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Causes and Possible Solutions of Disciplinary Problems of Secondary School Students in Masvingo, Zimbabwe 2003-2013

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Abstract :

The study focused on the causes, trends and possible solutions of disciplinary problems of secondary school students which were recorded in Masvingo Region as from 2003 to 2013. The qualitative paradigm involved a historical research method in order to solicit data. Document analysis was the tool used to collect data. Data was collected using a schedule with headings and subheadings. The population comprised of all the two hundred and twenty-three secondary schools in the region. One hundred and twenty of one hundred and twenty-three schools were purposefully sampled. The findings indicated that the common disciplinary problems were sexual misconduct, drug abuse, absconding lessons, assaults, and theft which recorded the highest average counts through the years under review. Vandalism and murder recorded the lowest counts; however, they were a cause of concern. The predisposing factors and causes were biological factors, social factors, social backgrounds, sports, field trips and other events which are conducive to mischief. The study recommends that an annual magazine be published at regional level in order to enlighten the community on what is going on in schools. Campaigns against disciplinary problems by all stake holders through the media can be used to reduce the levels of misconduct.

Keywords: disciplinary problems, predisposing factors, discipline, teachers, pupils.

1. Introduction and Background of Study

Discipline among school children is worldwide chronic problem which is passed on from generation to generation. Discipline and behaviour problems in developed countries' public schools are serious, omnipresent and are compromising student learning (Rizzolo, 2004). Secondary school teachers in particular are going through tuff times regarding class control and the conduct of students. In this context, disciplinary problems can be defined as difficulties caused by non-conforming to set rules.

Nduku (2010) and Hewett and Taylor (1998) say that the study of behaviour disorders started as early as 1941 as social maladjusted children. Researches concerning children's behaviour are mainly concerned with the types, causes and possible solutions. However, as far as the incidence of disciplinary problems in Zimbabwean secondary schools and disruptive behaviour are concerned, information so far gathered and published is very thin. There is little data on trends of disciplinary problems in Zimbabwean secondary schools (Ametepe, Chitiyo & Abu, 2009).

The nation at large is not aware of what schools are going through in terms of disciplinary problems. The parents in most cases are shocked when they see vandalism in schools on the first page of the daily newspaper. Information of disciplinary problems is confined to the Ministry of Education. Analytical research on the predisposing factors, causes and trends of disciplinary problems enlighten the public on what is happening. In this case, recorded data on what was going on in Masvingo secondary schools from 2003 to 2013 will shed light on the dimensions and nature of problems, rather than each school dealing with its own problems. This idea was shared up by Applegate (1952) in his book; "Everybody's Business, Our Children". The whole idea behind this book is to encourage schools, parents, teachers, headmasters and the community in general to work together on behaviour modification of children.

An analysis of recorded data disciplinary problems and their predisposing factors or causes of disruptive behaviour is clearly of utmost importance. The trends in which they happen may help to find solutions to some of the problems. Ametepe, Chitiyo and Abu (2009) state that many school teachers, males as well as females are concerned about matters of classroom discipline. Teachers seem to be especially concerned about children with disorderly conduct. Even experienced teachers are often at a loss on how best to proceed with deviant behaviour. Therefore, this study is intended to join the short circuit between and among teachers, headmasters and parents. This research emphasise on acquainting secondary school teachers with causes, and possible solutions of juvenile delinquency.

The variety of behaviour problems which teachers encounter in schools requires them to make some discrimination judgements and interpretations (Bowen, 2004). According to Mohanty (2007), class discipline and control is difficult when dealing with problem children. Teachers should be able to distinguish forms of behaviour which are temporary consequences of environmental factors from within and outside the school (Pokwana, 2012:1). Without recorded data or literature of recent events within the region or at national level, teachers, maybe bound to make wrong judgements. Thus, recorded or published cases and trends of disciplinary problems will go a long way in assisting teachers in making good judgements in cases which are similar in nature.

Masekoameng (2010) states that no man is an island, all of us are affected to some degree by what others do or about how they react. This view is in both ways, it affects both pupils and teachers. Pupils may strike because a neighbouring school has gone on strike. Headmasters and teachers may react in a manner similar to that of their neighbours. Masvingo region publishes results for each school according to the past rate. The aim of the exercise is to encourage school to work hard since the report reflect the overall performance of each school and the reports are distributed to all schools. This idea can be used to keep every school updated of the disciplinary problems faced in the region hence encouraging other schools to curb or minimise own misconduct since disruptive behaviour disturb the school and classroom climate and reduce effective teaching (Ametepe, Chitiyo & Abu, 2009).

Disruptions in schools caused by teenager groups are common in Masvingo secondary schools. Common group disruptions such as vandalisim, strikes and drug abuse occur more frequently than individual disruptions. Adolescents tend to favour group fighting against administration. Rizzilo (2004) assert that disruptive behaviour is one of the most common adolescents' types of misbehaviour. When schooling is boring, they tend to disrupt the smooth running of the school. This kind of problem is common among boarding schools. Poor diet in this case is the major predisposing factor for strikes and other disciplinary problems.

2. Causes of Disciplinary Problems

In attempts to explain why large numbers of boys and girls develop problem behaviours and why undoubtedly some of them are emotionally disturbed. There is need to examine their family, social, school as well as their nutrition, health, care and physical conditions. The development of behaviour disorders can be due to biological factors such as genetics, misfortune, brain damage, malnutrition and diseases (Worthington-Roberts & Williams, 2000).

Lawrence and Worsely (2007) suggest that certain kinds of behaviour are inherited in animals rather than learned experiences. Worthington-Roberts and Williams (2000) agree with Lawrence and Worsely (2007) by asserting that there is an issue that those behaviours are genetically transmitted. The similarity between all offspring of all species must have been obvious to early humans. Thus, a careful study of the causes of disciplinary problems or behaviour can also be looked at from the theory of evolution of behaviour. Individual differences in this regard are said to be the mainstay of evolution. Complex behaviour which is different from that of their ancestors may be observed on their offspring. Therefore, the behaviour of small species should be studied to see to what extent they are inherited, because all behaviour is inherited (Insel and Roth, 2000).

Scholars like Berzonsky (1981) place more emphasis on child rearing practices as the major causes of disciplinary problems among teens or high school students in Zimbabwe, drug abuse is one of the common fruits of child rearing practices. Most parents in Zimbabwe drink alcohol together with their children. Berns (2007) supports this view by asserting that abused children tend to be socially deviant. Worthington-Roberts and Williams (2000) argue that genetics and nature or nurture interaction determine human behaviour. Gilbert (2008) states that children are, after all, just influenced by the society of which they are part as other people. Haralambos and Holborn (2008) support the view by propounding attitudes of family members as well as the larger groups through which all these people operate. Thus, disciplinary problems among adolescents appear to be influenced by both genetic and environmental factors

According to Idu and Olugbade (2011) adolescence and young adults commit the bulk of crimes and by far are the most arrested groups in a society. In Zimbabwe, this is worsened by economic hardships which force the youth to depend on criminal acts for survival (Campel, 2011; Chapman, 2011; Ritzer, 2008). Juvenile' status offences include running away home and being ungovernable. In Masvingo urban street kids are commonly found. Other forms of misconduct are absconding from lessons or playing truant, violating curfew, having sexual relations and being beyond the control of teachers and parents. Masekoameng (2010) concurs with Rizzilo (2004) with regard to truancy, and states that truant behaviour for adolescents usually dislikes school and poorly performs in their studies. In this case, truancy consists of skipping school or absconding lessons so as to spend time in more enjoyable ways.

Benzonsky (1981) indicates that individuals, especially males, designated as underachievers tend to be hostile towards authority. In other words, the youth lacking academic purpose of direction 'work paralysis' typifies the plight of the under achievers. This view is supported by Haralambos and Holborn (2008) who argue that the attitude of family members, peers, teachers and friends as well as the society at large associate defect on the learning ability and perceive the child as disciplinary problem. Students who have a prior record of failing are labelled as problem students. These students fail to learn from the past experiences hence they make a lot of mistakes. They are also persistent and are the least interested in school work. With regard to personality underachievers are relatively defensive and impulsive and less responsible, dependable and lack self control and self discipline. Benzonsky (1981) asserts that a very large part of aggressive behaviour seems to arise from frustrations and fear of failure.

Scholars like Marion (1987) and Nduku (2010) are concerned with simple things which are overlooked but cause serious disciplinary problems like television programmes and films or the mass media in general. Sexual misconduct and vandalism are typical fruits of these. Children imitate and experiment what they see and hear.

3. Possible Solutions of Problems in Discipline

The fight against disciplinary problems among children especially adolescents is an ongoing struggle. According to Merton and Nisbet (1971), there are control strategies and behaviour theories. Biological theories are concerned with biological defects such as brain damage. These can be treated by surgical or biological interventions. This theory suggests that no amount of punishment can control misbehaviour caused by biological defects. However, some authorities have criticised it for very little evidence of significant changes after the biological solutions. On the other hand, psychiatric theories are concerned with conflicts, emphasising on making unconscious conscious. This therapy is well favoured because of its effectiveness in behaviour modification. This theory argues that some stored frustration in the subconscious can cause misbehaviour. The therapy focuses on dealing with the causes and effects of stress

Merton and Nisbet (1971) further suggest that opportunity structure theories have a great impact on the adolescent. When individuals fail to satisfy their wants in legitimate ways they resort to illegitimate ones. Zimbabweans were going through economic hardships throughout these years that school children were tempted to resort to illegal ways of satisfying their needs. Food shortages were also a factor which was a major cause of corruption. The boarding schools were finding it difficult to provide decent meals for the pupils. Parents, on the other hand were struggling to feed their families. It in this predicament that strikes and vandalism were common among boarding schools

The theory of identity deals with solutions whereby individuals try to show what kind of a person they are. Pupils misbehave in order to gain some identity. Rewards and feedback of good behaviour assist in behaviour modification. The use of positive reinforcement is discouraged. Teachers and parents are supposed to guide the teens in their state of confusion versus identity. Agabrian (2007:28) state that almost all the families care about their children, wish for them to have success and they try to obtain as much information as they can from the school and the community, therefore they are good partners in their children's education. This implies that parents can be involved in the discipline of their children.

Bowen (2004) argues which ever technique is involved in trying to curb unwanted behaviour among teens that there should be interested in boasting and concerned with the offer of positive sides in a mild manner. Teachers should also consider the after effects of disciplinary action or administered punishment. Brezina (2000) asserts that excessive indiscipline is harmful because something to stop a child from types leads to some form of indiscipline. Teachers and parents should know that no child is perfect so efforts in trying to make the child perfect may lead to the child being timid and withdrawn or rebel. In this regard, discipline which is firm, kind, reasonable and consistent benefits children. Insufficient discipline is always harmful. It normally results in spoilt child who is disobedient, rude and greedy. Haralambos and Holborn (2008) state that children learn to know their places as well as how powerful people can be. Thus, teachers should lead by example and be aware that pupils' behaviour may be part of discovering their environments.

Haralambos and Holborn (2008) and Bowen (2004) place more emphasis on the society which is closely connected to the school. The school might not explain anything about the society but they appear to demonstrate the way society works. In Zimbabwean schools, they are School Development Association Committee (SDAC) for each school which is responsible for assisting the smooth running of the school. The support given by such committees helps in curbing disciplinary problems.

Teachers and parents should be aware of the fact that adolescence is the bridge from childhood, from immaturity to maturity, from dependence to independence, from needing control and direction to needing support and advice. Thus, teachers and parents should create an environment which is conducive to learning and that gives fewer chances of misbehaviour. Hancock (2001) suggests that educators, both parents and teachers must consciously plan for children's experiences. Modern parents should know more about child growth and development so as to assist teachers. Larzelere (2001) suggests that parents and teachers should provide love, care, warmth and discipline to children. Parents should be involved and participate in school affairs so as to meaningfully contribute to their maximum. However, if possible prevention is better than cure. It is better to help children to avoid than to seek ways of redressing.

The findings are intended to benefit students, teachers, headmasters, parents and the community in general as they will be aware of nature of problems the pupils have and how they can help them. Information on problem cases will equip both teachers and headmasters on how to handle difficult cases. Teachers should be equipped with symptoms and implications of various types of deviant behaviour. When teachers are well acquainted with the diagnostic skills, this will help them to take appropriate disciplinary action.

4. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative approach which involved the use of the historical method since the data recorded the disciplinary problems of student between the years 2008-2011. Sidhu (2003) defines historical research as a systematic collection and objective evaluation of data related to past experiences or occurrences in order to find out causes, effects, or trends of those events which may help to explain, present events and anticipate future events. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) also define historical methods as the use of history to understand the past and try to understand the present in the light of past events and developments.

The use of a historical method in this study was intended to gain insight into the types causes and the context in which disciplinary problems among secondary schools occur. Document analysis was the tool used to collect data. Teachers, parents, headmasters should be informed about the nature of disciplinary problems which are most prevalent. Thus, the disciplinary problems are past events that are studied in order to find the way forward in dealing with problem behaviour. In this case, past events can give a clue of future events.

In historical research, the researcher gets data from written reports or documents from those who witnessed or participated in the events. The documents must be carefully analysed to sift truth from falsehood and the irrelevant or misleading. The researcher

assumed that all the records were original because the documents were in the original handwriting of pupils and headmasters' reports were typed with the school stamp and the signatures appended.

Data collection was from primary sources which were written by actual participants. In this case, the written reports were prepared by pupils involved and headmasters concerned. These reports in most cases were handwritten and were also original documents with signatures of all people concerned. According to Gray (2009), sources of historical data are classified as primary and secondary sources. Primary sources constitute first hand information such as original documents and reports. Secondary sources constitute second hand information, reference books or reports by parents. Data from these sources must be carefully analysed and reviewed in order to produce information which is not misleading.

The population comprised of two hundred and twenty-three (223) schools in the region. One hundred and twenty schools were purposefully sampled and these apparently had a reasonable number of cases that called for attention. The number of files in each of the sampled school files ranged from five to twenty cases of disciplinary problems encountered. A total number of nine hundred and ninety-eight students were involved. Sixty percent were males while forty percent were females. The instruments used to collect data were a data schedule. The schedule had the following headings to elicit information: disciplinary cases, number of pupils or cases per term and the headmaster and the regional director's recommendations. The number pupils involved were recorded according to the nature of misconduct.

5. Findings and Discussion

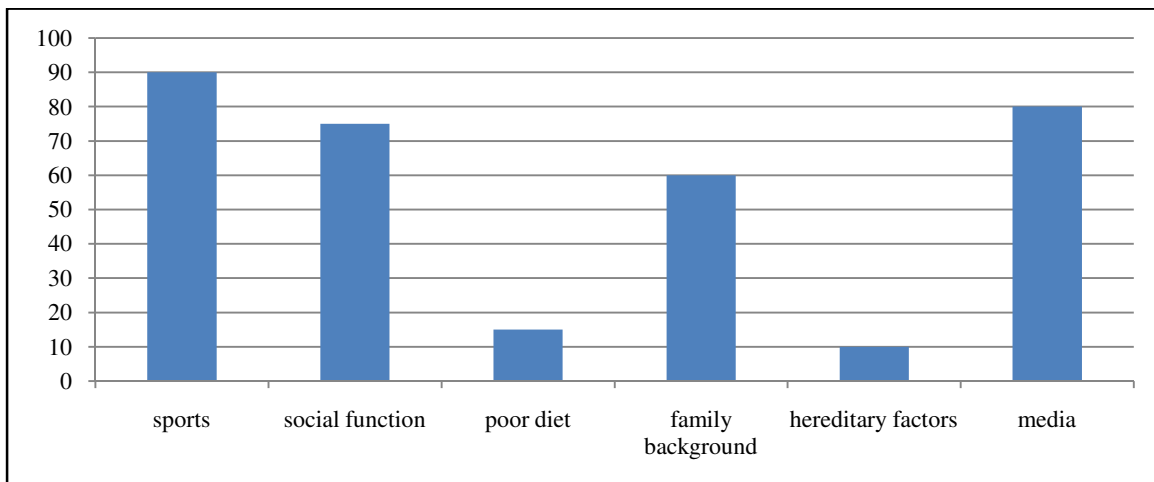
5.1. Findings

Data obtained from the files and reports were presented in tables and graphs. To unveil and analyse the data, descriptive and narrative forms were also used.

Year	Sexual misconduct	Drug abuse	Theft	Assaults	Absconding lessons	Vandalism	Murder
2013	59	46	18	38	0	0	0
2012	55	56	33	50	68	10	0
2011	42	43	54	50	0	0	1
2010	60	36	43	47	0	17	2
2009	38	61	29	62	55	55	2
2008	60	37	62	43	86	45	0
2007	61	46	53	60	66	0	0
2006	64	55	41	52	0	13	2
2005	16	48	35	52	0	38	0
2004	87	80	50	58	0	0	1
2003	55	67	41	52	94	27	3
Totals	579	475	459	564	314	205	11
Average	54	52	42	51	29	19	1

*Table 1: The types and trends of disciplinary problems recorded from 2001-2011
N=120*

The table indicates that sexual misconduct followed by drug abuse and assaults had the highest counts, with an average of 54, 52 and 51 respectively. Murder cases were the least while absconding lessons had an average of 29 and vandalism 19.



*Figure 1: Causes and predisposing factors of disciplinary problems
N=120*

The graph indicates that sports and media had the highest percentages 90 and 80 respectively while social functions and family background scored high percentages of 75 and 60. Poor diet and hereditary factors scored the least percentages of 15 and 10 respectively.

5.2. Discussion

The types and trends of the disciplinary problems among high school students reflect that teachers and heads were going through difficult times with regards to disciplinary problems. Macionis and Plummer (2008) assert that adolescents and young adults break the law more than any other group of the society or population. These violations include delinquency (truancy), underage drinking (drug abuse), minor vandalism and other misdemeanours typical of youth and crime (robbery, rape and murder) and other crimes committed against property of people.

The two cases which seemed to be quite chronic and appeared in every term of the year were drug abuse and sexual misconduct. The kind of trend reflected an average of fifty-four and fifty-two counts every year for sexual misconduct and drug abuse respectively. This indicates that if nothing is done now, it will be worse in the next ten years. These cases seemed to be difficult to control; however, strict conditions will help to lower the percentages. Ritzer (2008) argues that certain personal, social and family factors are associated with how frequently adolescents use drugs and with the likelihood of their beginning to use them in the first place. Drug abuse and sexual misconduct are usually fruits of the social background and of media. Parents who drink together or who expose their sexual conduct to children transmit bad habits to them. Most parents who were part of the problem were failing to help in controlling the bad habits.

Assaults recorded an average of fifty-one (51) counts while theft averaged forty-one counts. The findings reflected that quarrels and assaults among the teens are their daily bread. Macionis and Plummer (2008) assert that when facing a crisis, for example in this case academic stress, the borderline youth may explode with anger, become argumentative and blame others. The trend is constantly going up and relatively high. Theft cases were more prevalent at boarding schools than at day high schools. Absconding lessons had an average of twenty-nine (29) counts. The low average maybe due to the fact that the other two years learning was almost at stand still due to various reasons including economic hardships. The time they managed to go to school most pupils took it as an opportunity to study hard. Hence absconding lessons was a taboo.

Strikes which ended up with vandalism were quite common at boarding schools. The predisposing factors were poor diets due to economic hardships. Most boarding schools were failing to feed the pupils due to the harsh economic times and this was the cause of many strikes. The provision of proper meals was almost impossible in many cases since there were food shortages in Zimbabwe. Murder cases were very rare although they were heart breaking. Most of the murder cases were among day schools. The predisposing factor was drug abuse. Most cases happened under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

5.3. Causes and Predisposing Factors of Disciplinary Problems

The findings indicated that disciplinary problems among adolescents appeared to be influenced by both genetic and environmental factors. Nature versus nurture plays a pivotal role in shaping behaviour or character. The causes and predisposing factors of some cases were commonly shared. The issue of economic hardships was the main predisposing factor. Zimbabweans were going through economic hardships during the years under review.

Sports and media had the highest percentages as predisposing factors of sexual misconduct and drug abuse. Factors such as sports trips, social functions, distance between homes and school and social background had a great influence on sexual misconduct and drug abuse. Televisions and the use of sexual language in dramas and music stimulate attitude towards sex before the adolescents begin to imitate the behaviour (Goodman, 2010). Youths under the influence of alcohol commit a lot of crimes especially when males and females mix in a relaxed atmosphere (Lervin, 2012). Burgers (1992) points out that the pupils misbehave when there are possibilities of performing such activities. They tend to abuse given freedom and males constitute the larger percentage of disciplinary problems. This may mean that they study less and then fail. Manwa (2013) in her study on school social climate observed that pupils with behaviour problems have poor relationships with teachers. Poor relationships may hinder good academic performance. Merton and Nisbet (1971) in Ritzer (2008) assert that crime and delinquency rates for males are greatly in excess of rates for females except for peculiar cases such as pregnancy. Records reflected that males commit more crimes than females except for pregnancy. According to Macionis and Plummer (2008), girls are likely to wonder why someone would steal or be involved in truancy as compared to boys. Social background which includes social and economic status of the family was the major predisposing factor for theft and absconding lessons. Day scholars constituted a larger percentage as far as absconding lessons were concerned. Lack of enough resources and food were the major cause of truancy. While aggressive behaviour had a predisposing factor of family background, children who stay with parents who fight or quarrel at all times pass that behaviour to children (Adekola, 2012; Choi & Burger, 2010; Weiner, 2011;123). Haralambos and Holborn (2008) suggest that bad child-rearing practices are the dominating factors in causing aggressive behaviour in adolescents. Children learn through imitating their significant others which in this case are teachers and parents.

5.4. Possible Solutions of Disciplinary Problems

The two major disciplinary actions taken were exclusion and expulsion. These were used as a means of controlling disciplinary problems. Excluded pupils were given transfer letters and were allowed to be enrolled in other schools. The hassles involved in changing school were the punishment of the mischief. Expelled students were not given another chance to be enrolled in formal schools. More students were excluded than those expelled. The records of such actions if published will enlighten other schools on

what is going on. Pupils involved will know that their misconduct will be punished. Parents, the head concerned and the regional director were involved in taking action.

Ritzer (2008) suggests that solutions for disciplinary problems should be based on both hereditary and environmental factors. Nature versus nurture has a lot to do with the possible solutions of human misconduct. Parents, teachers, heads and the community should work together in controlling disciplinary problems affecting Zimbabwean schools through seminars and literature on disciplinary problems. Solutions should be published biannually or annually in order to sensitise the community on what heads and teachers go through. Pupils will also be aware of the costs involved when one has misconduct. Information on good moral standards should also be available to scholars. Rehabilitation centres managed by psychologists will also help in behaviour modification.

Learning deficits lead to poverty and poverty leads to stealing in trying to meet the basic needs. Trying to create opportunities legally and a brother and sister helping each other in school work can help in a special way. Parents and the community should assist the young ones by redirecting them to law abiding patterns. Counselling sessions should be part of the school curriculum so as to assist the children.

6. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The general trend in which the disciplinary problems occurred has proved to be a cause for concern. Number of nine hundred and ninety-eight pupils was involved. This indicated that an average of ninety pupils per year are either expelled or are excluded from school. The rate is quite alarming considering the future of all those pupils. The findings indicated that teachers are going through difficult times as far as misconduct such as sexual misconduct, drug abuse; theft, assaults, vandalism and murder were concerned.

Written reports showed that most of the cases reported occurred during the third term followed by the second term and then first term. Disciplinary problems such as vandalism due to strikes were exclusive to the third term. The most predisposing factors for drug abuse, sexual misconduct, theft and vandalism were sports, social functions, food shortages and economic factors. Assaults and absconding lessons had a lot to do with the social background and media. Most disciplinary problems were on the increase except for murder. Hereditary factors were also found to be influencing factors of mischief. There were disciplinary problems which were mostly day schools like absconding lessons while strikes were peculiar to boarding schools.

Controlling or removing other predisposing factors can be one of the major ways of controlling disciplinary problems. The teacher – pupil ratio can be increased when embarking on sports trips and when having social functions. All teachers should be involved in behaviour control. Members of the community should be discouraged to drink alcohol with the youngsters. The bond between teachers and parents should be more strengthened by improved communications.

The study recommends that the records on disciplinary problems be published biannually or annually in order to inform all stake holders on the plight of the teachers and heads. Staff development courses or workshops on behaviour modification for teachers and parents can help. Expelled pupils should be taken to rehabilitation centres which are managed by psychologists and where schools contribute their ideas. Pupils who reform should be given the chance to go back to school.

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