

A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF PHYSICAL LIVING CONDITION OF STREET CHILDREN AT LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

The paramount objective of the research is to shed light the physical living condition of street children. The study is conducted in the city of Lahore which first time highlighted the cruel incident of serial killing of street children in the history of Pakistan. The field based, exploratory type of study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods of research and strengthened from data collected. Observation and a structured interview schedule were used as tools for data collection from the field. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques and scientific hypotheses were used for the purpose of interpretation of the results. The results of the research shows the miserable condition of street children through high lighting their major problems of harassment, accommodation problem, physical torture, humiliating behavior, sexual abuse, health problems and substance use. Present research also indicate that majority of the street children were living at hired room while some of them were living at public places and bound to do work for long working hours. The research reveals the dire need of initiating such programs with the cooperation and coordination of public and private organizations which directly address the root causes of the street children phenomenon.

Key Words: Street children, physical living condition, none fulfillment, public places, harassment

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INTRODUCTION

Every human being has its own peculiar rights. Children rights are considered human rights and denying to child rights is the violation of human rights. These rights look us in the constitution of Pakistan, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and United Nations Convention on the Right of the Children (UNCRC).

The United Nations Convention on the Right of the Children (UNCRC) provides ample rights to the children. The UNCRC covers a whole spectrum of rights for children including civil, economic, social and cultural. Pakistan is also a signatory of UNCRC.

Childhood is the most significant, pompous as well as delightful phase of human life but not for those who are caught up by the cruel clutches of decree, not permitting them to heave up their mind and heart with many inner most wishes and inclinations. But those who strive for really endeavor to mean it, particularly true for street children preferring to shun their home to find out the horizon of their wishes and dreams.

Street Children are the unwanted gifts of economic growth, war, poverty, lost of traditional values, domestic violence, physical and mental abuse. Every street child has a reason for street life, while some children are deceived by the promise of excitement and liberty; the majority is pushed onto the street by the desperation and realization that they have nowhere else to go. If the problem of street children is explored at the inner level, it would not be futile to say that poverty and parental negligence lies in the background of the street children and their needs and problems are a result of wanting to fulfill basic needs for survival. The enigma of street children demands and requires an understanding that who they are, what they need, what they do and how they can be identified and can be solved by our sincere practical efforts.

It is estimated that there are 10 to 100 million street children in the world today¹. These children live a transitory life style and are vulnerable to inadequate nutrition, physical injuries, substance use and health problems including sexual and reproductive health problems. Some street children are “on the street” which mean they still see their families regularly and may even return every night to sleep in their family homes. “Children of the street” on the other hand, have no home but the street. In present research, children of the street are focused.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Being the signatory of UNCRC, the state is accountable about the survival, development; protection and participation of children whether they are on the street are not. In Pakistan, it is even indigestible to mention over here that no serious effort is being done to collect the statistics related to street Children or even to have know how of the life, they are leading in the streets right now.

Pakistan is also confronting the problem of street children like many other countries. No statistics are available related to street children in Pakistan. It is just estimated that 10,000 street children are present only in the city of Lahore ².

In Pakistan, street children are deprived of their basic needs and rights. They have limited access to social services. Being separated from their families, they are deprived of parental care, guidance and love which are significant factors in the healthy development of a child. They are at the mercy of criminals, police, drugs addicts and smugglers. Unhealthy living environment, lack of proper food, shelter and basic health services make them vulnerable to different types of diseases including sexually Transmitted diseases (STDS) and HIV/AIDS, exploitation and abuse. They are heavily into substance abuse, glue being the cheapest and the most accessible of all the substances. They are socially rejected and look down upon by the society due to which they develop negative attitude towards society which has lifelong effect and some time force them to indulge in anti social activities ³. Though over the last many years, the matters of street children are coming in to limelight but much more is needed to do especially with regard to Pakistan where CRC is not more than a sacred document to which nobody can touch.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are following.

1. To know about the personal profile of street children.
2. To shed light the physical living condition of street children

LITERATURE REVIEW

Childhood is considered the best stage in the cycle of human life. Nobody can forget the memories of his/ her childhood from the page of his/ her mind. Childhood is the most enjoyable

and delightful period of human life but not for those who are caught up by the cruel clutches of the decree, not permitting them to heave up their mind and heart with many inner most wishes and inclination. But those who strive for really endeavor to mean it, particularly true for street children, preferring to shun their home to find out the horizon of their wishes and dreams.

As Waghid proves that the Street children phenomenon is an alarming and escalating worldwide problem representing one of the more pressing issues in field of child welfare. “No other global child welfare problem is as significant as the loss of human potential experienced by millions of children who are being reared outside of the institution of family and education in the often perilous street environment ⁴”.

DEFINITION

The United Nations (1985) has its own definition of Street Children. According to UN, “Street Child is any girl or boy for whom the street in the widest sense of the word (including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland etc) has become his or her habitual abode and/or source of livelihood and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults ⁵”.

Lewis defines a street child as someone younger than eighteen, who has decided to leave home to care for himself / herself on the street unassisted by an adult ⁶.

Chetty states that street children are those who have abandoned or have been abandoned by their families, schools and immediate communities before they are eighteen years of age and drifted into nomadic street life ⁷.

He also refers to the difficulties in defining street children because the term is applicable to a large number of children; all of home spends the significant part of their day in the street without necessarily sharing any other common characteristics ⁸.

In the light of above mentioned definitions, there are three common elements are drawn which are listed below

- These children live or spend a significant amount of their time on the street.
- The street has become their source of livelihood.

- Overall, they are inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults..

CATEGORIES OF STREET CHILDREN

The first category in UNICEF (1986) definition is poor working children of street families, living at home but earning money on the street for their Families. They are referred to as, “Children at risk”. Second category in the definition is, “Children on the Street”. These children spend a lot of their time on the street but have some family support and live at home on regular basis. The last category is, “Children of the Street”. They live and work on the street. They have no or very little family contact or support⁹.

Patel (1990) in her study of street children in Bombay had same but some different categorization of children in the street ¹⁰.

Hecht found out that although street children are sometimes presented as a unified category, there are in fact different types of street children with different backgrounds, who are characterized by different activities ¹¹.

WHY CHILDREN ON THE STREET

Every street child has the justification for being on the street. He/ she strive to satisfy his/her inner by giving some justifications. In spite of these justifications, some children are captured and get attracted on score of excitement and freedom from outer world. While they leave their home, they are not cognizant of harsh and bitter realities of the callous attitude of the life. The majority of children enter into this sphere due to the desperation and pessimism. They have no rights for this sightless world and are compelled to stay there forever. Desmond says that the street children phenomenon represents a complex issue resulting from a wide variety of integrating factors ¹².

Stolberg mentioned that the reason for children taking to the street or forced out of their home are multiple. This simply means that no single factor is responsible for homelessness of children ¹³. In addition, Stolberg adds that broader global and societal factors filter down to affect communities, families and ultimately children. The immediate familial and community upheavals combine with inner motivation, culminating in the alienation of children from family and community supports so much so that running away is viewed as the best or only

alternative ¹⁴.

Agraval mentioned that in-depth study of the literature reveals a host of contributory factors, the most commonly cited being political factors, poverty, urbanization, un-employment, family disintegration and disruption, violence and conflicts, abuse in the sense of physical, sexual and emotional ¹⁵. Lalor says that the picture is more complex than to be comprised in a simple reason ¹⁶.

METHODOLOGY

Methodological techniques are very important for analyzing sociological problems empirically. Sound methodology is vitally important to establish chain for knowledge and empirical verification of hypothesis. The population for the study consisted of street children who were spending their life away from their home at least for one month ago and they have no or very little contact with their families. Present study is conducted at Lahore city. Different areas i.e., Data Darbar, Railway station, Minar-e-Pakistan, Laxmi Chock, Regal Chowk and Badami Bagh were the focal locals of the study. 370 street children were selected as a sample size through purposive sampling. According to Lawrence Neuman, "Purposive sampling is an acceptable kind of sampling for special situation. It uses the judgment of an expert in selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind". Data was collected with the help of a well structured interview schedule. Collected information's were analyzed through SPSS software. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Background Of The Respondents

Age (in years)	Frequency	Percentage
9-11	76	20.5
12-14	111	30.0
15-17	183	49.5
Total	370	100.0
	Mean age = 14.90	Std. Dev. = 3.18
Number of siblings	Frequency	Percentage
1-4	91	24.6
5-8	208	56.2

9 and above	71	19.2
Total	370	100.0
	Mean = 6.24	Std. Dev. = 3.78
Geographical Background	Frequency	Percentage
Urban	123	33.2
Rural	247	66.8
Total	370	100.0
Earners family members	Frequency	Percentage
One	166	44.9
Two	145	39.2
Three	59	15.9
Total	370	100.0
Dependent family members	Frequency	Percentage
1-4	88	23.8
5-8	165	44.6
9 and above	117	31.6
Total	370	100.0

Above table indicates that about one-fifth i.e., 20.5 percent of the respondents had 9-11 years of age, while 30.0 percent of the respondents had 12-14 years of age and about a half i.e., 49.5 percent of the respondents had 15-17 years of age. Mean age of children was about 15 years.

Table also presents the number of siblings of the respondent. As the siblings play an important role in the life of children so the numbers of the siblings of the respondents were asked. About one-fourth i.e., 24.6 percent of the respondents had the siblings 1-4 in number. A majority i.e., 56.2 percent of the children had the siblings 5-8 in numbers and little less than one-fifth i.e., 19.2 percent of them had the siblings 9 and above in number. Average number of siblings (as calculated by mean) was almost 6.

Table also indicates that about one-third i.e., 33.2 percent of the respondent's family belonged to urban areas, while a majority i.e., 66.8 percent of the respondent's family belonged to rural areas. In our rural areas has less entertainment, educational and economic opportunities as compare to urban areas, so due to more attraction majority of the children run towards cities.

Table further depicts that a major proportion i.e., 44.9 percent of the respondents had one earning member, while 39.2 percent of the respondents had two earner family members and remaining 15.9 percent of the respondents had three earner family members. It indicates low economic status of the respondents' family.

Table also reveals that 23.8 percent of the respondents reported that in their family 1-4 dependent members, while a major proportion i.e., 44.6 percent of the respondents said that 5-8 family members were dependent and 31.6 percent of them told that 9 and above family members were dependent.

Table # 2: Distribution Of The Respondents According To Their Education Level

Education level	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	60	16.2
Below primary	98	26.5
Primary	87	23.5
Below Middle	54	14.6
Middle	42	11.4
Below Matriculation	21	5.7
Matriculation	8	2.2
Total	370	100.0

Above table shows that 16.2 percent of the respondents were illiterate, while more than one-fourth i.e., 26.5 percent of the respondents were below primary and less than one-fourth i.e., 23.5 percent of them were primary passed. About 14.6 percent of the respondents were below middle and 11.4 percent of them were middle passed. Only 5.7 percent of the respondents were below matriculation and 2.2 percent of the respondents were matriculated.

Table-2: Distribution Of The Respondents According To Alive Status Of Their Parents

Alive	Frequency	Percentage
Father	103	27.8
Mother	84	22.7
Both	172	46.5
None of them	11	3.0
Total	370	100.0
If both alive then their living status	Frequency	Percentage
Together	125	72.7
Separated	17	9.9
Divorced	30	17.4
Total	172*	100.0

Parents' relationship with each other if they live together	Frequency	Percentage
Loving	34	27.2
Dominated by father	11	8.8
Dominated by mother	71	56.8
Physical torture	20	16.0
Abusive torture	14	11.2
Total	125	100.0

Above table indicates that the 27.8 percent of the respondents reported that their fathers were alive, 22.7 percent of them told that their mothers were alive and a major proportion i.e., 46.5 percent of the respondents said that their parents (father & mother) both were alive, whereas only 3.0 percent of the respondents told their parents (father & mother) both were died. Table reveals that a large majority i.e., 72.7 percent of the respondent's parents (father and mother) was living together, only 9.9 percent were living separated and 17.4 percent of the respondents stated that their parents were divorced. Table also presents the parents' relationship with each other who live together. Table indicates that 27.2 percent were living together with loving, while 8.8 percent of the respondents told that their parents were living together while their father's were dominated and 56.8 percent of them said that their mother were dominated. About 34 respondents' parents had conflicting relation with each other i.e., physical torture (16.0%), abusive torture (11.2%) etc.

Table # 3 Causative Factors Which Push & Pull The Respondents On The Street

Causes	To great extent		To some extent		Not at all		Total	
	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age
None fulfillment of basic needs	170	45.9	101	27.3	99	26.8	370	100.0
Lack of interest in education	40	10.8	33	8.9	297	80.3	370	100.0
Physical torture by father	50	13.5	29	7.8	291	78.6	370	100.0
Bad society	75	20.3	58	15.7	237	64.1	370	100.0

Parent's conflict at home	84	22.7	66	17.8	220	59.5	370	100.0
Desire to live in cities	91	24.6	63	17.0	216	58.4	370	100.0
Indifferent attitude of sibling	52	14.1	38	10.3	280	75.7	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 45.9 percent told that 'none fulfillment of basic needs' was great extent cause of their street life, while the second highest number of the respondents who were 27.3 percent mentioned it to some extent cause and the least number of the respondent who were 26.8 percent said that the 'none fulfillment of basic needs' was not the cause of their street life. Only 10.8 percent of the respondents reported that 'lack of interest in education' was the great extent cause of their street life while 8.9 percent told that the 'lack of interest in education' was the some extent cause of their street life whereas 80.3 percent of them said that 'lack of interest in education' was not the cause of their street life.

Only 13.5 percent of the respondents reported that 'Physical torture by father' was the great extent cause of their street life, while 7.8 percent of them told that the 'Physical torture by father' was the some extent cause of their street life whereas 78.6 percent of them said that 'Physical torture by father' was not the cause of their street life.

About one-fifth i.e. 20.3 percent of the respondents reported that 'bad society' was the great extent cause of their street life while 15.7 percent of them told that the 'bad society' was the some extent cause of their street life whereas 64.1 percent of them said that 'bad society' was not the cause of their street life.

Less than one-fourth i.e. 22.7 percent of the respondents reported that 'parents conflict at home' was the great extent cause of their street life while 17.8 percent of them told that the 'parents conflict at home' was the some extent cause of their street life whereas 59.5 percent of them said that 'parents conflict at home' was not the cause of their street life.

About one-fourth i.e. 24.6 percent of the respondents reported that 'Desire to live in cities' was the great extent cause of their street life while 17.0 percent of them told that the 'Desire to live in cities' was the some extent cause of their street life whereas 58.4 percent of them said that 'Desire to live in cities' was not the cause of their street life.

Only 14.1 percent of the respondents reported that 'indifferent attitude of sibling' was the great extent cause of their street life while 10.3 percent of them told that the 'indifferent attitude of

siblings' was the some extent cause of their street life whereas 75.7 percent of them said that "indifferent attitude of siblings' was not the cause of their street life.

Table # 4: Distribution Of The Respondents According To Their Residential Pattern.

Residential pattern		Frequency	Percentage
Room hired		250	67.6
Public places	Shrine	70	18.9
	Parks	30	8.1
	Graveyard	11	3.0
	Bus stop waiting room	9	2.4
Total		370	100.0
Status of hired room		Frequency	Percentage
Single		30	8.1
Shared		220	59.5
NA (not hired)		120	32.4
Total		370	100.0
No. of Members shared hired room		Frequency	Percentage
1-2		50	13.5
3-4		99	26.8
Above 4		71	19.2
NA (not shared or hired)		150	40.5
Total		370	100.0

Above table presents the residential pattern of the street children. A large majority of the respondents i.e., 67.6 percent were living in hired room and other were living at public places i.e., 18.9 percent at Shrine, 8.1 percent at parks, 3.0 percent at graveyard and 2.4 percent at Bus stop waiting rooms. Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 59.5 percent were shared their rooms with others and the least number of the respondents who were only 8.1 percent were not sharing their hired rooms with others. Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 26.8 percent were living 3-4 members in a room and the second highest number of the respondents who were less than one-fifth i.e.19.2 percent reported that above four members were living in a room. While the least number of the respondents who were 13.5 percent reported that 1-2 members were living in their shared room.

TABLE # 05 Facilities Availability In Hired Rooms Of The Respondents

Facilities	Yes		No		Total	
	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age
Electricity	250	100.0	000	000	250	100.0
Water supply	239	95.6	11	4.4	250	100.0
Bathrooms	210	84.0	40	16	250	100.0
Kitchen	7	2.8	243	97.2	250	100.0
Gas	73	29.2	177	70.08	250	100.0

Above table reflect that all respondent had electricity facility in their hired room while the highest number of the respondents who were 95.6 percent had water supply facility and the least number of the respondents who were 4.4 percent had not the water supply facility. On the other hand, the highest number of the respondents who were 84.0 percent had bathroom facility and the least number of the respondents who were 16 percent had not the bathroom facility. While the highest number of the respondents who were 97.2 had not kitchen facility in their hired room and the least number of the respondents who were only 2.8 percent had kitchen facility in their hired room. Whereas the highest number of the respondents who were 70.08 percent had not gas facility in their hired room and the least number of the respondents who were 29.2 percent had gas facility in their hired room.

Table # 06: Distribution Of The Respondents According To Their Food Getting Way.

Food getting way	Frequency	Percentage
Lunger Khana of Shrines *	250	67.6
Purchase readymade	20	5.4
Self cooked	16	4.3
Provided by owner	84	22.7
Total	370	100.0

* Free food point at Shrines

Above table presents the food getting way by the respondents. A large majority i.e., 67.6 percent of the respondents reported that they getting food from Lunger Khana of Shrines, 5.4 percent of the respondents were purchased readymade food, 4.3 percent were self cooked and 22.7 percent of the respondents told that the food provided them by the owner.

Table # 07: Distribution Of The Respondents According To The Type Of Substance They Used.

Type of substance	Yes		No		Total	
	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age
Opium	5	1.4	354	98.6	359	100.0
Hashish (Chars)	27	7.5	332	92.5	359	100.0
Heroin	10	2.8	349	97.2	359	100.0
Alcohol	22	6.1	337	93.9	359	100.0
Glue sniffing	141	39.3	218	60.7	359	100.0
Cigarette	215	59.9	144	40.1	359	100.0
Pan	56	15.6	303	84.4	359	100.0
Gutka	77	21.4	282	78.6	359	100.0
Niswar	82	22.8	277	77.2	359*	100.0

* 11 respondents never used substance.

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 98.6 percent never use opium and the least number of the respondents who were 1.4 percent used opium. While the highest number of the respondents who were 92.5 percent never use hashish and the least number of the respondents who were 7.5 percent use hashish (Chars). On the other hand, the highest number of the respondents who were 97.2 percent never use heroin and the least number of the respondents who were 2.8 percent uses heroin. Whereas the highest number of the respondents who were 93.9 percent never use alcohol and least number of the respondents who were 6.1 percent addicted to Alcohol. The table also depicts that the highest number of the respondents who were 60.7 percent never sniffs the glue and least number of the respondents who were 39.3 percent uses glue for sniffing. A highest number of the respondents who were 59.9 use cigarettes for smoking and least number of the respondents who were 40.1 percent never smoke a cigarette. While the highest number of the respondents who were 84.4 percent never use pan and the least number of the respondents who were 15.6 percent uses Pan. On the other hand, the highest number of the respondents who were 78.6 percent never use gutka and the least number of the respondents who were 21.4 percent uses gutka. Whereas the highest number of the respondents

who were 77.2 percent never use niswar and the least number of the respondents who were 22.8 percent uses niswar.

The table shows that 1.4 percent respondents use opium, 7.5 percent used Hashish (Chars), 2.8 percent respondents used heroin and 6.1 percent respondents were addicted Alcohol. Whereas 39.3 percent of the respondents used Glue sniffing, a majority i.e. 59.9 percent of the respondents was smoker, 15.6 percent of them used Pan, 21.4 percent used Gutka and 22.8 percent of them used Niswar.

Table # 08: Distribution Of The Respondents According To The Type Of Health Problem They Faced.

Health problems	Frequency	Percentage
Stomach problem	107	28.9
Fever	86	23.2
Pain in body	60	16.2
Weakness	37	10.0
Any other (hepatitis, skin infection, teeth problem, allergy etc.)	10	2.7
No health problem	70	18.9
Total	370	100.0

Above table presents the health problems of the respondents. Most of the respondents had stomach problem (28.9%) and 23.2 percent of them were suffering from fever and 16.2 percent had pain in body. About one-tenth i.e., 10.0 percent of the respondents felt weakness and 2.7 percent of them were suffering any other problems i.e., hepatitis, skin infection, teeth problem, allergy etc. Whereas 18.9 percent of them had no health problem.

Table # 09: Distribution Of The Respondents According To The Problems Of Street Life.

Problems	Yes		No		Total	
	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age	Freq.	%age
Harassment	160	43.2	210	56.8	370	100.0
Accommodation problem	106	28.6	264	71.4	370	100.0
Physical torture	100	27.0	270	73.0	370	100.0
Humiliating	84	22.7	286	77.3	370	100.0

behavior						
Sexual abuse	69	18.6	301	81.4	370	100.0
Transportation	28	7.6	342	92.4	370	100.0
Uncomfortable weather	17	4.6	353	95.4	370	100.0

Above table indicate that the highest number of the respondents who were 56.8 percent not facing the problem of harassment while the least number of the respondents who were 43.2 facing this problem. While the highest number of the respondents who were 71.4 percent not facing the accommodation problem during their street life and the least number of the respondents who were 28.6 percent facing this problem. Whereas the highest number of the respondents who were 73.0 percent not facing the problem of physically tortured during their street life and the least number of the respondents who were 27.0 percent facing this problem during their street life. Whereas the highest number of the respondents who were 77.3 percent not facing the problem of humiliating behavior and the least number of the respondents who were 22.7 percent facing this problem. The highest number of the respondents who were 81.4 percent not facing the problem of sexual abuse during their street life and the least number of the respondents who were 18.6 percent facing this problem. While the highest number of the respondents who were 92.4 percent do not face the problem of transportation during their street life and the least number of the respondents who were 7.6 percent facing this problem. The highest number of the respondents who were 95.4 percent not facing the problem of uncomfortable weather and the least number of the respondents who were 4.6 percent facing this problem during their street life.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis

Due to living on public places, street children physical tortured during their street life

Hypothesis: There is no relationship between residential pattern and facing physical torture problem during their street life.

Association residential pattern and facing physical torture problem during their street life

Residential pattern	Respondents facing physical torture problem		Total
	Yes	No	
Room hired	41	209	250
	16.4%	83.6%	100.0%
Public places (Shrine, park, graveyard, Bus stop waiting room etc.)	59	61	120
	49.2%	50.8%	100.0%
Total	100	270	370
	27.0%	73.0%	100.0%

Chi-square = 44.13 Std. Dev. = 1 Significance = .000**

** = Highly significant

Chi-square value (44.13) shows a highly significant (P = .000) association between residential pattern of the respondents and facing physical torture problem during their street life. Above table clearly indicates that only 16.4 percent of the respondents who had hired rooms and facing physical torture problem, while about a half (49.2%) respondents who were living on public places (shrine, park, graveyard, bus stop waiting room etc.) were facing physical torture problem during their street life. So the hypothesis “Due to living on public places, street children physical tortured during their street life” is accepted and null hypothesis is rejected.

CONCLUSION

The results of the research shows the miserable condition of street children through high lighting their major problems of harassment, accommodation problem, physical torture, humiliating behavior, sexual abuse, health problems and drugs addiction. Present research also indicate that majority of the street children were living at hired room while some of them were living at public places and bound to do work for long working hours. The research reveals the dire need of initiating such programs with the cooperation and coordination of public and private organizations which directly address the root causes of the street children phenomenon.

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