

# XENOPHOBIA

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## DESCRIPTION

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak in Singapore has presented a global health crisis that compels us as a community to band together and do our part to fight the virus as one people.

In response to the COVID-19, we witness instances of xenophobia overseas as well as in our community – displays of xenophobia, xenophobic posts and comments. Xenophobia has always existed. How did COVID-19 trigger xenophobic responses? Why did that happen and what can we as individuals do in this time?

## KEY LEARNING POINTS

- Xenophobia is in part a consequence of misunderstanding and misplaced assumptions
  - Situations like COVID-19 knows no nationality and race – we are more similar than we would like to think
  - Combat misunderstandings with facts and compassion, regardless of race, language, religion and nation
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# XENOPHOBIA

Influence and gain commitment from people

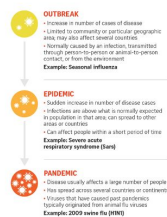
## XENOPHOBIA – Part 1 (Exploring the Topic)

**12 MARCH 2020  
COVID-19 DECLARED  
“A PANDEMIC”**



**WHAT IS A  
PANDEMIC?**

Virus explosion



**THE SPREAD OF COVID-19 IS  
GLOBAL**



### BUILDING CONTEXT

On 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak to be a pandemic.

### [Quick Sharing]

- What do you understand by “pandemic”?
- What is the difference between Pandemic and Epidemic/ Disease outbreak?

There is no explicit definition of Pandemics written by WHO. Generally, pandemics refer to worldwide spread of new diseases. Pandemics are hence not so much a reference to the severity of the disease than a reference to how widely the disease spreads geographically.

COVID-19 being declared a pandemic is indicative of its current worldwide spread. It has moved beyond being just a “Wuhan” situation, or “China/Chinese” situation. We see outbreaks in more than 160 countries (as of 19 March 2020) in various continents.

### Discussion Question: What do you think Xenophobia means?

*Students tend to look to the internet for the definition.*

*Educators can probe their understanding by asking them to rephrase it in their own words.*

- Dictionary definition: extreme dislike or fear of foreigners, their customs, religions etc
- What an example of rephrasing can look like:
  - o fear of/ hate towards certain people because they are of a different race or religion
- What does Xenophobia look/like like?

### WE STARTED TO SEE XENOPHOBIA ACROSS THE WORLD



Lesson 10: How... ©2020 Halogen Package by Halogen Foundation Singapore

Source: AP Photo

### [Video] An example of Xenophobia overseas

This is a video from New York City in early March. This shows the confrontation in a subway against an Asian man.

The aggressor was asking the Asian man to move away, and sprayed Febreeze or some kind of air freshener.

**Discussion Question: Since COVID-19 spreads globally, why do people still single out communities like the Asians and the Chinese?**

- Possible responses:
  - o COVID-19 started in China
  - o People are playing safe by rejecting and distancing themselves away from Asians/Chinese

At the time of this video (early March), there is actually not a single case of COVID-19 from an Asian in New York City.

**Discussion Question: Why then are people still treating Asians/Chinese like this?**

- What is the basis of such xenophobic/racist behaviour?
- Possible responses:
  - o Ignorance and misunderstanding
  - o Amidst the fear, people are finding elements of certainty to regain a sense of control. "Must be the Chinese/Asians who are spreading COVID-19 in this country!"

### 29 JANUARY 2020 XENOPHOBIA IN SINGAPORE

Coronavirus: MHA investigating religious teacher for 'xenophobic, racist' posts

Lesson 10: How... ©2020 Halogen Package by Halogen Foundation Singapore

Image Source: The Straits Times

### Xenophobia in Singapore

To a lesser extent, we also see Xenophobic tensions simmering in the Singapore society.

On 29<sup>th</sup> Jan 2020, a religious teacher posted on xenophobic and racist posts on his personal Facebook page. He talked about how COVID-19 was a retribution against the Chinese for their oppressive treatment against the Uighurs minorities in Xinjiang. In a separate post, he commented that the Chinese are not as hygienic and does clean up thoroughly after defecating, causing COVID-19 to spread through faeces.

On 14<sup>th</sup> Jan 2020, a Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD) sent an email to all students promoting one of the initiatives in the school's virtual open house. However, this student attributed the cause

# S'pore woman asks SUTD scholar to return to 'virus country' after disagreement on coronavirus name

The scholar was also asked if they would still take up a scholarship in Singapore if they did not receive a stipend every month.

**14 FEBRUARY 2020**  
**XENOPHOBIA IN SINGAPORE**

# S'pore woman asks SUTD scholar to return to 'virus country' after disagreement

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**14 FEBRUARY 2020**  
**XENOPHOBIA IN SINGAPORE**

For PhD students drawing scholarship, u are ought to be reminded that the scholarship you are receiving comes from Singapore Taxpayers money, or in short, our money. many of these PhD students hop to other countries applying to faculty positions upon graduation leeching on Singapore and SUTD's prestigious name, and without effectively contributing to the advancement in knowledge and technology in Singapore.

Here the undergraduate students has volunteered in this Sare Open House project. They should be commended and encouraged. Do u think u will volunteer to do PhD research in Singapore without the S\$33000 per month stipend scholarship?

If you are not happy, you can return to your virus country.

of bringing open house online to “Wuhan”, triggering a response email from a PhD student correcting the term (it should have been a more neutral and official term “COVID-19”) and asking for an apology.

Thereafter, a person “Chia Yiling” responded to the email...

She criticized the PhD student for taking “taxpayers’ money” for their own studies in Singapore without much contribution to Singapore, and asked the PhD student to “return to your virus country”

## XENOPHOBIA – Part 2 (Relating to the Topic)

**SINGAPORE PRIDES OURSELVES TO BE A COSMOPOLITAN CITY AND A TOURISM HUB**

**WE WELCOME PEOPLE OF ALL NATIONALITIES**

**TO WHAT EXTENT ARE WE TRULY EMBRACING DIVERSITY?**

### UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

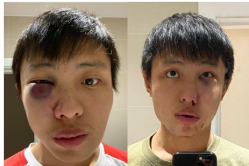
Singapore is well-known internationally for being a cosmopolitan city, meaning our city is comprised of people from many different countries. We are an international business and tourism hub.

**Discussion Question: To what extent are we truly embracing diversity?**

*Educators may sieve out questions to ask the class based on how deep he/she may want to delve into the topic of embracing diversity*

- When COVID-19 first landed on our shores, how many of us received or sent texts/memes/other media like “Avoid the Chinese”, “Get XXX out of Singapore!” etc?
- How did you feel about all these comments and the instances shared in the previous slides? Upset? Justified? Why?
- How open are we towards foreigners? Is there a bias towards/against certain countries, and why?
- Is embracing diversity an outcome of our openness as a society, or is it a matter of economics

**24 FEBRUARY 2020  
SINGAPOREAN ATTACKED IN  
LONDON**



(industries, offices and tourism)? Or a matter of convenience (so that they can do the work we don't want to do)?

- o And hence, are countries that provide PMETs (Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technicians) more welcomed than countries that provide blue collar workers?

**EXPLORING IMPACT OF PROBLEM**

On 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020, a Singaporean was a victim of Xenophobia in London. Jonathan Mok is a student in London. He walked past a group of youths when he heard them call out "Coronavirus". He turned and looked at them in response. One of youths then punched Jonathan twice in the face.

The youth said "I don't want your coronavirus in my country"

Now, a Singaporean becomes a victim of Xenophobia, and the social media erupted in call of injustice and expression of sympathy. His Facebook post garnered 11,000 comments and 40,000 shares.

**Discussion Question** □ **Having a fellow Singaporean being a victim, how does that confirm or challenge your view on diversity and xenophobia?**

- Imagine Mok to be your friend, how would you feel? (Angry, Injustice) Why?
- Possible responses:
  - o Xenophobia may be more prevalent overseas
  - o Though we may not see things happening, it doesn't mean that nothing is happening.

**Discussion Question** □ **Are we really that different – Singaporean vs foreigner?**

*Possible areas to explore:*

- *Visible: cultures, language, festivities*
- *Non-visible: both have families to protect/support, both wants safety, both wants to make a honest living*

Possible landing point: We are more similar than we sometimes care to admit.

## XENOPHOBIA – Part 3 (Solutions)

### 10 MARCH 2020 COSTA FORTUNA DOCKED IN SINGAPORE

Coronavirus outbreak

Cruise ship turned away by others to dock in Singapore today as planned



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Image Source: The Straits Times

### FACTS SURROUNDING SINGAPORE'S DECISION

"But this case is different. All passengers, including two Singaporeans, boarded the ship in Singapore on Mar 3. They were all checked and temperature-screened before they boarded."

"They had sailed off and were scheduled to return to Singapore later. Should we then deny them from coming back without any basis? That would not have been right."

### ALL PASSENGERS WERE SCREENED PRIOR TO TRAVEL



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Image Source: The Straits Times

### FACTS SURROUNDING SINGAPORE'S DECISION

On why these passengers were not subject to travel restrictions barring people with recent travel history from entering Singapore, the authorities said they had entered the country and boarded Costa Fortuna on March 3, before the travel ban took effect at 11.59pm on March 4.

### THE ITALIANS ON BOARD WERE OUT OF ITALY WHEN THE OUTBREAK ESCALATED



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Image Source: The Straits Times

### CONCEPTUALISING SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS WITHIN OWN SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

On 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Costa Fortuna cruise ship docked in Singapore.

This is significant because

- 1) we just witnessed another cruise ship (Diamond Princess) being the site of a COVID-19 outbreak, carrying more than 700 patients. At that time, the ship itself has the highest number of COVID-19 cases outside of China
- 2) It was rejected by ports in Penang and Phuket due to fears of similar COVID-19 infections on the ship
- 3) It was ferrying 60 Italians. Italy was seeing escalating number of confirmed cases in the country then, reporting thousands of new cases a day
- 4) Yet, Singapore chose to let them dock in Singapore, their home port

### Discussion Question: Should we have isolated them instead?

- What do you think was the right decision?
- What considerations would you have before deciding whether the ship should be allowed to dock?
- What do we know? What do we not know?

In response, the Government stepped out to provide the facts surrounding the incident.

- Passengers were already screened prior to travel and no new passengers were picked up after the ship set sail
- There were no sick passengers on board, according to the ship doctors

### Discussion Question: When the facts are pushed out, how does that change your initial opinion on this decision? Why?

## COMMUNITIES STEPPED UP TO SUPPORT FOREIGN WORKERS



## 16 MARCH 2020 MALAYSIA ANNOUNCED A MOVEMENT CONTROL ORDER

Malaysia bans travel abroad, shuts schools and businesses over coronavirus spread; lockdown till March 31

## 16 MARCH 2020 MALAYSIA ANNOUNCED A MOVEMENT CONTROL ORDER

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## 19 MARCH 2020 (MIDNIGHT) MALAYSIAN WORKERS ON THE STREETS

With no place to stay, some Malaysian workers sleeping rough near Kranji MRT Station

## LESS THAN 24 HOURS LATER...

S'poreans offer to house stranded Malaysian workers, as S'pore authorities step up patrols to look out for them

## POSITIVE RESPONSES

In contrast to the xenophobia we've seen, we also started to see more organic, on-the-ground responses to the plights of the foreigners suffering from COVID-19 in Singapore. This is one such group, itsrainingraincoats, who got in touch with the wife of one of the Bangladeshi migrant worker in the Seletar Aerospace cluster to find out her situation and her needs, and rallied the community and social media users to chip in to support her upcoming newborn.

More recently, on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Malaysia announced a Movement Control Order, which includes the ban on travel abroad starting from 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 till the end of the month. This means that schools and businesses are to remain closed, and Malaysians are not allowed to travel out of the country. In Singapore, we have 300,000 Malaysian workers who enter Singapore everyday for work. Suddenly, these workers, should they choose to remain in Singapore to work, have no way to go home.

The same night, we saw Malaysian workers sleeping in the public areas as they were unable to head home, and no accommodation plans have been made for them yet. At Kranji MRT station itself, there were around 20 of them sleeping on the cold, hard floor.

In less than 24 hours, the government responded with various initiatives, including working with employers to house the Malaysian workers and opening up sports hall as temporary shelter and distributing toiletries.

Alongside the government interventions, we once again saw ground-up initiatives – Singaporeans offering to house Malaysian workers, distributing food and blankets to those on the streets, communities rallying support via Facebook pages like Homeless Hearts of Singapore (<https://www.facebook.com/homelessSG>) and Couchsurfing communities.

## COVID-19 KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES

### HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THE FOREIGNERS IN SINGAPORE?



Unit 10: Health - COVID-19 Lesson Package by Halogen Foundation Singapore

Image Source: Shrek Russell/Corbis Out

COVID-19 knows no boundaries, so should we. The foreigners, away from home and family, are as fearful, if not more so, than we are.

### Discussion Question: How can we also support the foreigners in Singapore during this period?

- Why did Singapore choose to help the Malaysian workers?
  - o Precisely because COVID-19 is blind to race and nationality, we are in this together. Your problem is my problem, your solution is my solution.
- Win Together: Look out for foreigner friends and neighbours – check in with them, provide emotional support, give what we can
- Malaysian friends – How's things at home for them? For those who had to rush into Singapore, did they manage to gather what they needed before they rushed into Singapore?

Xenophobia (and racism) is the spread of hate. Sometimes that stems from misunderstanding and ignorance.

## XENOPHOBIA = SPREAD OF HATE

### HOW CAN WE ARM OURSELVES WITH FACTS TO COUNTER MISUNDERSTANDING?



Unit 10: Health - COVID-19 Lesson Package by Halogen Foundation Singapore

Image Source: Shrek Russell/Corbis Out

### Discussion Question: How can we arm ourselves with the facts, and spread the facts to counter ignorance, misunderstanding, fear-mongering etc against certain groups of people?

- Lead with a positive response: Fact-check news spreading on social media networks, question own assumptions and beliefs, form an informed opinion about things going around us and inject reason and assurance through our interactions with others