



Improving well-being through effective stress management for working class mothers in Enugu State

Martha Uchenna Ogbuke

Department of Sociology & Anthropology
Enugu State University of Science & Technology (ESUT)
Email: uche.ogbuke@esut.edu.ng

Raphael Chima Ofoegbu

Department of Sociology & Anthropology
Madonna University Nigeria, Okija
Email: rcofoegbu@gmail.com

Stella Abel Ugwu

Department of Sociology & Anthropology
Enugu State University of Science & Technology (ESUT)

Abstract

The concept of well-being is beyond just staying alive. It entails what is good and in the self-interest of a person. People's well-being is generally inhibited by different factors, among which is stress. Stress is seen as the rate of wear and tear caused by life experiences and thus has become one of the serious emotional health problems people face globally. This is more so for working class mothers who have to combine homemaking with office work, hence their ability to manage stress would go a long way in improving their well-being. It is on this premise that this study was conducted. Two specific objectives and corresponding research questions and hypotheses guided this study. Descriptive survey design was adopted. The population comprises working class mothers in Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu, numbering 1,350, out of which 10% was sampled. Structured questionnaire was used for data collection while mean and t-test were used for analyzing research questions and testing the hypotheses respectively. It was found, among others that school runs and other family interferences as well as poor working conditions are the major sources of stress for working class mothers. It was also revealed that engaging house help, adopting healthy sleep habit, cordial staff relationship among others are some of the strategies for coping with stress. The study recommends, among others, that the organizational management should introduce more holiday and other welfare incentives to allow working class mothers maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Keywords: Stress, Stress Management, Well-being, Working Class Mothers.



Introduction

Stress is one of the serious emotional health problems people experience globally. Every human being has needs and wants and there is a deep hunger and enthusiasm in people to satisfy these demands. However, as efforts are made to meet these requirements, a stressful situation develops. Life is entwined with stress. Stress, according to the American Institute of Stress (2016), is today's greatest hazard to health. According to the United Kingdom Health and Safety Executives –HES (2016), over 13 million working days are lost each year due to stress, which is thought to be the cause of 70% of doctor visits and 85% of major illnesses in the United Kingdom. Nigeria is not exempted as many cases of stress-related issues exist unreported.

Stress has a high price tag in terms of human misery, social and vocational damage, and sickness, and most of these stresses are job-induced (Mensah, 2021).

Job stress occurs when the demand placed on an individual at the work place exceeds their perceived ability to successfully cope with the situation, resulting in a harmful reaction. Job stress has gained much attention because it is one of the main determinants of mental well-being among working adults (Hsieh, 2019). One notable stratum of the working adults that severely suffer stress is working mothers.

Working mothers are women who are mothers and who work outside the home for income in addition to the work they perform at home in raising their children (Gayawan & Adebayo, 2015). These set of women make up a huge chunk of global population. As of the early 2000s, more mothers in the United States are working than ever before. Since the mid 2010s, 58 percent of mothers with children under the age of six, and nearly 75 percent of those with children between the ages of six and 18 were part of the paid labour force (US Demographic Health Survey, 2015). The case is not different in Nigeria, although a north-south divide existed in the likelihood of women engaging in all-year employment against not working, an east-west divide was found in seasonal/occasional jobs (Gayawan & Adebayo, 2015). However the divide, working mothers still make up significant portion of the workforce in Nigeria.

Stress is a function of different variables, which are called stressors (Selye, 2016). Poverty, unemployment, clinical depressions, compulsive disorder, heavy drinking,

insufficient sleep, among others are variables that contribute to various levels of stress (Liu & Zhu, 2019).

Stressors have been grouped into two namely: external and internal stressors. External stressors comprise physical environment stressors, social stressors, organisational stressors and daily hurdles (Selye, 2016). Physical environment stressors include factors like heat or noise. Social stressors are the interaction between people who exhibit rudeness, bossiness or aggressiveness. Organisational stressors include rules and regulations, red tape and deadline, major life events (like death of a relation, loss of job, promotion, new baby and few others) and mechanical breakdown. Internal stressors according to Selye (2016) are lifestyle choices like habitual caffeine consumption, inadequate sleep, and work over load/schedule, and negative self-perception like pessimistic thinking, self-criticisms and over-analysis. Others according to Selye (2016) are mind traps, taking things personally, exaggeration, rigid thinking and stressful personality traits like being a perfectionist. All these stressors may also be found in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Meanwhile, it is important to note that some of these stressors are work-related while others are family or social-related.

Stressors in Nigerian, include stress-inducing factors that precipitate stress in working mothers in various degrees. Work overload, time limits, a lack of promotion chances, insufficient recognition, insufficient pay, shifting job roles, and insufficient resources and money are among them (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, & Stough, 2017). Heavy workloads, position ambiguity, conflicting professional demands, frequent interruptions, and striving for family welfare are all sources of work pressure documented in the research (Goldenburg & Waddell, 2017). Further research has found that the competing demands of job and family life, as well as excessive working hours, account for a considerable part of stress experienced by working-class mothers (Socrcinelli & Gregory, 2016). Insufficient finance is a widespread issue in the Nigerian system.

Sources of stress have been classified under environmental, organizational and domestic sources. According to Al-Sowygh (2015) environmental stress includes three essential components. External components are the biopsychosocial and psychosocial

factors in one's external environment previously mentioned, the stress reaction is elicited by a wide variety of stimuli that are either physiologically or emotionally threatening and disrupt the body's homeostasis. Internal components are the physiological and biochemical factors in one's internal environment (body), the perceived stress. The cognitive responses resulting from the interaction between these two components are the coping strategies that constitute the third component. Occupational stress is the reaction to organizational pressures in the workplace that are regarded to be a threat to an individual's health or safety. Individual factors, in addition to organizational factors, have been implicated in stress consequences, according to Finney, Stergiopoulos, Hansel, Bonato, Sarah, and Dewa (2017). Individual factors such as personality and family difficulties mix with organizational stresses such as job overload, role conflict, under-promotion, and degree of participation to cause mental and physical ill-health in employees (Finney et al., 2017). According to Oluwu (2016), sources of stress can include a hostile work environment, such as a lack of space, insufficient work tools, a lack of motivation at work, no vacation (as seen among academic staff), long work hours, and other managerial variables such as job instability. Michael (2015) pointed out causes of work stress (stressors) as follows: harassment by anyone not necessarily one's manager, feeling powerless and uninvolved in determining one's own responsibilities, continuous unreasonable performance demand, lack of effective communication and conflict resolution, lack of job security and long working hours. The author further stated others to include excessive time away from home and family, conflicts among staff, a feeling that one's reward is not commensurate with one's responsibility, working hour's responsibility and pressures, lack of balance diet, exercise, sleep/rest and play. Whenever there is presence of stress caused by the above mentioned stressors, there are specific stress-related signs and symptoms that the individuals manifest.

The common signs and symptoms of stress have been enumerated as follows: forgetfulness, nervousness, worry, difficult sleeping (insomnia), heart padding, shaky hands, back pain, tension, headache, shortness of breath, diarrhea, constipation and stomach upset; Mullen, Gold, Belcastro and Medermott (2018). David (2016) categorized common symptoms of stress into four, namely: physical symptoms, mental symptoms, emotional symptoms and behavioural symptoms. Physical symptoms

include fatigue, headache, insomnia, muscle aches, chest pain, abdominal cramps, sweating, frequent cold and laziness. Mental symptoms include decrease in concentration and memory indecisiveness, mind racing, confusion and loss of sense of humour. Emotional symptoms of stress are anxiety, nervousness, depression, anger, frustration, worry, fear, irritability, impatience and short temper. While behavioural symptoms are frequent fidgeting, nervous habit (like nail-biting and foot-tapping), increased eating, smoking, drinking, crying, yelling and swearing (David, 2016) How one perceives a stress-inducing event and how he or she reacts to it determines its impact on one's health. One may be motivated by the event in one's life or may see same as stressful and respond in manner that may have a negative effect on his or her physical, mental and social well-being. If one always responds in a negative way, one's health and happiness may suffer. But by understanding one's self and reacting to stress-inducing situations, one can learn to handle stress effectively (Cook & Ludwig, 2017). To handle stress effectively depends on adoption of effective management. Hence stress management becomes pertinent.

Stress management refers to wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's level of stress, especially chronic stress usually for the purpose of improving everyday functioning (Lehler, David, Barrow, Woolfolk, & Sime, 2017). Stress management is also defined as actions adopted to manage the demands and pressure placed on one, in the most effective way (Gerard, 2018). In sum, stress management refers to all measures that working class mothers adopt in effectively managing the demands and pressures at workplace. For one to achieve effective stress management, the measures of stress must be put into practice. In extension, it is the set of activities or habits employed to reduce work and personal stress by working class mothers. These activities are engaged in mainly for the purpose of achieving a reasonable work-life balance, which is necessary for the well-being of the working mothers.

The psychological concept "well-being" is a general term for the condition of an individual or group, for example their social, economic, psychological, spiritual or medical state; high well-being means that, in some sense, the individual's experience is positive, while low well-being is associated with negative happenings (Guttman & Louis, 2012). Well-being has been defined as a dynamic state characterized by a reasonable



amount of harmony between an individual's abilities, needs and expectations, and environmental demands and opportunities (Effiong, Nwonyi, Ibeagha, and Eze, 2017). It is a person's evaluative reactions to his or her life – either in terms of life satisfaction, 'cognitive evaluations' or 'ongoing emotional reactions' (Diener and Diener, 2015). Though the concept of well-being is subjective, it can be summarized to be the feeling of contentment, happiness, satisfaction with life's experiences and of one's role in the world of work, sense of achievement, utility, belongingness and no distress, dissatisfaction or worry etc. It emphasizes positive characteristics of growth and development.

Statement of the Problem

Stress is the non-specific response of the body to any demand. It is an integral part of growth and development that only becomes a predominantly negative factor in a person's life eroding the abilities to function when it becomes acute and after repeated exposures. Management of stress reduces the demands and pressure placed on an individual especially working class mothers. This controls their level of stress, especially chronic stress experienced during the cause of discharging their duties, which might in turn improve their well-being.

In Enugu State, more and more women appear to be entering the labour market. This is more obvious in the civil service. Day by day, mothers with children of adolescents or younger, have to find ways of meeting up with official responsibilities, which often drain their mental and physical energies, and afterwards figure out how to meet up with family and other social responsibilities in the family. This continual hassle between work and family responsibilities sometimes creates a void/gap as effort is concentrated in one aspect at the expense of the other. What is often left of many of these women several years later are feeling of frustration, depression, inadequacy and general dissatisfaction with life – all of which hampers their well-being. As bad as it appear, many of these work/family stressors are inevitable for working class mothers, therefore they have to learn coping strategies that will help them adopt and maintain a balanced work-family routine. This is where stress management comes in.

In Nigeria, few studies have been conducted on stress management practices and well-being of working class mothers. More specifically, there fewer documented evidence on stress management practices among working class mothers in Enugu State. Hence, the study focuses on improving well-being through effective stress management for working class mothers in Enugu State.

Objective of the Study

The study is broadly targeted at improving well-being through effective stress management for working class mothers in Enugu State. The study seeks to pursue the following objectives:

1. Identify the sources of stress among working class mothers;
2. Determine the effect of stress on working class mothers' well-being;
3. Ascertain the extent stress management practices improve working class mothers well-being in Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study.

1. What are the sources of stress among working class mothers in Enugu State?
2. What is the effect of stress on working class mothers' well-being in Enugu State?
3. To what extent does stress management practices improve working class mothers' well-being in Enugu State?

Statement of Hypothesis

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

- H₀: Stress management practices do not improve working class mothers' well-being in Enugu State.
- H₁: Stress management practices do not improve working class mothers' well-being in Enugu State.

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Propounded by Bandura in 1986, social cognitive theory proposes that behaviour change is affected by environmental influences (models), personal factors (self-belief), and attributes of the behaviour itself (outcome). He further affirmed that social cognitive approach works by helping people to stay healthy through self-management of health habits. Lifestyle habits are brought about by stress which exerts a major impact on the quality of human health. By exercising control over several health habit people can live longer healthier and slow the process of biological aging. More so, if people lack awareness of how their stressful lifestyle habits affect their health, they have little reason to be put through the misery of changing the bad habits they enjoy, for instance, some lecturers may work continuously without a break because he/she has passion for the sick and these may be detrimental to their health. A central tenet of social cognitive theory is effective behaviour control and the concept of personal efficacy. Personal efficacy refers to belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce levels of attainment (Bandura, 1986).

Grizzell (2017) opined that a person must believe in his or her capability to perform the behaviour (i.e., the person must possess personal efficacy) and must perceive an incentive to do so (i.e., the person's positive expectations from performing the behaviour must outweigh the negative expectations). Additionally, a person must value the outcomes or consequences that he or she believes will occur as a result of performing a specific behaviour or action. By application, stress management can be made effective, among lecturers by providing clear instructions, providing the opportunity for skill development or training in stress and modelling the desired behaviour by the head of department. Therefore, if lecturers recognize stress as a problem and have a mindset that negative habits can be managed by replacing them with positive stress habit, ability to manage stress this way will make them perform better at work and live longer and healthier. Hence, for stress management among Lecturers social cognitive theory will be the theory of anchor.

Methodology

This paper adopted descriptive survey design. The population consists of all the working class mothers in Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) Enugu, numbering 1,350 (670 academic staff and 680 non-academic staff). 135 staff which represent 10% was sampled for the study i.e. 67 academic staff and 68 non-academic staff. A ten-item structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire use 4-Likert scale response option of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with four nominal values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The questionnaire was validated by three experts. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach Alpha and it gave an index of 0.82. Mean rating was used for analyzing the responses to the research questions while t-test was used for testing the hypotheses.

Decision Rule: Items with mean responses that are up to 2.50 and above are accepted, while those below 2.50 cut off point are rejected. T-test result with p-value of 0.05 and above is regarded as statistically insignificant or with t-calculated value that not less than -1.96 or not greater than +1.96 is regarded as not significant.

Result and Discussion

Research Question 1

What are the sources of stress among working class mothers in Enugu State?

Table 1: Responses on the sources of stress among working class mothers

S/N	Sources Of Stress	Academic Staff N = 67			Non-academic Staff N = 68		
		\bar{x}	SD	Decision	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1.	High management expectation	3.98	0.90	Accepted	3.31	0.81	Accepted
2.	Conflicts/competition with colleagues	3.10	0.82	Accepted	2.97	0.76	Accepted



3.	Lack of or limited annual leave and holidays	3.36	0.85	Accepted	3.76	0.76	Accepted
4.	Managing house chores	3.22	0.59	Accepted	3.77	0.93	Accepted
5.	Children school runs	3.74	0.63	Accepted	3.01	0.65	Accepted
6.	Excessive work load	3.02	0.88	Accepted	2.96	1.05	Accepted
7.	Poor working condition	2.99	0.72	Accepted	2.56	0.66	Accepted
8.	Others	2.78	0.82	Accepted	2.85	0.98	Accepted
Grand		3.27	0.78	Accepted	3.15	0.83	Accepted

Key: \bar{x} = mean; A= Accepted; SD= Standard Deviation; N = sample size

Table 1 showed that all the items for both academic and non-academic staff have mean scores above the 2.50 cut off point. This implies that they are all accepted to be sources of stress for working class mothers in Enugu State. The result indicated that all the items on stress management practices which include high management expectation; conflicts/competition with colleagues; lack of or limited annual leave and holidays; managing house chores; children school runs; excessive work load; and poor working condition were sources of stress among working class mothers in Enugu state. This finding is in line with a good number of other studies. Oluwu (2016) stated that sources of stress could be as a result of uncondusive work environment such as problem of space, inadequate work tools, lack of motivation at work and no vacation as seen among academic staff, work hours being lengthy and other managerial factors such as job insecurity. Michael (2015) pointed out causes of work stress (stressors) as follows: harassment by anyone not necessarily one's manager, feeling powerless and uninvolved in determining one's own responsibilities, continuous unreasonable performance demand, lack of effective communication and conflict resolution, lack of job security and long working hours. In line with the findings of this study, findings by Ofoegbu and

Nwadiani (2016) revealed significant factors influencing stress among lecturers in Nigeria to include strike and school interruption, delay and irregular payment of salary, lack of instructional facilities, preparation of examination results, invigilation of examination, campus militancy, and high cost of living. The findings indicate that working class mothers in Enugu state are faced with a great number of sources of stress which invariably will undermine their productivity.

Research Question 2

What is the effect of stress on working class mothers' well-being in Enugu State?

Table 2: Responses on the effect of stress on working class mothers' well-being

S/N	Options	Academic Staff N = 67		Non-academic Staff N = 68			
		\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
9	Burnout which manifest in the form aggressiveness	2.92	0.91	Accepted	2.77	0.88	Accepted
10	Perpetual low appetite in conjugal and other romantic activities	3.01	0.79	Accepted	3.00	0.96	Accepted
11	Sleeplessness	3.00	0.99	Accepted	2.92	1.01	Accepted
12	Weight loss	2.89	1.02	Accepted	2.79	0.89	Accepted
13	Conduct disorder towards their children	3.10	0.69	Accepted	2.98	0.85	Accepted
14	Ceaseless apprehension and worries	2.87	0.87	Accepted	2.96	1.01	Accepted
15	Ailment that could lead to hospitalization	2.95	0.75	Accepted	2.96	0.86	Accepted
16	Death in extreme cases	3.02	1.00	Accepted	2.95	1.01	Accepted
Grand		2.97	0.88		2.92	0.93	

Table 2 showed that all the items, have mean scores above the 2.50 cut off point. This means that stress has the following effect on working class mothers in Enugu State: burnout which manifest in the form aggressiveness; perpetual low appetite in conjugal

and other romantic activities; sleeplessness; weight loss; conduct disorder towards children; ceaseless apprehension and worries; ailment that could lead to hospitalization; and death in extreme cases.

In other studies, Gayawan & Adebayo (2015) identified the worry/fear of not being able to care for their children owing to perpetual work burnout as one of the factors contributing to women unemployment in Nigeria. Ibekwe, Aniwada & Okpoko (2018) submitted that a strenuous career

for women sometimes affect their chances of child bearing. The study of Greaves, Parker, Zacher & Jimmieson (2022) showed that core self-evaluations were related negatively to emotional exhaustion originating from work. The author further stated others to include excessive time away from home and family, conflicts among staff, a feeling that one's reward is not commensurate with one's responsibility, working hour's responsibility and pressures, lack of balance diet, exercise, sleep/rest and play. Whenever there is presence of stress caused by the above mentioned stressors, there are specific stress-related signs and symptoms that the individuals manifest. Mensah (2021) found that job stress had a direct negative effect on mental well-being among workers in Europe, with women having higher effect size than men.

Research Question 3

To what extent do stress management practices improve working class mothers' well-being in Enugu State?

Table 2: Responses on the extent stress management practices improve working class mothers' well-being

S/N	Options	Academic Staff N = 67			Non-academic Staff N = 68		
		\bar{x}	SD	Response	\bar{x}	SD	Response
9	Regularly making time for adequate sleep and rest help calm the nerves	3.22	0.59	Accepted	3.77	0.93	Accepted
10	Engaging in recreational reading and leisure remove their minds from work or family related worries	2.93	0.89	Accepted	2.82	0.78	Accepted
11	Attending social events helps heighten excitement	3.28	1.09	Accepted	3.54	1.11	Accepted
12	Isolating oneself from others	2.43	0.99	Rejected	2.25	0.76	Rejected
13	Regular participation in exercises stretches the muscles and aids smooth blood circulation	2.94	0.93	Accepted	2.99	0.79	Accepted
14	Engaging the services of househelp limits the pressures from family responsibilities	3.02	0.88	Accepted	3.01	1.05	Accepted
15	Fostering harmonious relationship with colleagues reduces friction and enhances enjoyable work environment	2.87	0.72	Accepted	2.94	0.66	Accepted
16	Seeking support from reliable social groups creates a sense of belonging and relieves mental burden	3.01	0.89	Accepted	2.89	1.02	Accepted
Grand		3.19	0.83	Agree	3.13	0.86	Agree

Table 2 showed that all the items, except for item 12, have mean scores above the 2.50 cut off point. It was revealed that among others, regularly making time for adequate

sleep and rest; engaging in recreational reading and leisures; attending social events; regular exercise participation; engaging the services of househelp; fostering harmonious relationship with colleagues; and seeking support from reliable social groups are some of the stress management strategies for improving well-being among working class mothers in Enugu State. Also the finding is in agreement with the finding of American Psychological Association (2017), which recommended the following as the healthy ways of managing stress: taking adequate sleep, eating healthful diet, being optimistic, social support, time management, relaxation, humor/laughter, generosity, playfulness, spirituality, engagement in music, and engagement in positive and realistic self- talk. The finding of the present study is also in line with some other stress management practices as enumerated by Okafor and Okafor (2017) which include maintaining positive outlook, proper and adequate nutrition, taking adequate sleep. The implication of this finding is in line with the assertion of Ejimonye (2020) that when stress is controlled and managed properly and effectively, one will have a healthy living, more so one will be able to add more years to one’s life and more life to one’s years. The finding on going to night clubs or Concert and isolating oneself from others is also consistent with that of Coon (2019) and Scott (2016) who noted them as negative stress management practices.

4.2 Test of Hypotheses

H₀: Stress management practices do not improve working class mothers’ well-being in Enugu State.

H₁: Stress management practices improve working class mothers’ well-being in Enugu State.

Table 4.4: T-test result for hypothesis II

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	Sign. level	T-cal	T-crit
Academic staff	67	3.89	0.83	133	0.0331	2.1031	1.96
Non-academic staff	68	3.77	0.86				

Interpretation and Decision

The analysis in Table 4.4 shows that the probability associated with the calculated value of t-cal is 2.1031, which is higher than ± 1.96 range and the two-tailed p-value is 0.0331, which is considered to be statistically significant. This means that the null hypothesis is rejected meaning that stress management practices improve working class mothers' well-being in Enugu State.

This result from the hypotheses further affirms the results from the third research question, which is supported by prior studies as well (see the studies of Okafor and Okafor, 2017; Ejimonye, 2020; Mensah, 2021; Greaves, Parker, Zacher & Jimmieson, 2022)

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Summary of Findings

1. The sources of stress for working class mothers include, among others: High management expectation; conflicts/competition with colleagues; lack of or limited annual leave and holidays; managing home chores; children school runs; excessive work load; poor working condition
2. Stress affects the well-being of working class mothers in the following ways: burnout which manifests in the form of aggressiveness; perpetual low appetite in conjugal and other romantic activities; sleeplessness; weight loss; conduct disorder towards children; ceaseless apprehension and worries; ailments that could lead to hospitalization; and death in extreme cases
3. Stress management practices that working class mothers can adopt include: regularly making time for adequate sleep and rest; engaging in recreational reading and leisure; attending social events; regular exercise participation; engaging the services of househelp; fostering harmonious relationships with colleagues; and seeking support from reliable social groups

Conclusion

The study has identified workload as a major source of stress among working class mothers and has established that these women use difference management practices such as exercises, isolation, holidays, therapy, proper nutrition among others depending on their socio-economic status to deal with stress. On the basis of the findings, it is concluded that these stress management practiced by working class mothers in tertiary institutions in Enugu State have positive effects on their daily living and general well-being.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, discussions and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. organizational management should endeavour not to over labour the working class mothers of their institution with so many responsibilities.
2. Work periods for working class mothers should be properly spaced so as to give enough room for rest in between lecture periods.
3. Working class mothers should endeavour to patronize the counselling services provided by their organizations to enable them overcome the pressures of work.
4. Stress management programme with emphasis on stress prevention should be organised on a regular basis for staff
5. Business organisation authority should establish an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to provide professional services and assistance to working class mothers suffering stress-related problems.
6. Working class mothers, on their own, should consult with members of their family particularly their spouses to reach a working system at home that will minimize the workload for these sets of working mothers.



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