

ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARDS
DATING VIOLENCE*

Mehbare İFTAR¹, Güngör GÜLER²

1. Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Education and Research Hospital, Muğla, Turkey

2. Doç.Dr., Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing, Muğla, Turkey.

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Correspondence: Doç. Dr. Güngör GÜLER e-mail: gungorguler@mu.edu.tr

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the attitudes and behaviors of university students towards dating violence. Study was performed cross-sectionally. Research population contained 645 students, which were selected by stratified sampling method. Data was collected using the "Personal Information Form" and the "Attitude Scales for Dating Violence". Number, percentage, chi-square, Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests were used as evaluation methods. In this study, average attitude scores of males towards physical and psychological violence were determined as 26,75±9,63 and 37,69±10,06, while those for females were 28,05±9,38 and 27,59±8,48, respectively. Violence attitudes scores were determined to be higher (p<0.05) for males, participants who had fragmented families, participants who indicated violence in their families, and smokers. Students, who were male, older than 23 years, whose missing the opportunity to graduate on time, whose living in large families, smokers and reporting violence in their families, were observed to apply more violence (p>0.05). Moreover, violence perpetration behavior was found to be higher for alcohol users (p<0.05). Students, who were alcohol users and reported violence in the family, were seen to be more violence-victim (p<0.05) whereas students, who were violence-victim in previous dating, were more violence-perpetrator in the current dating (p<0.05). This study demonstrated that about half of the participants were either violence-perpetrator or violence-victim in the continuing relation.

Keywords: Dating violence, university student, violence perpetration, violence

ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN FLÖRT ŞİDDETİNE YÖNELİK TUTUM VE DAVRANIŞLARI

ÖZET

Bu araştırma üniversite öğrencilerinin flört şiddetine yönelik tutum ve davranışlarını belirlemek amacı ile yapılmıştır. Araştırma kesitsel tiptedir. Araştırma evreni tabakalı örnekleme yöntemi ile seçilen 645 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Veriler “Kişisel Bilgi Formu” ve “Flört Şiddetine Yönelik Tutum Ölçekleri” kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Verilerin değerlendirilmesinde sayı, yüzde, Ki-Kare, Kruskal-Wallis ve Mann-Whitney U testleri kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmada fiziksel ve psikolojik şiddete yönelik erkeğin tutum puan ortalaması ve standart sapması sırasıyla 26,75±9,63 ve 37,69±10,06 iken kadınınki 28,05±9,38 ve 27,59±8,48 olarak bulunmuştur. Erkek öğrencilerin, parçalanmış aileye sahip olanların, ailesinde şiddet olduğunu belirtenlerin ve sigara içenlerin şiddet tutum puanlarının daha yüksek olduğu belirlenmiştir (p<0.05). Erkek öğrencilerin, 23 yaşından büyük olanların, dönem kaybı olanların, geniş ailede yaşayanların, sigara içenlerin ve ailesinde şiddet olduğunu belirtenlerin daha fazla şiddet uyguladığı ortaya çıkmıştır (p>0.05). Ayrıca alkol kullananların daha fazla şiddet uyguladıkları bulunmuştur (p<0.05). Alkol kullanan ve ailesinde şiddet olduğunu belirten öğrencilerin daha fazla şiddet mağduru olduğu (p<0.05), önceki flört ilişkisinde şiddet mağduru olan öğrencilerin mevcut flört ilişkisinde daha fazla şiddet uyguladığı belirlenmiştir (p<0.05). Bu araştırma üniversite öğrencilerinin yarısının flört ilişkisinde şiddet mağduru olduğunu ve şiddet uyguladığını ortaya çıkarmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Flört şiddeti, üniversite öğrencisi, şiddet uygulama, şiddete maruz kalma

INTRODUCTION

Violence is defined by World Health Organization like “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (1). Being a part of human experience, violence is seen in all part of the world in various forms. Therefore, violence has become an increasingly important issue in developing and developed countries, especially among young people (2,3).

Romantic relations and coupledness come into prominence, and play important role in the development of the individuals during university years when the transition to adulthood happens, in which period cognitive, social and emotional changes occur (4). It is possible for people to experience conflicts with their romantic partners from time to time, just like in their relations with the people in their environment. Individuals, who are involved in dating relations, may sometimes resort to violent behaviors towards their date to solve the problems they experienced (5). Dating violence is one of the interpersonal violence types, and occurs as behaviors including verbal, sexual, emotional and physical violence, or appears as imposing social restrictions on each other between couples during dating (2).

Several issues like gender, substance usage, domestic violence, etc. have been found to be related with violence among intimate partners (6-8). Effects of violence on health can be listed as physical and psychological problems from acute trauma, reproductive health problems,

injuries, psychological problems and even to death (9,10). Violence in childhood and adolescence may result in immediate and lifelong consequences, including physical, emotional, behavioral, and social challenges (10). Sexual violence during dating in the adolescent development age might cause experiencing of more disappointment, being adversely more affected coping skills, and hence might cause more suicide attempts compared to other sexual abuse issues (11). Furthermore, health problems those dating violence victims experienced nowadays increasingly diversify, ranging from small physical illnesses to severe mental health problems such as depression, substance abuse, decreases in academic achievement, post-traumatic stress disorder, homicide and suicide (12,13). Therefore, studies about preventing violence has gained utmost importance in terms of health problems and risks emerge with violence (14).

Solving the violence problem requires a multidisciplinary approach. It is necessary to prevent violence at the earliest stage, that is, primary prevention (10). Then, health staffs working in primary health care services are given crucial responsibilities. The public health nurses included in this team can provide important contributions to prevent violence at its source by informing parents about marriage counseling, raising a child, healthy communication, problem solving, etc. Furthermore, public health nurses have an important role on determining risk groups for dating violence, informing young people about dating violence, and on protecting and improving the health of individuals and communities by developing problem-solving and coping skills.

As dating violence might turn into domestic violence in the future, many violence patterns those may occur in the future can be avoided by preventing the violence in this period (4,11,15,16). Determining the attitude and behaviors of university students towards dating violence is important for early intervention of violence, and establishing and sustaining the healthy relations among young people. This situation is of utmost importance in terms of raising healthy communities of the future and being the role model. Dating violence, which is considered as an important problem in many countries that was brought by modern life, had not been recognized as an important public health problem in Turkey until recent years (17). Then, scientists have not given sufficient interest on dating violence and affecting factors in Turkey. From this point of view, this study aims to determine the attitudes and behaviors of university students towards dating violence.

METHODS

Study Design and Sample: This study was conducted cross-sectionally in order to determine the attitudes and behaviors of university students towards dating violence. The population of the study constituting the 16160 students studying in all faculties, colleges and vocational schools of a university in south western part of Turkey during the academic year of 2014-2015. The sampling was performed by using equation 1. A total of 645 students from all departments of all faculties, vocational schools and vocational high schools were included in the study determining by stratified sampling method. Students were randomly selected among different grades of departments by taking into account the gender ratio.

$$n = N \cdot t^2 \cdot p \cdot q / d^2 (N-1) + t^2 \cdot p \cdot q$$

Instruments

Data was collected using “Personal Information Form” and “Attitude Scales towards Dating Violence” (16).

Personal Information Form: This form was composed of 19 questions about students, such as gender, age, faculty/college they study, grade, semester loss situation, income, their parents’ profession and education, family types, violence situation in their family, and violence perpetration or victimization situation (2,4-5,9,12,16-20).

Attitude Scales towards Dating Violence: Attitude Scales towards Dating Violence were developed by Price, Byers & Dating Violence Research Team (18) in order to determine the attitudes of males and females towards physical, psychological and sexual violence in dating. These scales were adopted to Turkish by Yumuşak (16). The 5-point Likert type evaluation (1-totally disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-totally agree) was used for every item in the scales. The scales consist 50 items in four sub-scales: “The Attitude Scale towards Psychological Violence Males Perform in Dating”, “The Attitude Scale towards Physical Violence Males Perform in Dating”, “The Attitude Scale towards Psychological Violence Females Perform in Dating”, “The Attitude Scale towards Physical Violence Females Perform in Dating”. High scores obtained from the scales indicate that acceptance level towards dating

violence is high (16). Yumuşak (16) determined the internal consistency Cronbach alpha values of the scales as .81, .87, .75, .82, respectively. In this study, these values were found as .77, .83, .80, .82, respectively. Total Cronbach alpha value was determined as .83 in this study.

Data Analysis

Data was evaluated in SPSS Windows 20.0 package program by preparing a database. The total score of the scale was determined by summation of the answers given to each item of the scale. If the total score of each scale was calculated to be high, acceptance level of that scale was affirmed as high.

One-Sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test was conducted prior to data analysis in order to determine the suitability of data for the normal distribution. Data was determined not to fit normal distribution. Then, obtained data was evaluated by applying number, frequency, percentage distributions, and non-parametric tests like chi-square, Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney U tests.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical committee approvals and institutional permissions were taken from the related university for data collection. Students were informed about the aim and benefits of the study before data collection, and voluntary participation was provided. Data were collected by face to face interview technique in students' free hours.

RESULTS

This study was performed among university students to determine their attitudes and behaviors towards dating violence. The 53.6% of the students were male, 46.4% were female, and majority of them were between 20-22 age group (60.1%). The 19.9% of participants were first grade of university, and 36.1% were second grade. The 76% of them had nuclear family, and 38.6% had two-three siblings. The 37.4% of the students were smokers. More than one fourth of the students (28.5%) reported the domestic violence in their families.

Physical and psychological attitude scores were calculated separately both for males and females. Average attitude scores of males towards physical violence was found to be slightly lower than that of females: $26,75 \pm 9,63$ for males, and $28,05 \pm 9,38$ for females. In contrast, psychological violence average attitude score of males ($37,69 \pm 10,06$) was higher than that for females ($27,59 \pm 8,48$).

The 51.6% of the participants reported that they were in dating relations. The 52.9% of these students replied that they were violence victim while 52% of them stated that they were violence perpetrator in dating relations (Table 1).

Table 1. Students' Violence Perpetration or Victimization Status in Dating Relations (n=645)

	N	%
Dating relations		
Yes	333	51.6
No	312	48.4
Violence Victimization in dating relations*		
Yes	176	52.9
No	157	47.1
Violence perpetration in dating relations*		
Yes	173	52.0
No	160	48.0

*Percentage were calculated from total number of participants having dating relations

Attitude scores towards physical and psychological violence perpetrated by males, psychological violence perpetrated by female in dating were observed to be significantly higher according to the statements of male students ($p < 0.05$). Based on males' responses, attitude scores towards physical violence perpetrated by female in dating were calculated to be high although the finding was statistically not significant ($p > 0.05$). Furthermore, responses of term loss students revealed that all the attitude scores towards violence were found to be significantly high except that towards psychological violence perpetrated by male in dating ($p < 0.05$).

Attitude scores towards violence were found to be significantly high for students, who lived in fragmented family, reported violence in their family and were smoker ($p<0.05$). Likewise, attitude scores of alcohol users towards violence were high in all of the scales. However, statistically significant difference ($p<0.05$) was observed only between alcohol usage and attitude scores towards physical violence perpetrated by female in dating (Table 2).

Attitude scores towards violence were found higher for violence-victim students. Statistically significant difference was seen between attitude scores towards physical violence perpetrated by male, and physical and psychological violence perpetrated by female in dating in terms of being exposed to violence ($p<0.05$). Attitude scores towards violence of students, who perpetrate violence in dating relations, were found higher than those who do not perform. Depending on the violence perpetration in dating relations, significant difference was determined among attitude scores towards physical violence perpetrated by male ($p<0.05$) (Table 2).

Table 3 shows the relationship between some of the descriptive characteristics of the students and violence perpetration in their current dating relations. This study exhibited that male students and students of semester loss demonstrated more frequently the violent behavior ($p>0.05$). Furthermore, violent behaviors were found to be higher in students, who have lived in large family, who reported domestic violence, and who were smokers ($p>0.05$) and alcohol users ($p<0.05$).

Table 2. Average Attitude Scores of Physical and Psychological Violence Males and Females Perpetrate in Dating Relations According to Some Descriptive Characteristics of Students (n=645)

Descriptive characteristics	Attitude scores for physical violence male perpetrate in dating	Attitude scores for psychological violence male perpetrate in dating	Attitudes scores for physical violence female perpetrate in dating	Attitudes scores for psychological violence female perpetrate in dating
	X±SD	X±SD	X±SD	X±SD
Gender				
Male (346)	29.63±9.25	41.53±8.75	28.57±8.87	28.50±7.69
Female (299)	23.42±9.98	33.25±9.65	27.46±9.92	26.54±9.22
Test		MU=27411.00	MU=47876.50	MU=45128.00

	MU=32432.00 p=0.01*	p=0.01*	p=0.10	p=0.01*
Loss of semester				
Yes (117)	28.50±8.98	38.72±9.83	29.64±9.05	29.27±8.30
No (528)	26.36±9.73	37.46±10.10	27.70±9.42	27.22±8.49
Test	MU= 6731.50 p=0.02†	MU=28504.00 p=0.19	MU=27018.50 p=0.03†	MU=26590.00 p=0.01*
Family type				
Nuclear family (490)	26.20±9.61	36.87±10.18	28.15±9.54	27.20±8.70
Extended family (122)	26.78±9.31	39.69±9.41	26.41±8.80	27.87±7.62
Fragmented family (33)	34.90±7.34	42.72±8.18	32.67±7.48	32.45±6.77
Test	KW= 27.46 p=0.01*	KW=20.32 p=0.01*	KW=13.96 p=0.01*	KW=12.43 p=0.02†
Domestic violence				
Yes (184)	30.05±9.30	39.61±9.13	29.96±8.56	29.03±8.04
No (461)	25.43±9.45	36.92±10.31	27.29±9.59	27.02±8.60
Test	MU= 0933.00 p=0.01*	MU=36661.50 p=0.01*	MU=34894.00 p=0.01*	MU=36322.50 p=0.01*
Smoking				
Yes (241)	28.05±9.95	39.50±10.56	29.07±9.75	28.73±8.50
No (404)	25.97±9.36	36.61±9.60	27.45±9.11	26.92±8.41
Test	MU= 2815.50 p=0.01*	MU= 1379.00 p=0.01*	MU= 4136.00 p=0.04†	MU= 2645.50 p=0.01*
Using alcohol				
Yes (249)	27.45±9.87	38.40±11.13	29.18±10.22	27.90±9.23
No (396)	26.31±9.46	37.24±9.31	27.35±8.75	27.40±7.99
Test	MU= 5868.50 p=0.13	MU= 6004.00 p=0.15	MU=44326.00 p=0.03†	MU=47661.50 p=0.47
Violence victimization in dating relations‡				
Yes (176)	28.78±10.19	39.15±10.79	29.59±10.06	28.72±8.65

No (157)	25.85±9.45	37.14±9.57	26.61±9.39	26.70±8.86
Test	MU=11528.50	MU=12463.50	MU=11430.00	MU=11939.50
	p=0.01*	p=0.12	p=0.01*	p=0.03[‡]
Violence perpetration in dating relations [‡]				
Yes (173)	28.76±10.46	39.12±10.86	29.21±9.89	28.28±8.72
No (160)	25.93±9.16	37.21±9.52	27.08±9.71	27.21±8.87
Test	MU=11691.50	MU=12423.50	MU=12213.00	MU=12823.00
	p=0.01*	p=0.10	p=0.06	p=0.24

[‡]: No dating relations are not included into the table; MU: Mann-Whitney U Test; KW: Kruskal-Wallis Test; *p <0.01; [†]p < 0.05

Comparative evaluation, based on some descriptive characteristics and violence victimization status of students, revealed that the rate of violence victimization was significantly high for male students, students of semester loss, living in a nuclear family and for smokers (p>0.05). Moreover, students, who reported domestic violence, were determined to be more violence-victimized with a meaningful difference between them (p<0.05). Additionally, alcohol users were found statistically significantly be violence-victimized more (p<0.05) (Table 3).

Table 3. Status of Violence-Perpetration and Violence-Victimization of Students in Their Current Dating Relations According to Some Descriptive Characteristics of Students *

Descriptive characteristics	Violence perpetration in current dating relations						Violence victimization in current dating relations					
	Yes		No		Test		Yes		No		Test	
	n	%	n	%	χ ²	p	n	%	n	%	χ ²	p
Gender												
Male	94	54.7	78	45.3	1.03	0.30	93	54.1	79	45.9	0.21	0.64
Female	79	49.1	82	50.9			83	51.6	78	48.4		
Loss of semester												

Yes	31	54.4	26	45.6			32	56.1	25	43.9		
No	142	51.4	134	48.6	0.16	0.68	144	52.2	132	47.8	0.29	0.58
Family type [†]												
Extended family	31	54.4	26	45.6			27	47.4	30	52.6		
Nuclear family	136	52.1	125	47.9	0.09	0.75	140	53.6	121	46.4	0.73	0.39
Domestic violence												
Yes	63	58.9	44	41.1			68	63.6	39	36.4		
No	110	48.7	116	51.3	3.03	0.08	108	47.8	118	52.2	7.24	0.01 [‡]
Smoking												
Yes	72	54.1	61	45.9			78	58.6	55	41.4		
No	101	50.5	99	49.5	0.42	0.51	98	49.0	102	51.0	2.98	0.08
Using alcohol												
Yes	80	58.8	56	41.2			82	60.3	54	39.7		
No	93	47.2	104	52.8	4.34	0.03 [§]	94	47.7	103	52.3	5.10	0.02 [§]

*: No dating relations are not taken into the table

[†]: Fifteen people living in fragmented family, who were both violence victim and perpetrator, were not included in the table

[‡]p < 0.01

[§]p < 0.05

When Table 4 was surveyed, it was seen that the students, who were violence-victimized in their past dating relations, perpetrate more violence in current dating relations. The difference between them was found statistically be significant (p < 0.05).

Table 4. Variation in the Violence Perpetration Status of Students in Their Current Dating Relations According to the Violence Victimization Status in Their Past Dating Relations

Violence victimization in the past dating relations	Violence perpetration in current dating relations						Test	
	Yes		No		No dating relations			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	χ^2	p
Yes	85	36.8	30	13.0	116	50.2	63.15	0.01*
No	69	23.2	111	37.2	118	39.6		
No dating relations	19	16.4	19	16.4	78	67.2		

*p < 0.01

DISCUSSION

The attitudes and behaviors of university students towards dating violence were investigated in this study. It has been revealed that dating violence appeared reasonably at higher rate among university students. Rate of violence perpetration was found to be closer to that of violence victimization. This finding demonstrates that young people, who are violence victim, also perpetrate violence, which is important in terms of revealing the fact that violence is a learned behavior. The fact that students who were violence victim in their past dating relations perpetrated violence in their current dating relations proved this hypothesis. This evidence might also be explained by the acceptance of perpetrated violence to each other in dating with the sense of ownership as the sign of love and interest (16,18).

Raising boys and girls differs depending on the cultural structure of the society. In Anatolia, girls are fostered to be raised more harmonious and docile role with the society while boys might be supported to be more aggressive than girls from childhood, and their violence-aggressive behavior might be tolerated. Violent behaviors of males are supported in patriarchal order as a result of gender discrimination. Violent accepting level of males in dating, who civilized with violent supporting roles, was determined to be higher than that of females as a consequence of such attitudes and behaviors of society (7,21).

Significant challenges have occurred in patriarchal family structure parallel to the technological developments and globalization. Increase in violent behaviors among females, and exposure of

male students to more violence, whose violence attitudes are high and perpetrate more violence, are substantial indicators of social transformation (11,22).

The effect of family type on the violent behaviors and attitudes towards violence was also investigated as a variable. Violent attitude scores of students, who have fragmented family, were determined to be high in dating ($p<0.05$). Living in an extended family was observed to increase the rate of violence perpetration in dating whereas living in a nuclear family appeared to increase violence victimization ($p>0.05$). Families might be fragmented as a result of various environmental and/or economic reasons. Individuals, who are raised in such family, might have higher attitudes towards violence due to physical/psychological trauma they might have experienced in the family. Individuals from extended family might have higher violence attitudes because of competition with the environment to maintain their existence, to prove themselves and to achieve better conditions. On the contrary, individuals, who are grown up in nuclear family, might be exposed to more violence in university years since they are at the center of family's attention, and therefore, they do not need to struggle too much to get their demands, grow up in extreme parental conditions, come face to face less with adverse circumstances, etc. The violence attitudes of children, who are grown up in fragmented or extended families, are also affected by their violence victimization. However, violence victimization in childhood could not be the only factor for violent behavior. It is thought that several factors such as education, social and economic conditions, and social statue of parents, quality of spouse relations, and personal attributes may interfere with each other, and therefore, increase the possibility of violence (19,23).

Emotional and social functions of family are important as well as the biological and economic functions. Higher attitudes and behaviors towards violence of students, who reported domestic violence, were referred to the social function of the family. Parents are important role models for their children in terms of the emotional environment they create, problem solving methods and especially their ways of communication. Children, who are grown up in such families that they do not perform healthy parenting functions and adopt the way of solving problems by resorting to violence, might accept violence more easily in their adulthood, defend themselves against violence insufficiently, and might adopt violence as a learned behavior (8,24-26). So, obtained research findings was explained as that growing in a violent-familiar family environment increases the young peoples' acceptance levels of violence, and becomes effective on the behaviors of violence perpetration and victimization.

Semester loss due to academic failure was observed as an important variable affecting the attitudes of university students towards violence. Academic failure might lead students to worry about the future. They may try to fulfill their academic failures and approvals among friends in different ways like violence. Those students may attempt to prove themselves by tending to perpetrate violence and crime (20,24).

Risky behaviors among university students in Anatolia are increasing (27). This study demonstrated that smoking and alcohol usage among these risky behaviors were important variables affecting the attitudes of students towards violence. These risky behaviors significantly increased the rates of violence perpetration and victimization among students. Stressful studentship period is the leading factor in the increase of these risky behaviors. Students, who cannot cope with stress due to factors such as economic problems, lack of self-confidence, domestic violence witnessing or victimization, inadequate communication skills and anxiety about the future, may tend to substance use as a coping method. Being independent from family supervision in university environment, easy access to substances and the desire to be accepted around friends may prompt students to these risky behaviors. As a result of positive attitudes towards smoking and alcohol, and usage of them by parents in family environment, children, who regard their parents as role models, may gain the habit of smoking and alcohol in university years when self-development is expected to accelerate. Alcohol abuse may weaken the behavioral control, and cognitive and physical functions of the individuals, and may result in violence perpetration onto their partners (7,24,28,29).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study demonstrated that more than half of the students were violence victim in dating, and at the same time, perpetrate dating violence. Furthermore, it was determined that students, who were violence victim in their past dating relations, perpetrate violence more than those who were not.

Attitude and behavior scores of university students towards violence were found to be higher for male, smokers and alcohol users, ones with semester loss, participants from fragmented family, and domestic violence- witnessed ones. One of the most striking results of this study was that males reported to expose to violence more than females.

Prevention and control of dating violence, which has become an important public health problem nowadays, require multi-disciplinary approach by the participation of health, education and social services. Violence should be prevented by primary health services before it takes place. Public health nurses, who are members of primary health service teams, can provide important contributions to families in preventing the violence at its source by using roles such as education, counseling and leadership. Public health nurses can play an important role in determining the attitudes and behaviors of young people towards violence, changing them positively, and preventing and controlling dating violence by cooperating with educators and administrators of the university, families of students and other related disciplines. Education and consulting services can be provided to students by employing public health nurses in youth consulting centers to be established in universities. The active use of these centers by students can be provided. Students can be taught about safe relationship, dating violence and what to do in case of violence. By improving the personal development, students' participation to the training programs can be provided to reduce stress and violence in their lives, and to improve their anger management and life skills. Furthermore, qualitative studies can be conducted among university students in order to obtain more comprehensive information on the attitudes and behaviors of them towards dating violence.

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