

Research Article

Examination of the level of alexithymia in adult individuals in terms of different demographic factors¹

Hülya Erdem^{2*} and Engin Eker³

Istanbul Aydin University, Social Science Institutes, Psychology Department Graduate Program, Turkey.

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to evaluate the alexithymia levels of adult individuals in terms of various socio-demographic characteristics. The universe of the study are adults aged 24-65 in Turkey. The sample of the research was applied to 410 people who accepted the research according to the easy sampling method. The Socio-demographic information form and the Toronto Alexithymia Scale adapted to Turkish by Güleç et al. (2009) developed by Bagby, Parker and Taylor (1994) were applied to the participants. The Toronto Alexithymia Scale consists of 3 dimensions and 20 items: difficulty in recognizing emotions, difficulty expressing emotions, and expressive thought. Güleç et al. (2009), Total scale Cronbach's alpha value was found between 0.78 and sub-dimensions between 0.57-0.80. A high level of score indicates the presence of a high alexithymic level. According to the findings of the research, between the gender variable and the difficulty of expressing emotions, the level of thoughtfulness and alexithymia in adult individuals; between the age variable and difficulty in recognizing emotions, difficulty expressing feelings and level of alexithymia; there is a significant difference between the educational situation and outcrop thought; There was no significant difference between monthly income and alexithymia level and sub-dimensions.

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Introduction

It is understood that emotions have a very important place in the understanding of human existence in the universe. However, there are also people who are not aware of their emotions due to biological or psychological reasons and cannot express them accordingly. The concept of alexithymia of Greek origin, which is defined by Sifneos as limitation in emotional functions and poverty in the individual's fantasies, includes such people (Taymur et al. 2007). Alexithymic individuals have a limited affect. They don't have enough insight into their behavior and motivations. Alexithymic individuals worry about the adequacy of their psychological functions and their bodies. It has physical symptoms such as anxiety and increased blood pressure. They emphasize the importance of nonverbal communication and operational communication. They tend to be distant with people and avoid being too close with them (Yazıcı et al. 2006). In short, alexithymia can be summarized as a lack of processing and production of emotions. Although it was originally proposed to explain the symptoms seen in psychosomatic patients, it is now accepted as an individual characteristic with a normal distribution (Güz et al. 2011). Studies suggest that there are individuals with similar characteristics in the healthy population as in different pathological groups (Zackheim, 2007; Batıgün & Büyükşahin, 2008; Ogrodniczuk et al. 2011).

Although there are various ideas about the origin of alexithymia, the origin of alexithymia is not known exactly (Joukamaa et al. 2003). The researches and examinations made push the researchers to some consensus. Many reasons can be listed in the origin of alexithymia, such as stuck in developmental stages, pathological defense mechanisms, social and cultural factors, cognitive distortions, unconscious conflicts and early traumatic experiences. For these reasons, it can be thought that individuals with alexithymic features have difficulty in verbally conveying their emotions

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² Master student, Istanbul Aydin University, Social Science Institutes, Psychology Department Graduate Program, Turkey. ORCID No: 0000-0003-3444-3468
e-mail: hlyerdem@gmail.com

³ Asist. Prof, Psychology Department, Istanbul Aydin University, Turkey. E-mail: engineker@aydin.edu.tr ORCID No: 0000-0001-9316-7026

to other people (Gucht & Heiser, 2003). Some researchers stated that negative relationships and events occurring in childhood due to psychological trauma or disruptions in early mother-infant relationship may cause alexithymia. In other words, it has been observed that recognizing emotions and being able to express them are related to the family, the environment and childhood trauma history (Montebarocci et al. 2004).

In the last two decades, the concept of alexithymia has been considered as a distinct personality structure that has been characterized as a specific disorder in the cognitive evaluation of emotions. However, the terms of primary and secondary alexithymia that were put forward later and the differences between these two concepts accelerated the investigation of etiological factors (Sifneos, 1996). At this point, the studies conducted by Krystal et al. (1986) and Freyberger (1977) also revealed the fluctuation in individuals with alexithymic characteristics and brought the idea that alexithymia can be addressed from different perspectives.

It is observed that the prevalence of alexithymic features, which can be seen frequently in healthy individuals in the normal population, is increasing rapidly today. It is observed that in modern societies of our age, the rapid increase of the population, the complexity of human relations with developing technology and the progress of people towards dissatisfaction, and the increasing use of technological tools, increases in alexithymic characteristics in humans. However, it is clearly seen that studies on alexithymia are needed, although it continues to spread in the normal population and negatively affects the public health. In our country, there is a greater need for studies on alexithymia and especially studies with individuals in the normal population (Koçak, 2002). For this reason, conducting a study including the concept of alexithymia with individuals in the normal population constitutes the most important reason for this study.

Problem of Study

Problem of study is that;

- Do the alexithymia levels of adult individuals differ significantly according to their demographic characteristics?

Sub-problems of study are;

- Do the alexithymia levels of adults differ significantly according to the gender variable?
- Do the alexithymia levels of adults differ significantly according to the age variable?
- Do the alexithymia levels of adults differ significantly according to their monthly earnings?
- Do the alexithymia levels of adults differ significantly according to their education level?

Method

Research Model

The aim of this study is; It is a quantitative study aimed at evaluating the alexithymia levels of adult individuals in terms of various socio-demographic characteristics and was carried out with a general screening model. Screening models are a research approach that aims to describe a past or current situation as it exists. The event, individual, or object subject to research is tried to be defined in its own conditions and as it is. No effort is made to change or influence them in any way. There is something to be known and it is there (Karasar, 2015). Relational screening is research that aims to determine the presence or degree of change between two or more variables (Karasar, 2015).

Sample of the Research

The study population are adults between 24-65 years of age in Turkey. The sample of the study is 410 adult individuals determined according to the easy sampling method. The distribution of the adult individuals participating in the study according to gender, age, monthly income and education status is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.
Distribution of Participants by Demographic Characteristics

Variables	Participants (410)	
	f	%
Gender		
Female	228	55.6
Male	182	44.4
Age		
24-28 ages	45	11.0
29-33 ages	101	24.6
34-38 ages	90	22.0
39-43 ages	63	15.4
44-48 ages	56	13.7
49 + ages	55	13.3
Monthly Income		
0-2019 TL	67	16.3
2020-4400 TL	213	52.0
4401-6600 TL	81	19.8
6601-8800 TL	11	2.7
8801 + TL	38	9.3
Education Level		
Literate	12	2.9
Primary school	25	6.1
Secondary school	25	6.1
High school	62	15.1
Associate degree	23	5.6
Undergraduated	178	43.4
Graduated	85	20.8
Total	410	100

Considering the distribution of the participants by gender variable; Female participants constitute 55.6% of the group and male participants constitute 44.4% of the group. Considering the distribution of the participants by age variable, 11.0% of the adults participating in the study are in the 24-28 age range, 24.6% in the 29-33 age range, 22.0% in the 34-38 age range, 15.4% in the 39-43 age range, 13.7% were in the 44-48 age range, 13.3% were 49 and over; When the distribution by monthly income level is analyzed; 16.3% of the participants are between 0-2019 TL, 52.0% between 2020-4400 TL, 19.8% between 4401-6600 TL, 2.7% between 6601-8800 TL and 9.3% between 8801 TL and above. has a monthly income; Finally, when the distribution of the participants according to their education level is examined; 2.9% of the participants are only literate, 6.1% are primary school graduates, 6.1% are secondary school graduates, 15.1% are high school graduates, 5.6% are associate degree graduates, 20.8% are undergraduate and 20.8% are graduate. seems to be.

Data Collection Tools

Personal Information Form

The personal information form is a questionnaire consisting of 4 questions (gender, age, monthly income, educational status) in which the data about the personal characteristics and life of the participant group formed by the researcher are evaluated.

Toronto Alexithymia Scale

The short form of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale was reconstructed by Bagby, Parker and Taylor (1994) with the arrangement. Validity and reliability study of the Turkish form of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) was conducted by Güleç et al. (2009). At the same time, Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) is evaluated with three subscales: difficulty in recognizing emotions, difficulty describing feelings, and expressive thinking. difficulty identifying feelings with items 1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14, difficulty expressing feelings with items 2, 4 (reverse), 11, 12, 17, and finally externally oriented thinking 5 (reverse), 8, 10 (reverse), 15, 16, 18 (reverse), 19 (reverse), and 20 items. The Cronbach alpha value of the total scale was 0.78, and the subscales were between 0.57-0.80. According to the

confirmatory factor analysis results, it has been shown that the alexithymia structure provides the presence of 3 factors. (Güleç et al. 2009). High scores indicate the presence of a high alexithymic level.

Results

Results of the Alexithymia Levels of the Participants

Findings of Participants' Alexithymia Levels by Gender

In Table 2 below, there are t test analysis results regarding the situation of significant difference between sub-dimensions of Alexithymia Scale and gender variable.

Table 2.

t-Test Results of Participants' Alexithymia Levels by Gender

Dimensions	Groups	N	\bar{x}	ss	t	p
Difficulty Describing Feelings	Female	228	14.93	5.65	1.874	0.062
	Male	182	16.00	5.86		
	Total	410				
Difficulty Identifying Feeling	Female	228	12.09	3.72	2.431	0.016*
	Male	182	12.98	3.65		
	Total	410				
Externally-Oriented Thinking	Female	228	19.46	4.43	2.935	0.004*
	Male	182	20.64	3.47		
	Total	410				
Alexithymia Total	Female	228	46.48	11.03	3.015	0.003*
	Male	182	49.62	9.73		
	Total	410				

There is no significant difference between the test score average of male participants (\bar{X} = 16.00) and the test score average of female participants (\bar{X} = 14.93) in the dimension "Difficulty Describing Feelings in Toronto Alexithymia Scale" [t = 1.874, p> 0.05]. This finding shows that there is no significant difference between adult individuals' difficulty in recognizing their emotions and their gender.

There is a significant difference between the test score average (\bar{X} = 12.98) of male participants and the average test score (\bar{X} = 12.09) of female participants in the "Difficulty Identifying Feeling in the Toronto Alexithymia Scale" dimension [t = 2.431, p<0.05]. This finding shows that there is a significant difference between the levels of difficulty in expressing emotions of adults and their gender. It is understood that the difficulty levels of male adults in expressing their emotions are higher than that of female adults.

There is a significant difference between the test score average of male participants (\bar{X} = 20.64) and the test score average of female participants (\bar{X} = 19.46) in the dimension of "Externally-Oriented Thinking of the Toronto Alexithymia Scale" [t = 2.935, p <0.05]. This finding shows that there is a significant difference between adult individuals' expressive thinking levels and their gender. It is understood that male adult individuals have more expressive thinking levels than female adults.

In the "Toronto Alexithymia Scale", there is a significant difference between the test score average of male participants (\bar{X} = 49.62) and the test score average of female participants (\bar{X} = 46.48) [t = 3.015, p <0.05]. This finding indicates that there is a significant difference between adult individuals' alexithymic levels and their gender. It is understood that male adult individuals have higher alexithymic levels than female adults.

Findings Regarding Participants' Alexithymia Levels by Age

In Table 3 below, there are results of ANOVA analysis regarding the situation of significant difference between sub-dimensions of Alexithymia Scale and age variable.

Table 3.
ANOVA Results on Participants' Alexithymia Levels by Age

Dimensions	Groups	N	\bar{x}	F	P	M.D.	
Difficulty Describing Feelings	24-28 ages _a	45	18.33	3.920	0.002*	a-b a-c a-d c-e	a-f b-e b-f
	29-33 ages _b	101	15.56				
	34 -38 ages _c	90	15.42				
	39-43 ages _d	63	14.98				
	44-48 ages _e	56	13.39				
	49 ages + _f	55	15.22				
	Total	410	15.40				
Difficulty Identifying Feeling	24-28 ages _a	45	14.51	3.879	0.002*	a-b a-c a-d	a-f a-e
	29-33 ages _b	101	12.73				
	34 -38 ages _c	90	12.17				
	39-43 ages _d	63	12.02				
	44-48 ages _e	56	11.61				
	49 ages + _f	55	12.35				
	Total	410	12.49				
Externally-Oriented Thinking	24-28 ages _a	45	20.62	0.705	0.620		
	29-33 ages _b	101	20.12				
	34 -38 ages _c	90	19.41				
	39-43 ages _d	63	19.76				
	44-48 ages _e	56	20.09				
	49 ages + _f	55	20.29				
	Total	410	19.98				
Alexithymia Total	24-28 ages _a	45	53.47	3.730	0.003*	a-b a-c a-d	a-f a-e
	29-33 ages _b	101	48.42				
	34 -38 ages _c	90	47.00				
	39-43 ages _d	63	46.76				
	44-48 ages _e	56	45.09				
	49 ages + _f	55	47.85				
	Toplam	410	47.88				

A statistically significant difference was found between the levels of the participants in the " Difficulty Describing Feelings in the Toronto Alexithymia Scale" dimension in terms of age ($F = 3.920, p < 0.05$). According to the results of the analysis made to understand between which groups this difference is; Participants aged 24-28 ($\bar{X} = 18.33$) with participants aged 29-33 ($\bar{X} = 15.56$), 34-38 years old ($\bar{X} = 15.42$), 39-43 years ($\bar{X} = 14.98$), 44-48 years old ($\bar{X} = 13.39$) and participants aged 49 and over ($\bar{X} = 15.22$); between 29-33 years ($\bar{X} = 15.56$) and 44-48 years ($\bar{X} = 13.39$); Participants aged 34-38 ($\bar{X} = 15.42$) and 44-48 ($\bar{X} = 13.39$) were found. According to this, the Difficulty Describing Feelings of adults between the ages of 24-28, according to the adult individuals between the ages of 29-33, between the ages of 34-38, between the ages of 39-43, between the ages of 44-48 and over the age of 49; It has been determined that adult individuals between the ages of 29-33 and between the ages of 34-38 have more Difficulty Describing Feelings than adults between the ages of 44-48.

In the "

Difficulty Identifying Feeling in the Toronto Alexithymia Scale" dimension, a statistically significant difference was found between the levels of the participants in terms of age ($F = 3.879, p < 0.05$). According to the results of the analysis made to understand between which groups this difference is; Participants aged 24-28 ($\bar{X} = 14.51$) with participants aged 29-33 ($\bar{X} = 12.73$), 34-38 years old ($\bar{X} = 12.17$), 39-43 years old ($\bar{X} = 12.02$), 44-48 years old ($\bar{X} = 11.61$) and 49 years old and above ($\bar{X} = 12.35$). According to this, the level of Difficulty Identifying Feeling of adults between the ages of 24-28 is higher than those between the ages of 29-33, between the ages of 34-38, between the ages of 39-43, between the ages of 44-48 and those aged 49 and over. determined.

It was determined that there was no statistically significant difference in terms of age between the levels of the participants in the " Externally-Oriented Thinking on the Toronto Alexithymia Scale" dimension (F = 0.705, p> 0.05).

A statistically significant difference was found between the levels of the participants in the "Toronto Alexithymia Scale" in terms of age (F = 3.730, p <0.05). According to the results of the analysis made to understand between which groups this difference is; Participants aged 24-28 (\bar{X} = 53.47) with participants aged 29-33 (\bar{X} = 48.42), 34-38 years old (\bar{X} = 47.00), 39-43 years old (\bar{X} = 46.76), 44-48 years old (\bar{X} = 45.09) and 49 years and older (\bar{X} = 47.86) among the participants. Accordingly, it was determined that adults between the ages of 24-28 had higher alexithymic levels compared to adults between the ages of 29-33, between the ages of 34-38, between the ages of 39-43, between the ages of 44-48 and those aged 49 and over.

Findings Regarding Participants' Alexithymia Levels by Monthly Income

In Table 4 below, there are ANOVA analysis results regarding the situation of significant difference between sub-dimensions of Alexithymia Scale and monthly income variable.

Table 4.
ANOVA Results of Participants' Alexithymia Levels According to Monthly Income

Dimensions	Groups	N	\bar{x}	F	p	M.D.
Difficulty Describing Feelings	0-2019 TL _a	67	15.45	1.098	0.357	
	2020-4000 TL _b	213	15.85			
	4401-6600 TL _c	81	14.86			
	6601-8800 TL _d	11	13.09			
	8801 TL + e	38	14.68			
	Total	410	15.40			
Difficulty Identifying Feeling	0-2019 TL _a	67	12.19	0.936	0.443	
	2020-4000 TL _b	213	12.69			
	4401-6600 TL _c	81	11.98			
	6601-8800 TL _d	11	12.09			
	8801 TL + e	38	13.11			
	Total	410	12.49			
Externally-Oriented Thinking	0-2019 TL _a	67	19.88	1.125	0.344	
	2020-4000 TL _b	213	20.31			
	4401-6600 TL _c	81	19.43			
	6601-8800 TL _d	11	20.74			
	8801 TL + e	38	19.26			
	Total	410	19.98			
Alexithymia Total	0-2019 TL _a	67	47.52	1.097	0.357	
	2020-4000 TL _b	213	48.85			
	4401-6600 TL _c	81	46.26			
	6601-8800 TL _d	11	45.91			
	8801 TL _e	38	47.05			
	Total	410	47.88			

It was determined that adult individuals' scores on Alexithymia scale and sub-dimensions such as difficulty recognizing their emotions, difficulty expressing their feelings and expressive thinking sub-dimensions did not differ significantly according to their monthly income (p> 0.05).

Findings of Participants' Alexithymia Levels According to the Educational Status

In Table 5 below, there are results of ANOVA analysis regarding the status of significant difference between sub-dimensions of Alexithymia Scale and education variable.

Table 5.
ANOVA Results of Participants Alexithymia Levels According to the Educational Status

Dimensions	Groups	N	\bar{x}	F	P	M.D.
Difficulty Describing Feelings	Literate ^a	12	14.17	1.162	0.326	
	Primary school ^b	25	16.92			
	Secondary school ^c	25	15.64			
	High school ^d	62	16.40			
	Associate degree ^e	23	13.57			
	Undergratuated ^f	178	15.12			
	Gratuated ^g	85	15.42			
	Total	410	15.40			
Difficulty Identifying Feeling	Literate ^a	12	13.17	1.457	0.192	
	Primary school ^b	25	12.92			
	Secondary school ^c	25	12.80			
	High school ^d	62	12.81			
	Associate degree ^e	23	11.13			
	Undergratuated ^f	178	12.11			
	Gratuated ^g	85	13.11			
	Total	410	12.49			
Externally-Oriented Thinking	Literate ^a	12	21.42	4.635	0.000	a-g
	Primary school ^b	25	22.68			b-d
	Secondary school ^c	25	21.84			b-e
	High school ^d	62	20.55			b-f
	Associate degree ^e	23	20.04			b-g
	Undergratuated ^f	178	19.53			c-f
	Gratuated ^g	85	18.96			c-g
	Total	410	19.98			
Alexithymia Total	Literate ^a	12	48.75	2.079	0.055	
	Primary school ^b	25	52.52			
	Secondary school ^c	25	50.28			
	High school ^d	62	49.76			
	Associate degree ^e	23	44.74			
	Undergratuated ^f	178	46.76			
	Gratuated ^g	85	47.49			
	Total	410	47.88			

It was determined that there is a statistically significant difference between the levels of the participants in the dimension of "Expressing Thinking on the Toronto Alexithymia Scale" in terms of educational status ($F = 4.635, p < 0.05$). According to the results of the analysis made to understand between which groups this difference is; only literate ($\bar{X} = 21.42$) participants and graduate ($\bar{X} = 18.96$) participants; Participants with primary school graduates ($\bar{X} = 22.68$) and high school graduates ($\bar{X} = 20.55$), associate degrees ($\bar{X} = 20.04$), undergraduate ($\bar{X} = 19.53$) and graduate graduates ($\bar{X} = 18.96$); Participants with secondary school degrees ($\bar{X} = 21.84$) and those with undergraduate ($\bar{X} = 19.53$) and graduate degrees ($\bar{X} = 18.96$); It was determined that the participants were among the high school graduates ($\bar{X} = 20.55$) and those with graduate degrees ($\bar{X} = 18.96$). According to this, the expressive thinking levels of only literate adults compared to graduate graduates; The expressive level of thinking of primary school graduates, high school graduates, associate degree graduates, undergraduate and graduate graduates, secondary school graduates, according to undergraduate and graduate graduates; It was determined that the expressive thinking levels of the high school graduate participants were higher than the graduate participants.

In the alexithymia scale and its sub-dimensions, difficulty recognizing emotions, and difficulty expressing emotions, it was determined that the scores did not differ significantly according to educational status ($p > 0.05$).

Conclusion and Discussion

In the study, it is aimed to examine the relationship between alexithymia levels of adults according to various demographic characteristics. In this study, which is a quantitative study and conducted with a general screening model, a questionnaire was applied to 410 adult individuals without sampling. Within the scope of the findings obtained in this section, interpretations were made by referring to the results and previous studies and studies that support or do not support the findings.

In this study, it is seen that there is a significant difference between male and female participants in terms of alexithymia and that males exhibit more alexithymic characteristics than females. Consistent with the current research finding, Carpenter and Chung (2011); Abbate-Daga et al. (2015); Marsero et al. (2011) argue that men are more alexithymic than women in adults. In addition, it is observed that men have more difficulty expressing their emotions than women. This finding supports the fact that men do not develop their vocabulary for sensitive emotions such as hopelessness and fear because they perceive expressing their emotions as incapable (Levant et al. 2006). There are also studies showing that men feel limited in showing, expressing and sharing their strong emotions due to the definition of the masculine gender role and that this emotional limitation may be related to alexithymia (Konrath, Novin, & Li, 2012).

In terms of alexithymia, the difficulty of recognizing emotions in terms of age, difficulty in expressing emotions and a significant difference in alexithymia level are among the findings of this study. There are research results consistent with this research finding (Bağcı, 2008; Joyce et al. 2011). However, there are studies suggesting that alexithymia will increase as the age increases (Karakis & Levant, 2012). Considering that alexithymia is a structure that can vary depending on socio-cultural context, traumatic experiences and hereditary factors (Oktay & Batigün, 2014; Yalçın & Hamarta, 2014; Eyüpoğlu, 2018), there is a difference between alexithymia and age relationship may be found.

At the level of alexithymia, there is a significant difference in the dimension of expressive thinking according to the education level variables; It was observed that there was no significant difference in the level of difficulty recognizing their feelings, difficulty expressing their feelings and alexithymia. Consistent with the findings of this research, in addition to the studies showing that there is no relationship between education level and alexithymia (Atay, 2014; Yıldız, 2013); There are also studies reporting that as the level of education increases, alexithymia decreases. As the level of education increases, individuals' self-awareness about expressing their emotions and emotion awareness increases (Uzun, 2016), and therefore a decrease in alexithymic characteristics can be expected.

In this study, monthly income level does not differ significantly in terms of alexithymia. Consistent with the findings of this research, Aslan (1996) and Yıldız (2013) found that alexithymia does not change according to the perceived economic level. However, there are also research results revealing that as the economic level of the family decreases, alexithymia increases (Carpenter & Chung, 2011, Oktay & Batigün, 2014). It is seen that the results of the research on the relationship between alexithymia and the perceived economic level variable yield different results. The fact that the perceived economic levels of the sample group in this study were rather low may not have made a difference in terms of alexithymia.

Biodata of Author



Hülya Erdem is a graduate of İnönü University, Department of Philosophy, and a student of Anadolu University, Department of Social Services and Istanbul Aydın University, Psychology Master's Degree. He works as a Counselor in Final Education Institutions. She is interested in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. Her areas of interest are psychology and educational counseling. **Affiliation:** Istanbul Aydın University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology, Master's Degree **E-mail:** hlyerdem@gmail.com Phone: +90 0542 383 28 56 ORCID No: 0000-0003-3344-3468



Engin Eker is a graduate of Istanbul University, Department of Psychology. He completed his master's and doctorate education at Istanbul University Institute of Forensic Medicine and made his studies on Forensic Psychology. He works as the Head of the Department of Psychology at Istanbul Aydın University and provides consultancy services. He worked in Education Research Hospitals Psychiatry Clinic for 10 years. She has worked on psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, addiction, projective tests, eating disorders and gives training in this field. **E-mail:** engineker@aydin.edu.tr **Phone:** +90 0532 458 25 84 **ORCID No:** 0000-0001-9316-7026

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