inequalities for migrants have increased due to the pandemic, and migrants have been discriminated against and stigmatized (IOM 2020b).

Migrants are considered as one of the vulnerable groups who experience the pandemic severely due to reasons such as being less visible in public arenas, being discriminated against while accessing treatment and prevention services, being considered immune to the virus because of their different racial and ethnic origin, and being accused of spreading the virus (Broid 2020). As in many other crises, migrants constitute the most vulnerable group in the COVID-19 pandemic who may face severe negative consequences (Guadagno 2020, Runge 2020). Taking effective measures against the virus and a better understanding of the nature of the virus requires everyone to be taken into consideration regardless of race, ethnicity and nationality (Batasin 2020). However, it should not be ignored that migrants experience the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic more intensely (Guadagno 2020).

Xenophobic tendencies are among the main problems that migrants are exposed to during the pandemic (Cheah 2020, Cheng 2020). In the dictionary, xenophobia refers to hate of or prejudice against people from other countries (Oxford Dictionary 2020). Since the word derives from the Greek word “xenos” meaning foreigner and “phobos” meaning fear, it is used as “fear of foreigners” in the literature (Arogundade 2011). Xenophobia is addressed as the fear of migrants (Ortona 2017), but also includes intense antipathy and hatred (Tafira 2011). Hostile attitudes caused by feelings of fear, hate, and humiliation towards those outside the group are discussed as xenophobia (Bozdağ 2020). Although the prejudice against a nationality or ethnicity is generally based on the assumption of cultural/ethnic or racial superiority (American Psychiatric Association 2010), there are various differences between xenophobia and racism. Xenophobia refers to a state of fear and dislike for the unknown, while racism symbolizes dislike for a particular race. While a person with xenophobic tendencies does not like people outside/different from the group, a racist person cannot tolerate people who do not have the same features as him or her (such as hair and skin color, language, ethnic origin) (Kumar 2011).

Host community members may exhibit xenophobic tendencies as they perceive migrants as a threat to their identity and social status, and due to security concerns in general (Stafford 2020). In other words, host society members seeing individuals outside of the

group as a threat in the context of identity, value, culture, and socioeconomic status may lead to xenophobic tendencies (Canetti-Nisim et al. 2006). Such tendencies make it difficult for migrants to integrate into the host society, negatively affecting social adaptation, which is crucial to the welfare and development of the society (Zubashvili 2020). During the pandemic, the existing distrust, discrimination, fear, and anxiety towards migrants have increased (Gover et al. 2020, IOM 2020a). The ability of migrants to avoid infection, receive adequate health care, and cope with the economic, social, and psychological effects of the pandemic are affected by various factors. These factors are living and working conditions, disregard for their cultural and linguistic diversity, limited local knowledge and networks, problems with access to rights in host communities, and xenophobic tendencies in service provisions (Guadagno 2020).

While scientists are heavily concerned with the health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have not been able to focus enough on the spread of prejudice and xenophobic tendencies towards migrants (Zeng et al. 2020). The pandemic is often characterized by a focus on the generation of information, vaccination studies, and prevention of people getting sick. However, the socio-cultural consequences of the pandemic are often overlooked. In fact, the spread of xenophobic tendencies causes various groups in the society to be stigmatized and targeted, and therefore health services cannot be provided appropriately to these groups (Batasin 2020). In order to assess the xenophobic tendencies comprehensively, it is necessary to acknowledge that certain diseases and social conditions fuel fear and discrimination, and stigmatization of various groups in society because of the disease is also a significant challenge for global development (Das 2020). Accordingly, in this study, the factors causing xenophobic tendencies during the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of these xenophobic tendencies and various steps to prevent these tendencies are discussed.

Factors causing xenophobic tendencies during the pandemic

In recent years, xenophobic tendencies towards migrants have increased especially in western societies (Barni et al. 2020). In many western countries (e.g., USA, Sweden, Germany, and France), far-right and anti-migration parties and politicians receive more support (Georgiadoua et al. 2018, Conneely 2019, Zubashvili 2020). When the main factors leading to xenophobic tendencies in various societies are examined, economy, migration movements, cultural threat perception, political imbalances, religious doctrines, and terrorism come to the fore (Omuluabi 2008). However, xenophobic tendencies increased immediately after the pandemics in the past. Especially when viral outbreaks are fatal, fear often led people at risk to blame “the other” or a group outside of their national, religious, or ethnic identity (Muzzatti 2005). Throughout history, viral diseases were often associated with the place or regions where outbreaks were first seen. WHO issued several guidelines in 2015 to end this and thus reduce prejudice and xenophobic tendencies towards these regions or their people (Zeng et al. 2020). These guidelines aim to avoid causing offense to any cultural, social, national, regional, professional, and/or ethnic group (WHO 2015). Stigmatizing phrases

such as the “Spanish Flu”, “Mexican Swine Flu” appear to be frequently used, despite these guidelines for naming diseases (WHO 2015) to avoid stigmatizing communication. Such stigmatizing statements lead to an increase in xenophobic tendencies by suggesting that there is an association between foreigners and a certain pandemic (Hoppe 2018).

There is a constant effort to prevent the use of false and stigmatizing statements used for the COVID-19 virus (Adalja 2020). However, with the increase of COVID-19 cases, terms such as the “Chinese Virus”, “Kung-Flu”, “Chinese Coronavirus” and “Wuhan Virus” have been frequently used by political leaders and some segments of the society, especially in the USA (Reny and Barreto 2020, Wardell-Ghirarduzzi 2020). Such denunciations regarding the virus have led to the legitimization of negative behaviors towards Asian communities, disruption of treatment services, and stigmatization of these communities (Wardell-Ghirarduzzi 2020). The study of Reny and Barreto (2020) experimentally proven that associating the pandemic with a social group in this way will activate negative attitudes towards Asian communities.

The style and language used in the transmission of information about the virus may cause the spread of xenophobic tendencies as well as contribute to their prevention (Stanford News 2019, Wardell-Ghirarduzzi 2020). However, stigmatization and xenophobic tendencies with negative expressions towards migrants are becoming widespread (IOM 2020b). In the USA, racist acts against Asians and Asian Americans increased in connection with COVID-19 cases, and Asian societies became vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse due to widespread prejudices (Batasin 2020, Yan et al. 2020). Similarly, xenophobic tendencies and discrimination against Asians, Italians, gypsies, and other minority groups are increasing in Europe. These groups are being scapegoated for spreading and causing the virus (Hale 2020). It is reported that tensions between local people and immigrants surfaced due to the pandemic in Singapore, and that xenophobic tendencies are rising (Wong 2020).

A 36-year-old adult man returning to his village from Dhaka, Bangladesh committed suicide because he was exposed to xenophobia by other people in the village since they suspected him of being COVID-19 (Mamun and Griffiths 2020). Similarly, a 50-year-old adult man in India committed suicide because of fearing COVID-19 and believing that he had it (Goyal et al. 2020). The study conducted with 600 participants in India by Ahuja et al. (2020) revealed that the general xenophobic tendencies towards Muslims were low, whereas the xenophobic tendencies associated with the COVID-19 pandemic were high. In another study conducted by Reny and Barletto (2020) with 4,311 people in the USA, it was determined that concern about the virus, xenophobic tendencies, and political preferences were associated with anti-Asian attitudes. A study conducted by Dhanani and Franz (2020) with 1,451 participants in the USA put forth that associating COVID-19 with China instead of having an unbiased perspective on the virus increased negative attitudes towards Asian Americans, beliefs about the resources being allocated for Americans rather than migrants, and xenophobic tendencies. A heavy emphasis on the economic effects of the virus

further increases the belief that Asian Americans are a threat to resources and xenophobic tendencies.

Although there are no studies addressing the xenophobic tendencies directly during the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey, which is one of the countries hosting the most refugees today, various studies focusing on the experiences of refugees in this process was conducted. While services for the refugees in Turkey had been directed to social adaptation from basic protection services before COVID-19, they began to focus on the basic protection services again with the pandemic (Üstübcü and Karadağ 2020). The study conducted by the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Immigrants (ASASI) (SGDD 2020) with 1,162 refugees, 960 of whom were Syrians, determined that most of the refugees had difficulties in meeting their nutritional and hygiene needs, paying their rent, bills, and getting the basic necessities. Another study conducted by the Refugee Support Center (RSC) (MUDEM 2020) collected data from 385 refugee households. 91% of these refugees were economically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, 52% of them did not have information about the updates during the COVID-19 pandemic on health services such as hospital appointments, getting medicine, and medical reports. Similarly, in a study conducted by Relief International (2020) with 879 Syrian refugees, it was revealed that 87% of the refugees reported someone in the household lost their job due to the pandemic, 71% could not access health services, and 81% had urgent needs to be met. In addition, social distancing measures implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced the interaction of the refugees with the host community, which is the most important factor supporting the social adaptation of refugees (MUDEM 2020). Considering the negative association between social contact and the xenophobic tendencies of the host community members (Bozdağ 2020), this is worrisome. Progressing delicately and brittlely, social adaptation in Turkey is at risk of going backward because of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, false information or news that may increase this risk further, and discriminatory practices that may cause social tension between the host society and the refugee community should be carefully taken into consideration (MUDEM 2020).

The level of interaction between members of the host society and migrants, cultural factors including identity and nationalism, job opportunities, and economic factors related to the available resources are determinants in the increase of xenophobic tendencies towards migrants (Nell 2008). In recent years, especially with the rise of nationalistic trends, xenophobic tendencies increased (Barni et al. 2020, Alrababa'h et al. 2021). During the pandemic, the influence of media and politicians stand out as two important factors triggering xenophobic tendencies towards migrants. The media discourses, the way politicians plan and manage the pandemic, and the expressions they use in this process shape the attitudes and perceptions towards migrants in society.

Effect of media

Individuals restricted due to the pandemic continued to communicate mostly through social media and online applications (Teixeira da Silva 2020). The facilitation of sharing via social media, websites, and various applications enabled the posts to reach faster and wider audiences compared to previous periods. However, the rapid spread of information via the internet also causes various difficulties in preventing false information waves (Somvichian-Clausen 2020, Teixeira da Silva 2020). The media's exaggeration or assurance about epidemic diseases may increase or decrease people's risk perceptions regarding the disease (Fung et al. 2014).

Transferring information about the pandemic in real-time and through digital media became an important life experience for many people during this restriction era, including migrants. However, such media sources may also become a vehicle for spreading misinformation, rumor, and direct hate. In fact, xenophobic statements in the media increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (IOM 2020a). Communication styles normalizing racism caused fears to spread and tension in society to escalate (Asmelash 2020). In this sense, the effects of news headlines should be taken into account. News headlines have a strong influence on the attitudes people adopt. Fake news that is not linked to reliable sources and context triggers xenophobia (Noel 2020). The response of the media to the COVID-19 pandemic in the USA was generally in the form of using sensational statements, transferring false information and presenting xenophobic headlines. Along with misunderstandings, the use of headlines such as the "killer virus", "deadly virus" and "Wuhan virus" increased fear and panic, leading to prejudice, discrimination and xenophobic tendencies (Noel 2020). In addition, online messages and social media posts are circulated maliciously, spreading derogatory comments and violent threats against migrants. New hate incidents became particularly prominent in mainstream media, including digital news sources and social media with fake news and/or false information (IOM 2020a).

Schild et al. (2020) analyzed the discourses on synophobia (hatred of Chinese and Chinese culture) with the data they collected from Twitter and 4chan for five months during the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis results revealed that some new discriminatory concepts (such as the Chinese Virus, and the Kung Flu) emerged with the COVID-19 pandemic and that the pandemic caused an increase in synophobia. The hate speeches and xenophobic speeches also increased during the pandemic. Similarly, in the study conducted by the Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI) (2020), an organization based in New Jersey, the USA, it was determined that xenophobic discourses about the Chinese society on social media platforms increased sharply. In another study conducted by Ziems et al. (2020), anti-Asian hate speech and its spread were analyzed by examining more than 30 million tweets. The analysis results showed that hate speech increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and that there was intense interaction between those who resort to hate speech and those who use opposing hate speech. It was stated that hate is contagious and increases even more

after exposure to hate speech. As a result, xenophobic tendencies increased through media channels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Effect of politicians

The COVID-19 crisis not only instilled fear in the public but also brought to light the impact of fear that dynamically steers politics (Degerman et al. 2020). In general, outbreaks create fear and fear plays a role as a fundamental component in the spread of racism and xenophobic tendencies. In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic also revealed social and political ruptures in societies, causing racist and discriminatory responses against marginalized groups. Most of the political leaders abused the pandemic by causing racial discrimination to increase and the spread of anti-immigrant discourse (Deve Kumar et al. 2020).

The discourses of politicians have important effects on the spread of xenophobic tendencies during the pandemic. The results of a study examining comparatively the 5,638 political responses to the SARS virus in Canada and the USA showed that xenophobic discourses negatively affecting multicultural societies as well as broad political subsystems were common (Baker 2007). Similarly, the inappropriate language used by government leaders in the USA during the COVID-19 pandemic today increased tensions in society (Batasin 2020). US former president Donald Trump's referring to COVID-19 as the Chinese virus and Italy's former Vice Prime Minister Matteo Salvini's call for the closure of borders by mistakenly associating COVID-19 with African asylum seekers triggered possible conflicts in society (Deve Kumar et al. 2020). The study conducted by Renny and Barreto (2020) with 4,311 people revealed that negative attitudes towards Asian Americans are related to political preferences as well as concerns about the virus and xenophobic behaviors. Political attitudes adopted by individuals may trigger negative behaviors towards Asians.

Due to various explicit and implicit policies, in many places, migrants faced different barriers when trying to access healthcare during the pandemic (IOM 2020b). Institutional racism against Romans, refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants in European countries, discrimination in legal practices, and the unaccountable use of force by law enforcement agencies were reported to be of alarming proportions [Amnesty International (AI) 2020]. Migrants, people of color, and individuals with low socioeconomic status were disproportionately more exposed to the negative consequences of the pandemic and experienced severe limitations in access to health services (Deve Kumar et al. 2020). In some countries/regions (e.g., USA, Italy, Greece, Spain, Thailand, Malaysia), movement restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic targeted specific migrant communities (AI 2020, Guadagno 2020, IOM 2020b). Such strict restrictions on migrants prevented them from accessing essential care and services (IOM 2020b). In addition, many countries closing their borders due to the pandemic brought the idea of the nation-state and the privileges of the citizens back to the agenda. The closure of borders and the prominence of citizenship made it possible for some migrants to return home, but most migrants were placed in a

more precarious status (Kollender and Nimer 2020). Considering such practices and the discourses of politicians in general, effectively combating xenophobia depends on examining and improving the systems that produce and limit it (Noel 2020).

Results of xenophobic tendencies during the pandemic

The results of various studies on the increasing xenophobic tendencies due to COVID-19 pointed to concerns about ensuring social adaptation and the effective management of the pandemic. 2,583 discriminatory and xenophobic incidents in the United States were reported from the beginning of the pandemic until August 5, 2020 (Jeung et al. 2020). Reports from various countries showed that discriminatory and xenophobic behaviors lead to food insecurity and the return of migrants to their home countries (IOM 2020b). With the increase in xenophobic tendencies in the USA, the demands for Asian Americans to return to their countries also increased and this led to more exclusion of Asian Americans in society (Cheng 2020). Asian Americans experience serious problems such as physical assault, verbal harassment, being coughed on, being kicked out from shops and restaurants, discrimination at workplaces, and vandalism (Cheung et al. 2020). It was reported that Asian Americans were verbally and physically abused at subway stations in Los Angeles and New York (Batasin 2020) and that there were 1,135 verbal abuse, humiliation, and physical assault incidents against Asian Americans in two weeks period in the USA (Redden 2020). Another study conducted in Malaysia revealed that the xenophobic tendencies and racism towards the Rohingya increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is supported by reports on increasing hate speech against Rohingyas in both social media and government policies [Mixed Migration Center (MMC) 2020]. In a study conducted with Asian university students in Poland, it was determined that the COVID-19 pandemic triggered xenophobic tendencies towards students. 61.2% of the students stated that they were subjected to prejudice, and 47.1% of them stated that these biased attitudes occurred in public transportation and on the street. The reactions towards Asian students were listed as walking away, changing seats on the bus, keeping a safe distance, closing the mouth and nose, wearing judgmental facial expressions, pointing, speaking in a whisper, spitting, throwing a beer bottle, and using offensive language (Rzymiski and Nowicki 2020). Another study put forth that 90% of the participants in China displayed discriminatory attitudes towards people coming from the Hubei province, such as reporting their presence to local authorities, avoiding them, and actively removing them from their communities (He et al. 2020).

There are concerns that verbal and physical attacks especially against Asians may continue to increase during the pandemic [American Hospital Association (AHA) 2020]. The increase of racist actions against the Asian communities due to fear and misinformation in the community puts the physical health of these communities at risk as well as their mental health (Cheah et al. 2020, Cheng 2020, Li 2020). Emotional and physical traumas may be experienced in individuals facing prejudice and discrimination.

Problems such as anxiety and depression, personal security concerns, and deterioration of physical health may also be seen in these individuals. Discriminatory attitudes may also lead to chronic stress, rapid aging, and insecurity towards the health system (AHA 2020). The self-esteem of Asian youth and young adults who are exposed to racism and discrimination decreases, their self-awareness about body image and phenotypic characteristics are negatively affected, and their feelings of discontent and shame increase (Cheng 2020). In addition, the fact that migrants not being taken into account after the closure of schools and the implementation of online processes during the pandemic period leads to educational problems as well as mental problems (Kollender and Nimer 2020).

The increase in xenophobic tendencies due to the COVID-19 pandemic affects the perceptions towards these groups as well as treatment services (Batašin 2020). It was stated that Chinese-American parents and their children are subjected to racism and racist discrimination due to the pandemic and are exposed to synophobia in the provision of health services (Cheah et al. 2020). The results of a study conducted with 178 people from various migrant groups in Tunisia determined that most of the migrants had difficulties in accessing the health system due to fear of discrimination and racism during the pandemic. Beyond the difficulties in accessing the healthcare system, Tunisian migrants reported that xenophobic tendencies increased since the reporting of the first COVID-19 cases and that this reflected in their daily lives in multiple ways (MMC 2020b). Some patients in hospitals in the USA verbally abused Asian service providers and refused care. Some Asians and Asian Americans stated that they may not seek help both in public spaces and within the healthcare system out of fear of discrimination (AHA 2020). Moreover, migrants, especially those who are undocumented, avoid hospitals due to fear of identification and reporting, and as a result, the disease progresses and is detected at a later stage (Devekumar et al. 2020). The situation is similar in Turkey. The migrants in Turkey avoid going to the hospital because of the language barrier, lack of reliable information, and fear of losing their jobs when they receive a positive diagnosis (Üstübcü and Karadağ 2020). This puts communities at risk (AHA 2020).

Discussion

Physical distancing measures and various restrictions implemented in the COVID-19 pandemic led to a decrease in interactions between people. Reducing the duration and frequency of contact between people may cause conflict and disharmony (Teixeira da Silva 2020). As a matter of fact, the aforementioned study results revealed that xenophobic tendencies became widespread during the pandemic and that racist and discriminatory behaviors towards migrants were displayed intensely in the society. Therefore, various steps should be taken to prevent xenophobic tendencies in society. Preventing xenophobic tendencies will make significant contributions to the more effective execution of the pandemic.

As evidenced in many xenophobic incidents involving hate speech, harassment, and physical assaults, it is vital to use accurate information-based and effective communication strategies in planning the pandemic in order to eliminate disadvantaged situations and reduce inequalities (Lee et al. 2008). In this sense, the information obtained should be questioned effectively. To assess the reliability of the sources, the timeliness of the information, the importance of the information, the source of the information, the reliability and accuracy of the information, and the reason for the existence of the information should be evaluated comprehensively (Blakeslee 2004).

Social media platforms should facilitate the reporting and removal of the content found to be false that may promote racism related to COVID-19. In case the removed content is shared again, the individuals should be informed that the content is wrong (Chiu and Chuang 2020). When trust and transparency are established among the public, with special attention to the presentation of information in the media, public health officials, education authorities, and political leaders will have significant opportunities to resolve differences and improve collective decision-making processes vital to social, economic, and cultural equality (Noel 2020). Identifying reliable sources will be able to counter the negative effects of websites, blogs, and social media sites that may spread false information (Bataşin 2020). In this regard, beyond paying attention to their discourses, politicians and media need to produce effective plans for the transfer of information during the pandemic.

The inadequacy of health systems in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic led to inequalities in healthcare services. As a result of these inequalities, fragile social problems such as stigmatization, discrimination, racism, and injustice came to the fore again (Teixeira da Silva 2020). Thus, regulations should be made in health services in order to prevent social problems. Furthermore, the protection of health depends on the promotion of social inclusion, justice, and the spread of the culture of solidarity as well as the regulations in health services. In the absence of these factors, inequalities grow, and scapegoats continue to be sought (Devekumar et al. 2020).

Conclusion

It is possible to present various recommendations to prevent xenophobic tendencies during the pandemic, in line with the framework presented by the International Organization for Migration. These are (IOM 2020a):

- a. Developing legal and policy frameworks on hate crime and implementing them effectively.
- b. Actively addressing xenophobic discourse in online forums.
- c. Promoting an evidence-based and non-stigmatizing language in all communication channels that respect and empower people.
- d. Strengthening community-centered approaches to reduce prejudice and promote social adaptation.

e. Developing and strengthening prejudice reduction and anti-discrimination measures within the recovery plans.

Considering that xenophobic tendencies also caused mental problems in migrants during the pandemic, mental health professionals should be aware of this issue. They must effectively assess xenophobic tendencies and their impact on mental health (Cheng 2020). While displaying stigmatization and anti-racist attitudes in order to prevent and reduce xenophobic incidents in society, they should also aim to develop migrants' knowledge and skills to cope with xenophobic tendencies. Mental health professionals should reinforce their roles and responsibilities in the context of advocacy. In this context, during the pandemic, they should be guides for migrants to effectively benefit from social, educational, and justice services, especially health services.

In terms of researchers, the lack of studies on the xenophobic attitudes migrants exposed to during the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey suggests that this gap needs to be filled. Examining the xenophobic tendencies towards migrants in Turkey, which is the country hosting the highest number of migrants will contribute more effectively overcoming the pandemic. In the literature, the influence of the media and politicians frequently stands out among the factors leading to xenophobic tendencies during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the qualitative and quantitative data gathered from the migrants themselves and the host community members, it may be possible to identify different factors leading to xenophobic tendencies, and thus to develop intervention studies aiming to reduce xenophobic tendencies in the society. In general, racism and nationalism are known to trigger xenophobic tendencies. Factors affecting racism and nationalism during the COVID-19 pandemic and their relationship with xenophobic tendencies may also be addressed.

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