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Academic Stress, Academic Anxiety and Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja.

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Abstract

This study investigated Academic Stress, Academic Anxiety and Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja. The Cross-sectional survey design was employed where 211 newly admitted students consisting of 91 (43.1%) males and 120 (56.9%) females were used. Their ages ranged from 20-54years with the mean age of 36.88 years (SD=4.202). Convenient sampling was used to draw samples for the study. Three instruments were used for data collection; The Academic Stress Inventory, Academic Anxiety Source Instrument and the Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale. Three hypotheses were tested using Multiple Linear Regression and Standard Multiple Regression. Findings indicated that academic stress significantly predicted psychological health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja. The result further indicated that all the dimensions of Academic Stress; Teacher Stress, Result Stress, Test Stress, Group Studying Stress, Peer Stress, Time Management and Self-Inflicted Stress made significant contributions in the prediction of Psychological Health. Secondly, the result also indicated that Academic Anxiety significantly predicted Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja. The result further indicated that all the dimensions of Academic Anxiety; Study Task Source, Emotional Source, Social Source, Language Source and Family Source significantly predicted Psychological health. The result also showed that Academic Stress and Academic Anxiety jointly predicted Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja. It was recommended that Clinical and School Psychologists should develop intervention programmes to reduce the stress and anxiety that students face in the course of studying, since the two factors were noted to affect students' psychological health. In addition, the Students' Affairs Division of universities should schedule periodic psychological health check–up for newly admitted undergraduate students. This will keep them in the right mental state to pursue their academic goals.

Keywords: Academic stress, Academic anxiety, Psychological health, Mental health, Peer pressure

Introduction

The competitive nature of higher education in our contemporary society has exacerbated the psychological health of undergraduate students. This is most common among newly admitted undergraduate students who are faced with the challenge of adjusting and coping with the new academic environment. Eventually, some fresh students come down with psychological health issues such as anxiety, depression, suicide ideation amongst others.

Studies have shown that stressors related to meeting organizational and socio-cultural expectations, maintaining study hours, and fulfilling tuition costs are causes of concern for depression, anxiety, and stress in university student populations (Fawzy & Hamed, 2017; Beiter, Nash & McCrady, 2015).

The entire time students spend in the university is emotionally and intellectually more demanding than almost any other stage of learning. At this stage, students face a great deal of pressures and challenges that pose many social, physical and emotional hitches (Rodgers & Tennison, 2009). As a result of changing social and emotional picture of university students, they become more vulnerable for developing psychological health problems (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein & Hefner, 2007). Psychological health problems among university students have both short term and long term consequences including decreasing work capacity and poor academic performance (Breslau, Lane, Sampson & Kessler, 2008).

Unfortunately, despite the relatively high prevalence of elevated stress and mental health difficulties among students, research has consistently revealed that most students who have psychological health problems do not seek help. Specifically, studies have found that only 8% to 38% of students who experience a clinically significant psychological health problem seek treatment (Downs, Wisdom, Wansink & Loewenstein, 2013; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Many factors are implicated in the prediction of Psychological Health.

One major factor implicated in predicting Psychological Health is Academic Stress. Bernstein, Penner, Stewart and Roy (2008) viewed stress as a negative emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological process that occurs as a person tries to adjust to or deal with stressors. The effect of stress is often understood in many ways of life with diverse populations. Richlin-Klonsky and Hoe (2003) reported that stress lessens academic performance, hinders a student's capability to involve in and add to campus life, and raise the probability of substance abuse and other potentially destructive behaviours. On a similar note, Erkutlu and Chafra (2006) opined that the pressure to perform well in examination and the time allocated makes the academic environment very stressful. One of the major impacts of stress is that, it affects drastically the psychological functions of people".

Another likely predictor of psychological health is academic anxiety. Anxiety is a common condition noticed in people of all age groups. It may be caused by a physical condition, mental condition and effects of drugs or due to a combination of these. Anxiety is thus seen as a painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill. There are many external factors that may contribute to anxiety. Some of the psychological symptoms of anxiety among students include feeling nervous before a study

class, panicking, going blank during a test, feeling helpless while doing assignments, or lack of interest of subjects difficult whereas the physiological symptoms include sweaty palms, racing heartbeat, or an upset stomach. Yet, the role of these factors on psychological health has not received substantial research attention. Takebayashi, Tanaka, Sugiura and Sugiura (2018) revealed that anxiety is a prime predictor of mental health. However, this finding was not established among newly admitted students. Similarly, Njue and Anand (2018) revealed that anxiety from non-academic source affects wellbeing. This noted gap has led the present study to attempt filling the existing vacuum. Therefore, this study investigated Academic Stress and Academic Anxiety as predictors of Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja.

Academic Stress and Psychological Health

McCloud and Bann (2019) examined the association between financial stress and mental health among higher education students. They conducted a rapid review of the peer reviewed scientific literature. Eligible studies were English-language publications testing the association between any indicator of financial stress and mental health among higher education students in the UK. Papers were located through a systematic search of PsychINFO, PubMed and Embase up to November 2018. The search strategy yielded 1,272 studies - 9 met the inclusion criteria. A further two were identified through hand-searching. The median sample size was 408. Only three of seven studies found an association between higher debt and worse mental health. There was a consistent cross-sectional relationship between worse mental health and both experience of financial difficulties and debt worry/financial concern, though longitudinal evidence was mixed and limited to six studies. Among higher education students in the UK, there is little evidence that the amount of debt is associated with mental health. However, more subjective measures of increased financial stress were more consistently associated with worse mental health outcomes. Nevertheless, the identified evidence was judged to be weak; further research was thus required to examine whether links between financial stress and mental health outcomes are robust and causal in nature.

Strizhitskaya, Petrash, Savenysheva, Murtazina and Golovey (2019) assessed the association between stress and psychological well-being. The Scale of Perceived Stress, Psychological Well-being Scale, 16 PF Personality Test - Factor C using a sample of 323

adults aged 20-60. First, using regression analysis we confirmed that emotional stability was associated with both perceived stress and psychological well-being. Second, they assessed associations between perceived stress, psychological well-being and emotional stability using structural analysis. Results suggest that perceived stress decreases one's emotional stability that in turn affects psychological well-being. Retest using random subsamples confirmed structural analysis. Their results showed that perceived stress can be associated not only with immediate emotional reactions but with relatively stable personality characteristics such as emotional stability. Their results suggested that the associations between perceived stress and psychological well-being can be moderated by emotional stability. Thus, high levels of emotional stability can prevent or delay the effect of stress on psychological well-being. This study was however not conducted among undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja.

Sydney-Agbor, Ebeh and Onyeanu (2018) assessed the predictors of students' mental wellbeing among 348 undergraduates selected through random cluster sampling from the Faculties of Social Sciences of three higher institutions in Eastern Nigeria. Participants' ages ranged from 16 to 33 years, with the mean age of 23.15 and a standard deviation of 3.46. Variables considered include academic stress, substance abuse, age and institution type. The Descriptive Cross-Sectional Design was employed while Standard Multiple Regression and 2-Way ANOVA were adopted for data collection and analyses respectively. Results revealed that academic stress, substance abuse and age had significant inverse relationship with mental wellbeing. Mental wellbeing and academic stress did not differ across gender, while type of institution influenced academic stress. The researchers recommended stronger awareness of the implications of drug use and the re-structuring of academic programmes that can minimize stress. Also, the need for a free functional counseling unit to enable students obtain professional advice that will help promote mental wellbeing was advocated. This study was however not limited to newly admitted students.

Hubbard, Reohr, Tolcher and Downs (2018) examined the relationships between different stressors, mental health, and help-seeking behavior among college students. An online survey distributed locally and nationally asked college students aged 18 to 24 (n=564) about their stressors, mental health symptoms, and past and current help-seeking behavior. Factor analysis suggested that college students experienced stress in four domains: intrapersonal, interpersonal, performance, and financial. Regression analyses revealed that intrapersonal and interpersonal stress predicted anxiety and depression in both women and men, whereas performance stress predicted anxiety and depression in women but not men. Financial stress was not related to mental health symptoms in either gender. Regarding help

seeking, 37.5% of women and 16% of men had received help for a mental health problem, although none of the men and only 5.8% of the women were currently receiving counseling or therapy. Help-seekers reported significantly higher levels of performance, interpersonal, and intrapersonal stress, as well as more eating problems, anxiety, and depression. These results suggest the need for colleges to consider new ways of identifying at-risk students and encouraging those students to seek help. This finding despite its significance was obtained from a sample of college students and not university students.

Academic Anxiety and Psychological Health

Takebayashi, Tanaka, Sugiura and Sugiura (2018) investigated the buffering effects of psychological well-being on the relationships between cognitive vulnerabilities (fear of anxiety and negative beliefs about worry) and GAD symptoms among 297 Japanese undergraduates (female=62%, age=18.91±1.61) in a two-wave prospective cohort study. Participants completed the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Questionnaire for DSM-IV, Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale, Anxiety Control subscale of Affective Control Scale, Negative Belief about Worry subscale of Meta-Cognitions Questionnaire, and Nishida's Psychological Well-being scale. A moderated regression analysis tested the buffering effect of psychological well-being sub-dimensions on the relationship between cognitive vulnerabilities and generalized anxiety symptoms. Fear of anxiety and negative beliefs about worry at baseline predicted generalized anxiety at follow-up, after controlling for baseline symptoms, and three interaction terms significantly predicted generalized anxiety symptoms. Purpose in life and autonomy buffered the negative relationship between cognitive vulnerabilities and generalized anxiety symptoms. Contrary to the hypothesized relationship, positive relationships with others at baseline facilitated a positive relationship between fear of anxiety and generalized anxiety symptoms. Those results suggested that enhanced Purpose in life and Autonomy dimension of Psychological well-being may be useful in preventing GAD, while the enhanced positive relationship with others dimension of Psychological well-being may facilitate generalized anxiety, as a function of fear of anxiety. It was recommended that, in a primary prevention setting, it may be useful to consider the dimensions of psychological well-being. These dimensions are considered in the present study.

Njue and Anand (2018) examined the relationship between academic anxiety and general wellbeing and compared the results of boys with girls. To do this, Academic Anxiety Scale for Children (AASC) and PGI General Wellbeing Measure (PGIGWM) were administered to a sample of 204 high school students. Before that, it had been hypothesized that the correlation between academic anxiety and general wellbeing would be negative in both boys and girls and that there would be no significant difference between academic anxiety in boys as compared to girls and finally there would be no significant difference between general wellbeing of boys with that of girls. After the administration of the scales, the data was analyzed by computing Pearson Correlation, Mean and t-values. The results showed that, the correlation between academic anxiety and general wellbeing was negative in both boys and girls proving the first two hypotheses true. In addition, the results also showed that, there was no significant difference between academic anxiety in boys as compared to girls and there was no significant difference between general wellbeing of boys with that of girls also proving the third and fourth hypotheses and the null hypothesis true. Some suggestions were recommended for future research.

Deb, Strodl and Sun (2015) investigated the academic stress and mental health of Indian high school students and the associations between various psychosocial factors and academic stress. A total of 190 students from grades 11 and 12 (mean age: 16.72years) from three government-aided and three private schools in Kolkata India were surveyed in the study. Data collection involved using a specially designed structured questionnaire as well as the General Health Questionnaire. It was found that nearly two-thirds (63.5%) of the students reported stress due to academic pressure – with no significant differences across gender, age, grade, and several other personal factors. About two-thirds (66%) of the students reported feeling pressure from their parents for better academic performance. The degree of parental pressure experienced differed significantly across the educational levels of the parents,

mother's occupation, number of private tutors, and academic performance. In particular, children of fathers possessing a lower education level (non-graduates) were found to be more likely to perceive pressure for better academic performance. About one-thirds (32.6%) of the students were symptomatic of psychiatric illness and 81.6% reported examination-related anxiety. Academic stress was positively correlated with parental pressure and psychiatric problems, while examination-related anxiety also was positively related to psychiatric problems. They concluded that academic stress is a serious issue which affects nearly two thirds of senior high school students in Kolkata. Lastly, the potential methods for combating the challenges of academic pressure were suggested. Although, this study was carried out among high school students in India and not undergraduate students in Nigeria.

The following hypotheses were postulated to guide the study:

i. Academic Stress will significantly predict Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja.

ii. Academic Anxiety will significantly predict Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja.

iii. Academic Stress and Academic Anxiety will jointly predict Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja.

Design

This study employed the use of Cross-sectional Survey design to investigate Academic Stress, Academic Anxiety and Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja. A cross-sectional survey collects data to make inferences about a population of interest (universe) at one point in time. In this study,

the independent variables are academic anxiety and academic stress while the dependent variable is psychological health.

Participants

The participants for this study were 211 newly admitted students of Baze University Abuja. They consisted of 91 (43.1%) males and 120 (56.9%) females students. Their ages ranged from 20-54years with the mean age of 36.88 years (SD=4.202). In terms of their religion, 177 (83.9%) were Christians while the remaining 34 (16.1%) were Muslims. As for their ethnic group, 153 (72.5%) were Tiv, 42 (19.9%) were Idoma while the remaining 16 (7.6%) were from other ethnic groups. Considering their marital status, 130 (61.6%) were Single, 77 (36.5%) were Married, 1 (0.5%) was divorced while the remaining 3 (1.4%) were Separated. Still amongst them, 170 (80.6%) got admission via post UTME while the remaining, 41 (19.4%) were admitted via Direct Entry.

Instruments

The instruments for data collection included the socio-demographic variables, Academic Stress Inventory, Academic Anxiety Sources Instrument and the Ryff Psychological Wellbeing Scale.

i. The demographic variables that were assessed in the study included Sex, Age, Religion, Ethnic Group, Marital Status, Mode of Entry and Level of Study.

ii. Academic Stress was measured using the Academic Stress Inventory developed by Lin and Chen (2009). The 34-item scale is measured on a 5-point Likert format of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale is composed of 7 dimensions; Teacher Stress (items 1-9, α=.90), Result Stress (items 10-14, α=.89), Test Stress (items 15-18, α=.92), Group Studying Stress (items 19-23, α=.87), Peer Stress (items 24-27, α=.85), Time Stress Management (items 28-30, α=.87) and Self-inflicted Stress (items 31-34, α=.86), meanwhile the overall scale has an coefficient value of .90. Meanwhile, the present study obtained alpha coefficients as follows; Teacher Stress (α=.71), Result Stress (α=.75), Test Stress (α=.87), Group Studying Stress (α=.70), Peer Stress (α=.71), Time Management (α=.83) and Self-inflicted Stress (α=.90), meanwhile the overall scale has a coefficient value of .91. Sample of items include; “I worry that I have to redo the compulsory

courses in which I fail", "I often face problems as to how to share work with my classmates when some exercises or reports require group work".

iii. Academic Anxiety was measured using the Academic Anxiety Source Instrument developed by Shahrouri (2016). The 43-item scale is measured on a 5-point Likert format of 1 (never) to 5 (most often). The scale has 5 dimensions; Study Task Source (items 1-8), Emotional Sources (items 9-16), Social Sources (items 17-26), Language Sources (items 27-36) and Family Sources (items 37-43). The author reported an alpha coefficient of .88. Meanwhile, the present study obtained an alpha as follows; Study Task Source (α=.68), Emotional Sources (α=.76), Social Sources (α=.61), Language Sources (α=.70) and Family Sources (α=.68) and the overall alpha coefficient is .79. Sample of items include; "I feel anxious during exam due to the lack of preparation", "I feel depressed after taking an exam".

iv. Psychological Health was measured using the Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale developed by Ryff (1989). The 42-item scale is measured on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale has six dimensions; Autonomy: items 1, 7, 13, 19, 25, 31, 37; Environmental Mastery: items 2, 8, 14, 20, 26, 32, 38; Personal Growth: items 3, 9, 15, 21, 27, 33, 39; Positive Relations: items: 4, 10, 16, 22, 28, 34, 40; Purpose in Life: items: 5, 11, 17, 23, 29, 35, 41 and Self-Acceptance: items 6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42. Amongst the 42 items, items 3, 5, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 39, 41 are reversed scored. The overall score on the scale is obtained by summing the individual items. The present study obtained alpha coefficients as follows; Autonomy (α=.81), Environmental Mastery (α=.78), Personal Growth (α=.64), Positive Relations (α=.67), Purpose in Life (α=.72) and Self-Acceptance (α=.88). Meanwhile, the overall alpha coefficient is .86. Sample of items include; "the demands of everyday life often get me down", "I have a sense of direction and purpose in life".

Procedure

This study was conducted among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja. The researchers prepared a total of 230 copies of the questionnaire. Approval was sought and obtained from the school management. Their consents were sought and obtained before administration. They were instructed on how to complete the scale. It

took the respondents about 10 minutes each to complete the filling. After administration, a total of 211 copies representing a return rate of 91.7%. These copies were then considered for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, the researchers employed the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. In this study, the descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, frequencies and simple percentages were used to describe the respondents. Meanwhile, Multiple Linear Regression and Multiple Regression were used to test the hypotheses generated in this study.

Results

The hypotheses raised in this study were tested using Multiple Linear Regression for Hypotheses One and Two and Multiple Regression for Hypothesis Three. The result is as shown in the following tables:

Table 1: Multiple Linear Regression showing Academic Stress as a predictor of Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja

Outcome		R	R^2	F	β	t	Sig
Psychological Health							
	Constant	.953	.908	142.698		8.099	.000
	Teacher stress				.383	5.322	.028
	Result Stress				.325	4.110	.025
	Test Result				.334	4.798	.012
	Group Studying stress				.312	4.311	.032
	Peer Stress				.375	4.170	.017
	Time Management				.337	4.797	.026
	Self-inflicted stress				.372	4.371	.012

The result presented in table1 above shows that academic stress significantly predicted psychological health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University R^2=.908, F(7,203)=142.698, p<.001. The result further indicated that all the dimensions of Academic Stress; Teacher Stress (β=.383, t=5.322, p<.05), Result Stress (β=.325, 4.110, p<.05), Test Stress (β=.334, t=4.798, p<.05), Group Studying Stress (β=.312, t=4.311, p<.05), Peer Stress (β=.375, t=4.170, p<.05), Time Management (β=.337, t=4.797, p<.05) and Self-Inflicted Stress (β=.372, t=4.371, p<.05) made significant contributions in the prediction of Psychological Health. This implies that Academic Stress explained 90.8% of the variance in Psychological Health.

Table 2: Multiple Linear Regression showing Academic Anxiety as a predictor of Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja.

Outcome	R	R^2	F	β	t	Sig.
Psychological Health						
Constant	.651	.424	133.258		6.442	.000
Study Task Source				.288	3.321	.041
Emotional Source				.428	6.042	.023
Social Source				.215	3.170	.027
Language Source				.412	3.918	.024
Family Source				.331	4.011	.032

The result presented in Table 2 above shows that Academic Anxiety significantly predicted Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University R^2=.424, F(5,205)=133.258, p<.001. The result further indicated that all the dimensions of Academic Anxiety; Study Task Source (β=.288, t=3.321, p<.05), Emotional Source (β=.428, 6.042, p<.05), Social Source (β=.215, t=3.170, p<.05), Language Source (β=.412, t=3.918, p<.05) and Family Source (β=.331, t=4.011, p<.05) made significant contributions in the prediction of Psychological health. This implies that Academic Anxiety explained 42.4% of the variance in Psychological Health.

Table 3: Multiple Regression showing Academic Stress and Academic Anxiety as joint predictors of Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja

Variables	R	R^2	F	β	t	Sig.
Constant	.844	.712	78.697		8.638	.002
Academic Stress				.519	12.622	.004
Academic Anxiety				.649	14.007	.002

The result presented in Table 3 above shows that Academic Stress and Academic Anxiety jointly predicted Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University R^2=.712, F(2,208)=78.697, p<.01. This implies that Academic Stress and Academic Anxiety explained 71.2% of the variance in Psychological Health.

Discussion

Hypothesis One was tested to find out if Academic Stress will significantly predict Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja. Findings indicated that Academic Stress (Teacher Stress, Result Stress, Test Stress,

Group Studying Stress, Peer Stress, Time Management and Self-inflicted Stress) significantly predicted Psychological Health. This finding implies that as the levels of stress among undergraduate students become elevated, their psychological health is also affected. This finding tallies with Schonfeld, Brailovskaia, Bieda, Zhang and Margraf (2016) who indicated that self-efficacy as a mediator of the effects of daily stressors on mental health, with superior effect sizes for positive compared to negative mental health. Similarly, Subramani and Kadhiravan (2017) found that academic stress had a significant relationship with the mental health of students. Other studies (Liu, 2017; Sydney-Agbor, Ebeh & Onyeanu, 2018; Clemente, Hezomi, Allahverdipour, Jafarabadi & Safaian, 2016) found that an inversely significant relation exists between stress and psychological well-being. On the opposing side, a study conducted by Kiani, Latif, Bibi, Rashid and Tariq (2018) showed that no notable association exists among academic stress and mental health of university students.

Hypothesis Two was tested to find out if Academic Anxiety will significantly predict Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja. Findings indicated that Academic Anxiety (Group Task Source, Emotional Source, Social Source, Language Source and, Family Source) significantly predicted Psychological Health. This finding could be due to the fact that, the feeling of anxiety is an indication that the normal mental state of an individual is compromised, thus psychological health becomes vulnerable. This finding tallies with Deb, Strodl and Sun (2015) who in their study found that examination-related anxiety was positively related to psychiatric problems. In support, Njue and Anand (2018) showed that the correlation between academic anxiety and general wellbeing was negative. Furthermore, other researches (Jeny & Varghese, 2014; Takebayashi, Tanaka, Sugiura & Sugiura, 2018; revealed that enhanced Purpose in Life and Autonomy dimensions of Psychological well-being may be useful in preventing Generalized Anxiety Disorder.

Hypothesis Three was tested to find out if Academic Stress and Academic Anxiety will jointly predict Psychological Health among newly admitted undergraduate students of Baze University Abuja. Findings indicated that Academic Stress and Academic Anxiety jointly predicted Psychological Health. However, there are currently no supportive studies to this finding.

Recommendations of the Study

Based on the nature of this study and the finding obtained herein, the following recommendations are made:

i. Clinical and School Psychologists should develop intervention programmes to reduce the stress and anxiety that students face in the course of studying, since this two were noted to affect students' psychological health.

ii. The Students' Affairs Division of universities should schedule periodic psychological health check–up for newly admitted undergraduate students. This will keep them in the right mental state and in the long run enhance their academic performance.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the efforts of the researcher to ensure both internal and external validity, some irrevocable factors have been noted to affect this study:

i. This study employed a Cross-sectional survey design, which implies that it cannot be said that psychological health is caused by academic stress and/or academic anxiety. It can only be said of the extent to which academic stress and academic anxiety influence psychological health.

ii. Secondly, the use of self-report measures of data collection gave room for the researchers to have faked some responses in order to look good in the eyes of the society. This may render the result of this study undependable.

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