

Drug Abuse and Self Medication Scenario in Nigeria

by

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Abstract

Drug abuse has always been a problem in Nigeria. From the early sixties when drugs of abuse, mainly cannabis was brought into the country by soldiers returning from war, till now when various other chemical substances – heroin, LSD, Cocaine, Amphetamine, and volatile solvents to mention a few have entered into the scene. However, in Nigeria, there isn't enough research work done on drug abuse and self-medication. Most publications come from abroad.

This study was carried out within Lagos State to determine the trends of Drug abuse and self-medication. The descriptive survey design was employed. The research population consists of randomly selected respondents from Surulere, Mushin, Amuwo-Odofin, and Eti-Osa Local Government Areas. These embodied Adeniran Ogunsanya, College of Medicine Idi-Araba, Idi-Araba Community, Victoria-Island, Festac and the Surulere Campus of Lagos State Polytechnic. A total of

three hundred and sixty-two respondents' (362) participated in the study.

Data was collected and collated by the use of a questionnaire, which solicited responses on different facets of drug abuse and self-medication. The respondents' answers provided the basis for answering the three research questions posed in the study.

Of the three hundred and sixty-two respondents, 188 (51.93%) were female and 174 (48.07%) were male. 63.81% of the respondents admitted drug use. Paracetamol was found to be the most commonly abused drug (19.61%) in this study. 12.45% abuse more than three drugs, Paracetamol inclusive

Majorities of drug users were between the ages of 21-30 years, (68.78%) and first contact with drugs was mostly between the ages of 15 – 19 years.

"Chemists" were identified as a major source of drugs (10.77%), and the Doctors, at the slightest complaint, readily prescribed these drugs.

Key Words: Drug Abuse; Self-Medication; Prevalence;

The term drug abuse refers to the excessive and persistent use, usually by self-administration, of any drug without due regard for accepted medical practice. Although the term seems to imply that users abuse drugs they take, in fact, it is themselves or others they abuse by using drugs.

Self-medication can be described as the arbitrary self-administration of any drug without consulting a physician or pharmacist. Self medication tends towards drug abuse when the drug in question is taken persistently and/or excessively i.e. self-medication usually precedes drug abuse. Reports of patients who have suffered adversely as a result of self-medication in the developed countries are common. Analgesic abuse resulting in renal papillary necrosis and purgative abuse resulting in potassium deficiency, weakness, lethargy and pyelonephritis are well-documented (1,2,3,4). Here in Nigeria, the extent of damage brought about by the indiscriminate ingestion of folk medicine is a matter that is conjectural. This has presented as cases of cirrhosis of the liver, endomyocardial fibrosis and chronic renal disease with shrunken kidneys which might have arisen due to insidious damage to these organs produced by some constituents

led to psychosocial disorientation, the end result being drug induced physical distress, mental distortions, increased crime rates and ultimately drug abuse. The relationship between substances of abuse and delinquency is often adequately explored and talked about.

Introduction

The modification of physiological systems has enticed man into using drugs for subtle reasons such as elevation of mood, enhancing physical performance and other criminal uses. This has

retrieved. These made up the sample size for this study.

D. Procedure for Analysis of Collected Data

The frequencies and percentile means have been adopted for data analysis. These have been presented as histograms and described systematically. Analysis and Interpretation of Results

A total of 400 questionnaires were given out of which 362 (90%) were retrieved.

BIODATA.

188 (61.93%) of the respondents were females. The age-group distribution shows that 68.78% of the respondents fall within the 21-30 years age bracket; very few respondents are age above 41 years (3.04%). 87.85% of the respondents are single, 11.88% married. 83.70% of the respondents are Christians

while 16.3% are Moslems. (See Figure 1).

PATTERN OF DRUG USE.

The survey revealed that a variety of drugs/substances are consumed and that most respondents have some knowledge of the meaning of drug abuse and self-medication (Figures 2 & 3). About 41% of respondents take drugs often without prescription (Fig 4) and on a continuous basis (Fig.5)

Paracetamol topped the list of drugs taken continuously, followed by antibiotics. On the duration of drug

use, a large number (44.2%) use the drugs for over 1 year (Figure 6).

On the circumstances surrounding drug use, 20.72% use drugs during examination periods while about 18% consume drugs during parties. Friends introduced about 35% of drug users to the act (Fig.7).

On the sources of drugs chemists (v. doctors) account for a sizable source, whilst friends and doctors are also

Figure 3. Comments of Respondents on the meaning of Self-Medication.

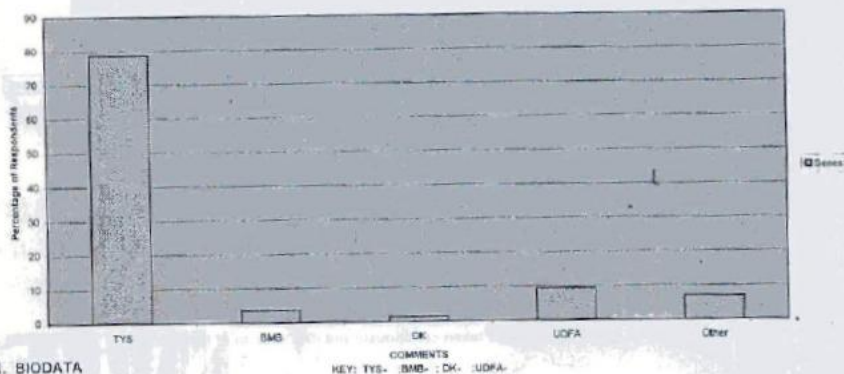


Figure 1. BIODATA

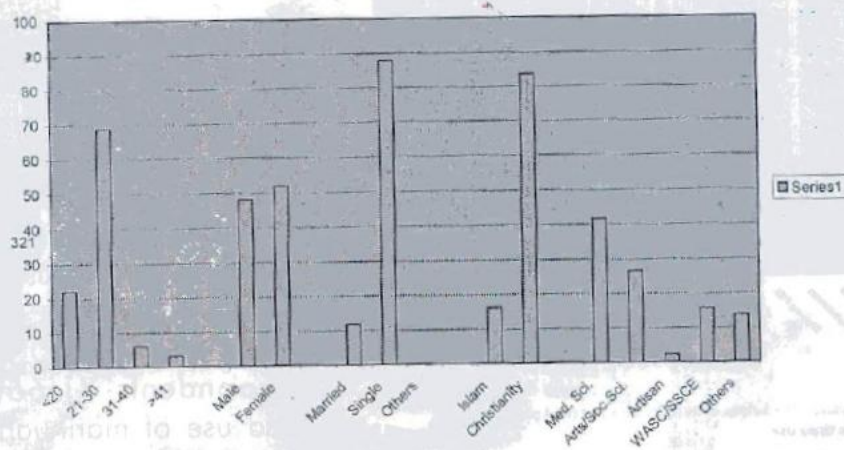
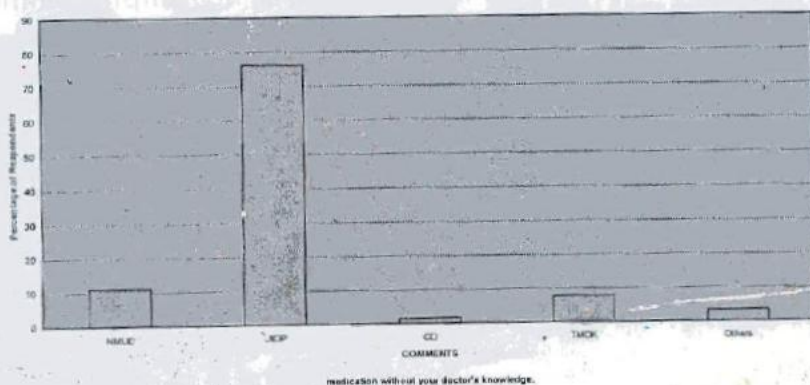


Figure 2. Comments of Respondents on the meaning of Drug Abuse.



implicated (Figure 8). Incidentally, 58% of respondents know that drug indiscriminate taking is harmful and 25% of them would like to stop NOW. About 94% of respondents declined ever abusing hard drugs. 30% blame themselves for the habit (Figure 9).

DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

There were a total of 231 drug users among the 362 respondents, which gave a prevalence rate of 63.81%.

During the course of this study, it was noticed that the populace were aware of this

Figure 4. Comments on frequency of drug purchase without prescription.

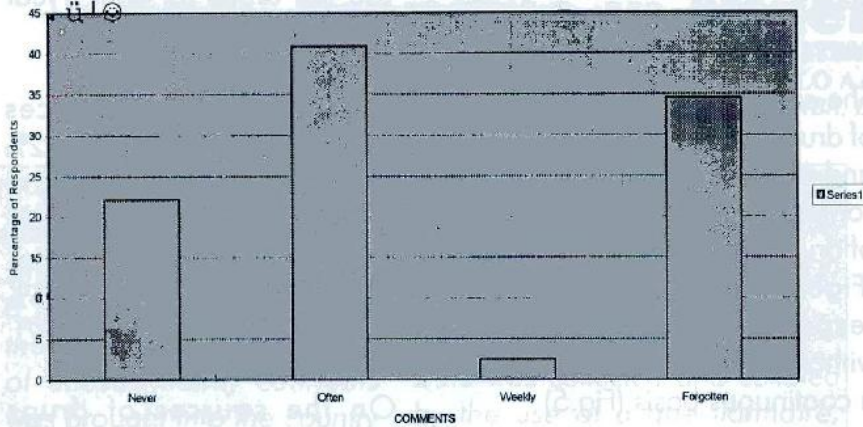


Figure 5. Comments on ever buying drugs in the Bus and taking drugs Continuously

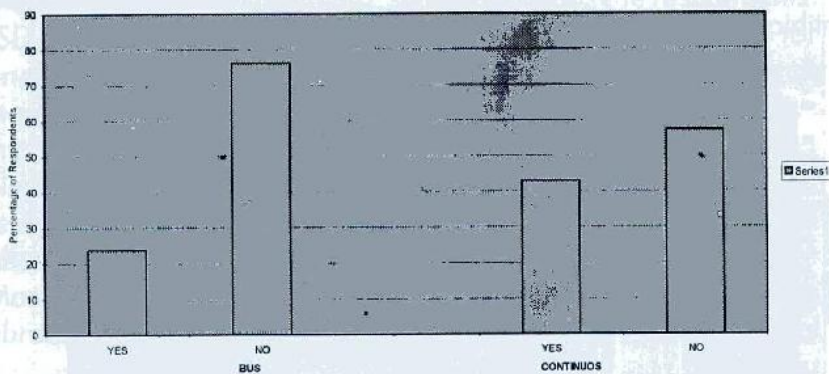


Figure 6. Comments on (A) Types of drugs taken continuously and (B) Duration of Use of drug

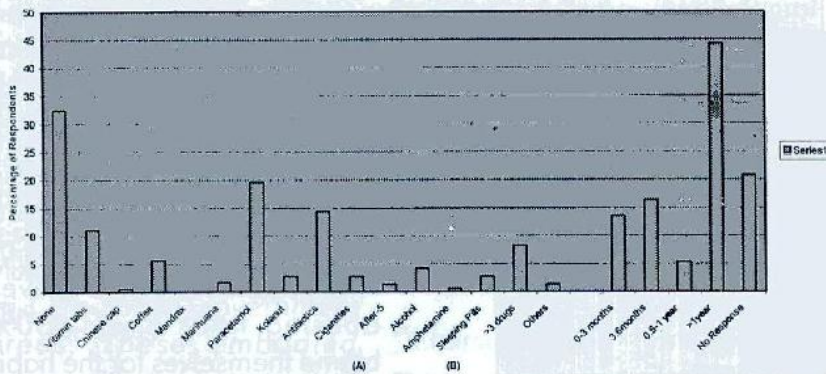
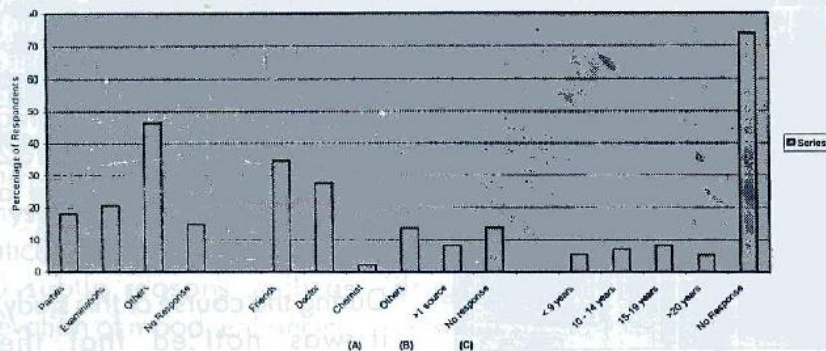


Figure 7. Comments on (A) Circumstances surrounding, (B) Sources of Introduction and (C) Age of introduction to drug use



scourge: Drug abuse and self-medication. The most commonly abused drug by male and female respondents was found to be Paracetamol (19.61%). This is in line with the findings of Oviasu in 1977 (7) who found analgesic drugs to be predominant on the list of commonly abused drugs by university students in Lagos. Odejide and Sanda in 1976 (8) also showed the prevalence of socially accepted drugs (alcohol and cigarette) and pain killers to be more than that of psychoactive drugs. Antibiotics 14.36%, vitamin tablets 11.05% and coffee 5.52% followed this. This could be attributed to the fact that analgesics (such as Paracetamol), antibiotics, vitamin tablets and coffee are produced locally, and are readily available and/or sold in open markets by anybody whether licensed or not.

Only 4.15% admitted the use of alcohol in this study. This is a rather low finding as it is a well-known fact that alcohol consumption is very rife around these areas. No Female in this study admitted to the use of alcohol.

Six respondents (1.66%) admitted use of marihuana, None to mandrax and two (0.56%) to amphetamine, which are psychoactive drugs. This is probably due to the fact that some respondents weren't entirely truthful: No one would want to be tagged an addict. In this study, antibiotic abuse was 14.36% as the respondents resorted to self-medication with antibiotics for the treatment of symptoms like

Figure 8. Comments on (A) Major sources of drugs, and (B) Co-consumers of drugs.

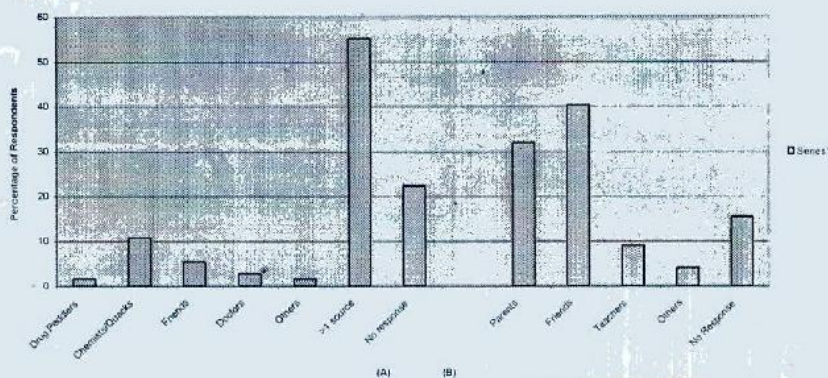
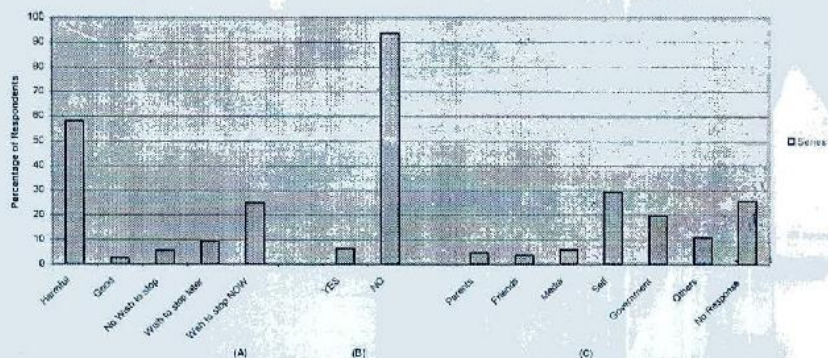


Figure 9. Comments on (A) Opinion about taking drugs (B) Ever abusing Hard Drugs and (C) Who to blame for taking drugs



fever and body pains, without prior consultation of a Doctor. Sleeping pills were abused by 2.76% of the drug users with all of them being women. This could be due to the fact that more females were sampled in this study. The other forms of drugs abused by respondents fell unto the following categories: eye drops, Beer, anti-malarial, haematinics, antihistamines, food supplements, vitamins, anti-infective and contraceptives.

68.78% of drug users fell within the age bracket of 21-30 years. This is similar to the 50% by Lambo (9) and 68.6% by Oviasu (7) of drug users (in clinic based studies) being under 25 years. This pointed to the fact that drug abuse is rampant amongst those young at heart. A greater percentage of the respondents had undergone formal education beyond or are in tertiary institutions of learning (82.04%), while the remaining (17.96%) were either artisans or

WASC / SSCE holders. In other words, majorities of the drug users were educated.

A sizeable number of respondents would define drug abuse as using drugs indiscriminately without a doctor's prescription and self-medication (78.75%), as treating yourself when sick. In other words, the entire 362 respondents were aware of what drug abuse and self-medication was about.

A sizeable number of respondents (40.88%) admitted to buying drugs without prescriptions. Only 23.76% of the respondents admitted to buying drugs in the bus, a veritable source of different types of drugs in these areas. 42.82% admitted to be taking certain drugs on a continuous basis without a doctor's prescription. Those who admitted to have bought drugs in the bus had those drugs falling into these classes: Haematinics, Analgesics, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, worm expellers and remarkably marihuana (one respondent). Most of the drug users had been using them for over one

year (44.20%); usually in the range of 5-18 years. The drugs are used mainly during parties (18.23%), during examination (20.72%) and during other scenarios: one respondent said, "when I want to feel high" and another "as an aphrodisiac".

Friends (34.53%) introduced a sizable number of respondents to drugs. Closely followed by Doctors (27.62%). The age of introduction of greatest significance was 15-19 years. This is to be expected, as youths want to try out things for themselves at an early age. Patients usually indulge in self-medication with drugs prescribed by doctors when the same symptoms reoccur, or they fall in similar health conditions to which they first presented to the doctor.

Chemists were a major source of drug supply. 10.77% identified chemist as major source of drug supply. This can be partly due to the fact that most of these drugs like Paracetamol, sleeping pills, vitamins are not sold under license, and are readily purchased over the counter without a doctor's prescription.

Only 5.52% of drug users identified friends as source of drug supply. 55.25% gave more than one source. 40.33% admitted to friends around as co-addicts, 30.04% implicated their parents and 8.01% their teachers.

58.01% of respondents believe taking drugs is harmful, 22.86% would wish to stop now and 2.49% believe drug taking is beneficial. 93.65% admitted to have never abused any hard drug. Majority of the respondents (29.28%) blame themselves for their drug taking habit, 5.80% the Media, 4.70% their parents, 19.89% the Government, 3.87% their friends and 10.77% other reasons which included medical

of folk medicine (2,3).

It is pertinent to say that at present, in Britain, patients are being encouraged to tow the line of self-medication. However, pharmacists are deeply involved in this programme by way of teaching rational drug use. The programme is geared at reducing physician visits to the barest minimum, in cases of illness that can be easily treated with specific (OTC) drugs. Thus, it is hoped that physicians can face more urgent clinical presentations, and severe disease states.

Drug abuse has always been a problem in Nigeria. From the early sixties when drugs of abuse, mainly cannabis was brought into the country by soldiers returning from war, till now when various other chemical substances – heroin, LSD, Cocaine, Amphetamine, and volatile solvents to mention a few have entered into the scene (5). The drug abuse problem has grown in complexity, the modes of administration more sophisticated and various socioeconomic outcomes visibly evident. It has led to high drop-out rates in the educational system, increased crime rates, increased frequency of broken homes, increased promiscuity and prostitution rates, increased incidences of rape and incest, increased vehicular accidents, arson and other consequences too numerous to mention (1,6). All this societal ills are brought about by distorted mentation due to the pharmacological actions of

the drugs of abuse.

As a result of all these, government has had to spend monies that would have been ploughed back into other sectors of the economy on drug rehabilitation, law enforcement, public enlightenment, procurement of drugs for treatment purposes and other measures aimed at rectifying drug related problems.

The purpose of this study is to investigate.

- (1) What people understand by drug abuse and self-medication.
- (2) The prevalence and frequency of drug abuse and self-medication.
- (3) The attitudes towards drug abuse and self-medication.

Methods and Materials

A. Selection of the Location of the Study and The Population Sample
Lagos was selected as the location for study due to its cosmopolitan nature. It offers the greatest job opportunities. It also has the greatest number of people on the least land mass i.e. it has the highest population density in Nigerian. It thus provided an opportunity of ascertaining variations within the case study. Individuals from various walks of life, tribes, social class, and religions all abound in Lagos. It was thus, an excellent location for sampling opinions and trends in Nigeria, as it was representative. The population sample of the study was randomly selected to cover these various locations in Lagos: Surulere, Amuwo-Odofin, Mushin and Eti-Osa Local Government Areas respectively.

The following locations were sampled within these Local

Government area: Festac, Adeniran Ogunsanya, Victoria-Island, Idi-araba, College of Medicine University of Lagos and Lagos state polytechnic, Surulere Campus.

B. Development of the Research Instrument

In order to solicit the opinions of the respondents on drug abuse and self medication, a research questionnaire was developed. It consisted of two parts, the first part solicited the personal characteristics of the respondents. The second part, which dealt with information related to the research questions under investigation, contained statements relating to:

- The relationship between drug abuse and self-medication.
- Knowledge about drug abuse self-medication.
- Further comments relating to drug abuse and self-medication.

C. Administration of the Research Instrument

The questionnaires were randomly distributed at various areas as stated above. 34 Questionnaires were administered at Idi-araba, Out of the 100 questionnaires sampled at Victoria-Island, 74 were retrieved. 11 questionnaires were administered at Festac, 24 at Adeniran Ogunsanya, 68 at the Surulere campus of Lagos State polytechnic, 151 at College of Medicine University of Lagos, but another 7 questionnaires couldn't be accounted for. As a result, 362 completed questionnaires were

representative. It was noticed that some respondents weren't forthcoming on some issues.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has looked into the prevalence and problematic nature of Drug Abuse and Self-medication.

The prevalence of drug abuse and self-medication was found to be 63.81%. The most commonly abused drug was Paracetamol 19.61%, others commonly abused drugs were vitamins, coffee, antibiotics and sleeping pills. Only 1.66% indulged in such a dangerous drug as marihuana.

Majority of the drug users fell in the 21-30-age bracket, however 5.52% were introduced to drugs before the age of 10 years. Religion, educational background and gender did not seem to play a significant role.

27.62% identified doctors as source of introduction to drugs, and 10.77% identified chemists as the most important source of supply. Parents formed another important source for drug users (32.04%). Only 58.01% were aware that drugs might be harmful.

Drugs of addiction such as heroin, morphine, cocaine,

pethidine and also psychoactive drugs such as amphetamine, After-5, mandrax did not pose any problem in this study population.

Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendation:

- (1) Specific protection through health education and primarily prevention being a collective effort of individuals and groups with skills relevant to drug abuse control should be emphasized. This can be achieved through collaborative efforts of schoolteachers, lecturers, medical students, doctors, pharmacists and social welfare officers.
 - (2) The existing legislative sections and/or decrees made by government are adequate. The law enforcement agencies, which comprise the police, customs and the NDLEA operatives, should ensure the success of these steps aimed at controlling drug abuse. They are to enforce the prohibition of importation, local cultivation, production, and use of illicit drugs.
 - (3) Government should ensure that only licensed persons or companies sell drugs directly to the public. Control of drugs sold by chemist (patent medicine stores) to the general populace should be enforced.
 - (4) Parents should monitor the type of friends or peer groups kept by their wards. They also should
- (5) Commercials on smoking on the mass media should be drastically reduced. Sports and Television stars and notable public figures should not be used for commercials involving such drugs that do have harmful effects on the body and mind. Sponsorships by companies involved in the production of goods likely to be abused: cigarettes, spirits, alcohol should not be encouraged, but downplayed.
 - (6) The federal ministry of health and other regulatory bodies should control the influx of drugs into the country, particularly those psychoactive or dependence-producing in nature.
 - (7) Doctors should exercise caution with prescription based on vague symptomatic clinical presentations such as headaches and pains requiring analgesics. This makes patients resort to self-medication when such symptoms re-occur.
 - (8) Early diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of addicts are highly essential.

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