

The Xenophobia Risk of Covid-19 Pandemics and Ethical Treatment Recommendations*

Covid-19 Pandemisinin Xenophobia Riski ve Etik Sağaltım Önerileri

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Dear Editor;

The COVID-19 outbreak remains a mystery from its onset. The claim that this virus emerged at the Wuhan's live animal market in the Hubei province of China and delayed denial to the statements that the virus has spread by the Chinese Government has made people suspicious.^{1,2}

Xenophobia, that elegant-sounding name for an aversion to persons unfamiliar, ultimately derives from two Greek terms: xenos, which can be translated as either "stranger" or "guest" and phobos, which means either "fear" or "flight". Phobos is the ultimate source of all English -phobia terms, but many of those were actually coined in English or New Latin using the combining form -phobia (which traces back to phobos). Xenophobia itself came to us by way of New Latin and first appeared in print in English in the late 19th century.³

Societies' attitude towards diseases affects the future of social life. Diseases can cause mass chaos due to fear and panic. As a result, xenophobia turns into a kind of social reflex and it is possible that this will turn into a kind of hypochondriac. There are many examples of this in the history of medicine.

Different ideas on the origin of the causative virus lead societies to approach each other with suspicion and the occurrence of discrimination. Essentially, similar examples can be seen in the history of infectious diseases. One of them is syphilis disease. Regarding syphilis, eastern societies have blamed the west for this disease, and western societies have claimed east is responsible. The fact that syphilis disease is known as a European disease in Turkey is an example of this situation.⁴

Similarly, during the yellow-fever pandemic of 1853 in the USA, European immigrants, who were considered to be more vulnerable to the disease, had become primary targets of stigmatization. East Asians during the SARS epidemic in China and Africans when the Ebola epidemic emerged in 2014 were targeted of stigmatization. Still, media outlets in some countries refer to COVID-19 as the "Wuhan virus". Recently, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO director-general stated that "Stigma, to be honest, is more dangerous than the virus itself".⁵ However, some wrong ideas still exist. Today, the COVID-19 outbreak evolved from a medical issue to a social issue. Due to many reasons such as prolonged quarantine measures and the deterioration of the economy, the normalization delayed and this leads societies to live with anxiety. This situation increased and even caused xenophobic thoughts in the Western World. The United Nations warned countries against this highly risky problem, stating that China and other minority

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communities should not be subjected to physical and verbal attacks during the clarification of unknown aspects of the virus.⁶

Statements related that an epidemic can cause dangerous consequences in societies such as fear, panic, and anger in the social world, began to take place in the periodic scientific medical literature. This indicates that the concern of COVID-19 is shifting in a different direction in addition to being a medical issue still exists.⁷ The possibility that communities with low income, having pandemic-related unemployment, as well as socioculturally and socioeconomically weak communities and immigrants might increase the spread of the epidemic, allowing discriminatory thoughts to develop. However, causing a result like xenophobia is a kind of problematical perspective. We live in a world that ethical breakdown has completed in the last 50 years. Societies are faced not only with mental health deterioration but also with ethical and moral deterioration. To prevent this, an ethical therapy model must be developed. To remind of the correct principles, values and virtue as a higher view of life, this model can be implemented through information courses and seminars to individuals of all ages, professions and fields. Aside from the ethical treatment, philosophy, ethics and sociology specialists should also act as intellectual engineers and help for the reconstruction of society in a right manner.

In the future, perhaps, we will have to learn to live with such pandemics. Societies should learn that they should not display an abnormal reflex, discrimination based on religion, language or race and allow stigmatization during a medical crisis. We should do whatever is necessary related to the lesson that the COVID-19 pandemic taught us.

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