

A Review of Post-COVID Xenophobia

Leili Allahbakhshian¹, Nasrin Eftekhari Moghadam², Nahid Kermani³, Mina Borazjani⁴, Nahid Shabani^{5*}

¹ Vice-Chancellery for Research and Technology, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran

² Department of Psychology, Dezful Branch, Islamic Azad University, Dezful, Iran

³ Department of Counseling, Roodehen Branch, Islamic Azad University, Roodehen, Iran

⁴ Department of Cognitive Science, Faculty of Psychology and Education, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

⁵ Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran

* **Corresponding Author:** Nahid Shabani, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran. E-mail: shabani_nahid@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound effects on global health and society, extending beyond physical illness to encompass psychological, economic, and social dimensions. One of the significant social repercussions of the pandemic has been the rise of xenophobia and discrimination against certain groups, particularly those perceived to be associated with the initial outbreak of the virus. This review examines the nature, causes, and consequences of post-COVID xenophobia, drawing from existing literature and case studies.

Methods: To identify relevant studies on post-COVID xenophobia, a systematic search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including: PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar and Web of Science. The search was conducted in Jun 2024 to ensure a comprehensive capture of available literature. The following keywords and phrases were utilized to perform the search. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to refine and broaden the search strategy: "post-COVID-19" OR "post- SARS-CoV-2" "after" OR "xenophobia" OR "discrimination" OR "racism" OR "stigma", "anti-Asian" OR "immigrant discrimination" OR "social attitudes", "public health" OR "social impacts" OR "community responses" from the year of 2023 until present.

Results: Totally 47 articles were retrieved that among them 12 articles were included. Post-COVID xenophobia represents a significant challenge that has implications not only for affected individuals but for societal wellbeing as a whole. Understanding the complex interplay of fear, misinformation, and historical context is essential for developing effective interventions.

Conclusion: Moving forward, concerted efforts at individual, community, and policy levels are required to combat xenophobia, promote inclusivity, and ensure that the lessons learned during this pandemic help build a more equitable society.

Keywords: COVID-19, Xenophobia, Post COVID-19

Introduction

Xenophobia is characterized by a fear or aversion to anything perceived as strange or unfamiliar, often manifesting as a strong dislike for practices and individuals seen as outsiders. This can lead to mistrust, avoidance of interaction, and blaming these perceived outsiders for local problems. Such individuals may treat outsiders with hostility and regard them as threats without any evidence to support these feelings.¹

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only demanded a global health response but has also unveiled intricate social dynamics that have far-reaching consequences for communities and individuals alike. Among the most alarming sociopsychological outcomes is the rise of xenophobia—an irrational fear or aversion towards those perceived as outsiders, often exacerbated by

misinformation and societal stigma. As countries implemented measures to combat the spread of the virus, these actions inadvertently catalyzed a surge in discrimination and hostility towards immigrants and minority groups, branding them as scapegoats for the pandemic's socio-economic challenges.²

Xenophobia, defined as an irrational fear or hatred of individuals from other countries or cultures, is not a novel phenomenon. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing biases and led to new instances of discriminatory behavior worldwide. As nations grappled with the crisis, communities turned to scapegoating, often targeting immigrants, Asian populations, and healthcare workers. This article aims to understand the dynamics of post-COVID xenophobia,

including its manifestations, contributing factors, and potential solutions.³

According to the United Kingdom-based organization End Violence and Racism against East and Southeast Asian Communities (EVR), hate crimes saw a shocking 50% increase over two years. This surge has led to severe repercussions, including suicide attempts, depression, and social isolation, with vulnerable adolescents being particularly affected.⁴

How do pandemics influence the attitudes of host citizens toward migrants? Numerous studies have indicated a rise in anti-immigrant and anti-minority sentiments and behaviors during pandemics.⁵⁻¹² Conversely, some research has shown minimal impact of pandemics on xenophobia and anti-immigrant attitudes.^{13,14} A key theory explaining the increase in anti-immigrant views is the behavioral immune system (BIS) hypothesis, which posits that perceived disease threats heighten xenophobia, as individuals may view minorities or immigrants as potential sources of disease and seek to eliminate that perceived risk.^{1,7,9,10,15} However, a crucial question arises: how do individuals determine which minorities to blame for the disease? We argue that the rhetoric of political elites significantly influences the stigmatization of immigrants and minorities as disease vectors. Notably, studies that have identified a link between disease and anti-immigrant sentiments highlight the differing roles of elites. For instance, Drouhot et al. (2021) found no significant impact of the pandemic on public attitudes in Germany, where leaders avoided blaming immigrants, while Dipoppa, et al (2023) reported a notable effect in Italy, where leaders exhibited open hostility toward immigrants.^{7,8}

This review explores the phenomenon of post-COVID xenophobia as a critical public health and social concern, examining its origins, manifestations, and implications for community cohesion and mental health. By analyzing data from various studies and reports, we aim to illuminate the underlying mechanisms that have fueled such sentiments during and after the pandemic. Additionally, we will discuss the importance of addressing xenophobia as part of holistic public health strategies, emphasizing interventions that promote social inclusivity, education, and mental well-being. Ultimately, acknowledging and confronting xenophobia is essential for fostering resilience in society, improving public health outcomes, and restoring a sense of belonging among all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds.

Materials and Methods

Literature Search Strategy

A systematic literature review was conducted to explore post-COVID xenophobia, focusing on studies that examine changes in attitudes toward migrants as a result of the pandemic. We conducted a comprehensive search in multiple electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar, using terms such as "COVID-19," "xenophobia," "anti-immigrant sentiment," and "migrant attitudes." The search was limited to articles published between January 2023 and December 2024 to capture the most relevant research in the context of the pandemic. The following keywords and phrases were utilized to perform the search. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to refine and broaden the search strategy: "post-COVID-19" OR "post- SARS-CoV-2" "after" OR "xenophobia" OR "discrimination" OR "racism" OR "stigma", "anti-Asian" OR "immigrant discrimination" OR "social attitudes", "public health" OR "social impacts" OR "community responses" from the year of 2023 until present.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Articles were included in the review if they met the following criteria:

1. **Relevance:** Studies must focus specifically on xenophobia or anti-immigrant sentiments in the context of the post-COVID-19 pandemic.
2. **Population:** Research involving any host citizen population and migrants was considered.
3. **Methodology:** Empirical studies employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approaches were included.
4. **Availability:** Articles needed to be published in English and be available for full-text access.

Exclusion criteria included

1. Studies not specifically addressing the impact of COVID-19 on xenophobia.
2. Literature reviews, opinion pieces, and commentaries without original data.
3. Duplicate studies or those with overlapping datasets.

Selection Process

The initial search yielded a total of 47 articles. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, two

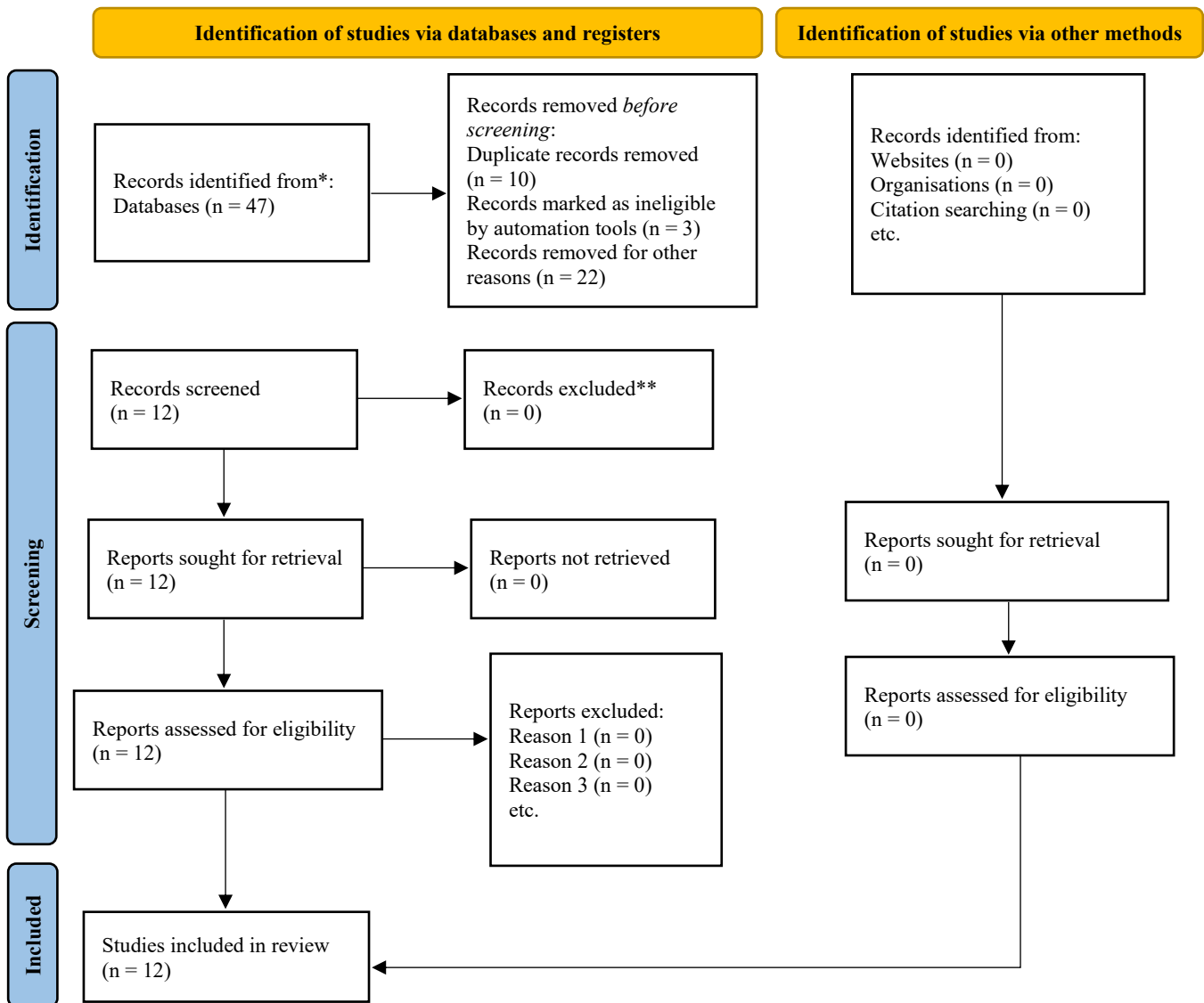


Figure 1. RRISMA Flowchart.

independent reviewers assessed each article's relevance based on titles and abstracts. Full texts of the remaining articles were retrieved and evaluated for eligibility. Discrepancies between the reviewers were resolved through discussion, and consensus was reached. Ultimately, 12 articles were included in the final analysis, representing a diverse range of methodologies and contexts.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data were extracted from the selected articles, focusing on key variables relevant to post-COVID xenophobia, including attitudes toward migrants, factors influencing these attitudes, and statistical significance of findings. A qualitative synthesis of the results was performed, examining common themes, patterns, and

discrepancies across studies. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how COVID-19 has shaped xenophobic attitudes globally.

Reporting

The findings were organized thematically, reflecting the various dimensions of xenophobia discussed in the literature. This review is reported in accordance with PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility in the systematic review process (Figure 1).

Results

The review of the 12 selected articles revealed several key themes and findings related to post-COVID xenophobia, illustrating the complex interplay between public health crises, societal attitudes, and individual

Table 1. Findings of the Included Studies

Citation	Key Themes/Findings	Implications
Shahabi Sorman Abadi R et al. (2023) ¹⁶	Examines travel behavior of xenophobic tourists during COVID-19.	Highlights the impact of public health crises on tourism behavior and the need for targeted interventions.
Dong F et al. (2023) ¹⁷	Analyzes challenges faced by Asian international graduate students due to anti-Asian racism amidst the pandemic.	Emphasizes the importance of support systems for affected populations to mitigate psychological distress.
Chan LH & Lee PK (2024) ¹⁸	Discusses the rise of nationalism and xenophobia in China during the pandemic via discourse analysis.	Calls for awareness of how nationalistic rhetoric can exacerbate xenophobic attitudes.
Elias A & Ben J (2023) ¹⁹	Investigates the structures and trajectories of racism during the pandemic.	Suggests a need for comprehensive policies that address both racism and public health.
Hall JE & Boulware LE (2023) ²⁰	Explores approaches to combating racism through research, training, and public health policies.	Advocates for integrating anti-racism strategies into public health responses.
Lu Y (2024) ²¹	Looks at the role of social contexts in the support for racist naming of COVID-19 on Twitter.	Highlights the influence of social media on perpetuating xenophobic discourse and the need for media literacy.
Junza-Silva A & Vilela C (2023) ²²	Studies the effects of micro-daily events on xenophobia and psychological wellbeing.	Indicates that daily positive interactions can reduce xenophobic attitudes, especially in certain populations.
Teng CC et al. (2023) ²³	Investigates the impact of discrimination fear on psychological distress among East Asian students.	Suggests emotion regulation strategies as critical for mitigating negative mental health impacts.
Chen YT et al. (2024) ²⁴	Examines racial discrimination and mental health, focusing on intersecting factors of race, ethnicity, and status.	Reinforces the need for intersectional approaches in addressing mental health and discrimination impacts.
Phiri MZ (2024) ²⁵	Discusses the importance of decolonial approaches in global health responses to racism.	Advocates for rethinking public health strategies to dismantle systemic inequities.
Ertorer SE (2024) ²⁶	Explores manifestations of anti-Asian xenophobia, from avoidance to overt discrimination.	Informs strategies to raise awareness and combat various forms of xenophobia in society.
Zhou YY, Rojas D, Peters ME (2024) ²⁷	No evidence that COVID-19 exposure changed attitudes toward Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. - Those who retained their jobs viewed Venezuelan migration more positively by the end of the study.	Suggests that economic factors may mitigate xenophobic attitudes. - Highlights the importance of political rhetoric in shaping public sentiment during crises.

experiences. Table 1 summarize the major findings from each study, highlighting their implications for understanding xenophobia in the context of the post COVID-19 pandemic.

Travel Behavior and Xenophobia

Shahabi Sorman Abadi et al. (2023) examined how xenophobic attitudes influenced the travel behavior of tourists during the pandemic. The study highlighted that public health crises can significantly alter tourism patterns, necessitating targeted interventions to address the underlying xenophobia that may deter travel to certain regions.

Challenges Faced by Asian International Students

Dong et al. (2023) analyzed the challenges encountered

by Asian international graduate students amid rising anti-Asian racism during the pandemic. The findings underscored the critical need for robust support systems to alleviate psychological distress among affected populations.

Nationalism and Xenophobia in China

Chan and Lee (2024) discussed the rise of nationalism and xenophobia in China during the pandemic through discourse analysis. Their work emphasized the influence of nationalistic rhetoric on exacerbating xenophobic attitudes, calling for greater awareness and mitigation strategies.

Structures of Racism

Elias and Ben (2023) investigated the structures and

trajectories of racism during the pandemic, suggesting that comprehensive policies addressing both racism and public health are essential for fostering equity and inclusivity.

Combating Racism in Public Health

Hall and Boulware (2023) explored various approaches to combat racism through research, training, and public health policies. They advocated for integrating anti-racism strategies into public health responses to create a more equitable healthcare system.

Role of Social Media

Lu (2024) examined how social contexts influenced support for racist labeling of COVID-19 on Twitter, highlighting the role of social media in perpetuating xenophobic discourse. The study emphasized the need for media literacy to counteract harmful narratives.

Micro-Daily Events and Psychological Wellbeing

Junça-Silva and Vilela (2023) studied the effects of micro-daily events on xenophobia and psychological wellbeing. Their findings indicated that positive daily interactions can reduce xenophobic attitudes, particularly among vulnerable populations.

Discrimination Fear and Psychological Distress

Teng et al. (2023) investigated the impact of fear of discrimination on psychological distress among East Asian students. The study suggested that emotion regulation strategies are crucial for mitigating negative mental health effects associated with xenophobia.

Intersectionality in Mental Health and Discrimination

Chen et al. (2024) examined the intersections of race, ethnicity, and status in relation to racial discrimination and mental health. Their findings reinforced the need for intersectional approaches to effectively address the impacts of discrimination on mental health.

Decolonial Approaches in Global Health

Phiri (2024) discussed the importance of decolonial approaches in global health responses to racism, advocating for a rethinking of public health strategies to dismantle systemic inequities.

Community Resilience and Xenophobia

Zhou et al. (2024) provided evidence that not all

pandemic threats lead to increased xenophobia; some communities display resilience and social cohesion that mitigate xenophobic responses. This highlights the variability in community reactions to crises.

Manifestations of Anti-Asian Xenophobia

Ertorer (2024) explored various manifestations of anti-Asian xenophobia, ranging from avoidance to overt discrimination. The study informed strategies aimed at raising awareness and combating these forms of xenophobia within society.

Economic Factors and Attitudes Toward Venezuelan Migrants

Zhou, Rojas, and Peters (2024) found no evidence that COVID-19 exposure changed attitudes toward Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. Interestingly, individuals who maintained their jobs viewed Venezuelan migration more positively by the study's end, suggesting that economic stability may mitigate xenophobic attitudes and highlighting the role of political rhetoric in shaping public sentiment during crises.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the results indicate that while xenophobia has been exacerbated in certain contexts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the responses vary significantly based on factors such as economic stability, community resilience, and the influence of political discourse. The findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions that address both the psychological impacts of xenophobia and the structural factors contributing to it. Furthermore, the studies highlight the importance of fostering social cohesion and support systems to mitigate the adverse effects of xenophobia on marginalized communities.

The compiled research on xenophobia and its implications after the COVID-19 pandemic reveals a concerning intersection of public health crises and societal discrimination. The studies collectively illustrate how fear and misinformation can heighten xenophobic attitudes, particularly against Asian communities, leading to significant psychological distress and a pressing need for support systems.

Key findings show that xenophobic behaviors have manifested in altered travel patterns, exemplifying the wider societal repercussions of health emergencies.

Concurrently, the experiences of Asian international graduate students underscore the urgent need for targeted mental health interventions that acknowledge the distinct challenges these individuals face amidst rising racism.

Furthermore, the analyses of nationalistic rhetoric in various countries indicate that discourse plays a critical role in shaping public perception and can exacerbate xenophobia. This highlights the necessity for public health policies that integrate anti-racist frameworks and community education to foster resilience against discriminatory narratives.

Emphasizing the potential for positive daily interactions to counter xenophobia, the literature suggests that fostering social cohesion can be instrumental in mitigating the adverse impacts of discrimination. Additionally, the intersectional approach to understanding racial discrimination reinforces the importance of addressing the multifaceted nature of identity, status, and health outcomes.

Moving forward, it is imperative that policymakers, researchers, and community leaders work collaboratively to implement strategies that promote inclusivity, empathy, and understanding. This response should be informed by the lessons learned during the pandemic to ensure that future public health initiatives prioritize mental well-being and actively combat xenophobia. As society continues to navigate the aftermath of COVID-19, fostering a united front against discrimination will be vital in building healthier and more equitable communities for all.

The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for the rise of xenophobia, particularly directed towards Asian communities, highlighting the intricate relationship between public health crises and racial discrimination. The studies reviewed in this article collectively unveil the complexity of xenophobic attitudes and behaviors in a time of global uncertainty.

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced societal attitudes towards immigrants and minority groups, intensifying xenophobic sentiments in many regions. However, the findings from this review suggest a complex landscape where the effects of the pandemic on xenophobia vary widely depending on contextual factors such as political rhetoric, social cohesion, and economic stability.

Political Rhetoric and Xenophobia

The role of political discourse in shaping public attitudes toward migrants has been a recurring theme in several studies. Chan and Lee (2024) highlight how nationalistic rhetoric in China exacerbated xenophobic attitudes during the pandemic. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2024) indicate that in contexts where politicians did not scapegoat immigrants, such as Colombia with Venezuelan migrants, there was no significant change in attitudes despite the economic downturn. These findings align with existing literature that emphasizes the power of influential leaders in framing narratives about immigration and public health.^{27,28} Political figures' messages can either mitigate or exacerbate xenophobia, underscoring the need for responsible communication during crises.

Economic Factors as Modulators of Xenophobia

Another critical finding from this review is the impact of economic conditions on attitudes toward immigrants. Zhou et al (2024) found that Colombians who retained their jobs during the pandemic viewed Venezuelan migrants more positively, suggesting that economic stability may cushion against xenophobic sentiments. This aligns with theories on the behavioral immune system, which propose that economic anxiety often heightens xenophobia as individuals perceive outsiders as threats.²⁷ In contrast, studies such as those by Dong et al. (2023) and Elias and Ben (2023) emphasize the challenges faced by marginalized groups amid economic stress, highlighting the necessity for robust support systems to alleviate the psychological distress of both host citizens and migrants.^{17,19}

Social Cohesion and Resilience

Community resilience emerged as a significant theme in understanding the varied responses to xenophobia during the pandemic. Zhou et al. (2024) provide evidence that certain communities displayed strong social cohesion, mitigating xenophobic reactions despite the pandemic's challenges. This finding aligns with research suggesting that social connections and supportive networks can buffer against the negative effects of crises, fostering inclusive attitudes.²⁷ Studies by Junça-Silva and Vilela (2023) further support this notion, showing that positive daily interactions can reduce xenophobic attitudes, particularly in vulnerable populations.²²

Media's Role in Perpetuating Xenophobia

The influence of media in shaping attitudes toward immigrants cannot be overlooked. Lu (2024) demonstrates how social media platforms can perpetuate xenophobic discourse, particularly through the framing of COVID-19. This highlights the need for media literacy initiatives aimed at counteracting harmful narratives surrounding immigration, especially during global health crises.²¹ The combination of responsible journalism and community engagement strategies may help mitigate the spread of xenophobic sentiments.

Intersectionality in Understanding Xenophobia

Finally, the intersectional analysis of Chen et al. (2024) underscores the importance of considering how race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status interact to shape experiences of discrimination and xenophobia. This approach is critical in developing more effective policies and interventions that address the diverse needs of affected populations. Comprehensive strategies that consider these overlapping identities can foster greater understanding and empathy among host citizens and migrants alike.²⁴

The articles reviewed reveal a troubling trend, where xenophobia influences not only individual behaviors—such as the travel decisions of tourists—but also profoundly impacts the mental health and experiences of marginalized groups, such as international students facing anti-Asian racism.¹⁷ Discourse analysis indicates that narratives of nationalism within China have been tightly intertwined with xenophobic sentiments post-pandemic,²⁸ highlighting the societal contexts that can either exacerbate or mitigate these attitudes.

Moreover, these studies shed light on the structural dimensions of racism, emphasizing the importance of understanding racism not just as an individual prejudice but as embedded within larger social systems. For example, Elias and Ben (2023) discuss the trajectories of pandemic racism, while Hall and Boulware (2023) propose frameworks for combating racism through research and public health initiatives.^{29,30}

Investigations into social media dynamics reveal how platforms can perpetuate scapegoating and racist labeling, while other studies suggest that daily interactions—combined with individual psychological factors, like neuroticism—affect levels of xenophobia.²² This complexity underscores the necessity of addressing

both individual and collective facets of racism during public health crises.

Additionally, the review highlights a crucial intersectional perspective, as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status play significant roles in shaping experiences of discrimination and mental health outcomes among affected groups.²⁴ The call for a decolonial approach to health responses²⁵ speaks to the need for a more equitable paradigm that dismantles systemic racism rather than reinforcing it.

Interestingly, some studies indicate contexts where pandemic-related fear did not escalate xenophobic attitudes, suggesting that social cohesion and community responses can provide protective factors against such divisions.²⁷

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a critical reminder of the urgent need to recognize and combat xenophobia in its various forms. To foster inclusive societies, it is imperative to enact public health policies that address not just the immediate health crisis but also the underlying social inequities that enable discrimination. As communities navigate recovery, insights garnered from this period must inform ongoing efforts to promote empathy, solidarity, and respect for diversity, ensuring a more equitable future for all. Continued research is essential in crafting effective strategies that mitigate xenophobia and promote mental health and well-being across diverse populations.

Conclusion

The review of post-COVID xenophobia reveals that while the pandemic has heightened xenophobic sentiments in several contexts, the responses are heterogeneous and shaped by a variety of factors, including political rhetoric, economic conditions, social cohesion, and media discourse. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates anti-racism strategies in public health responses, fosters community connections, and promotes responsible media practices. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics to better understand and counter xenophobia in an increasingly diverse world.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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