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Forms of Domestic Violence and the Characteristics of Sexuality in The Women's Every Day Who Live in Extreme Poverty

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Abstract

The study presents the situations of those women living in extreme poverty in whose families, any forms of the domestic violence against women and combinations of these occur regularly. It seeks to discover those conflicts and typical life situations in these families that trigger the abusive behaviour of the men. The study analyses the forms, types and combinations of violence. Significant importance is given to the presentation of how the women react to the violence and why most of them accept it and why they are unable to escape from the violent relationship. The basis of the study is a qualitative research using 89 in depth interviews that aimed primarily to discover the situations of women living in extreme poverty. In this study, we briefly summarize the characteristics of domestic violence and putting major emphasis on these impacts on the women's sexual life.

Keywords: women living in extreme poverty; domestic violence; sexuality; physical violence; emotional violence; sexual violence.

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1. Introduction

There are few researches on the phenomenon of domestic violence, although the topic emerges more and more often in public. Several theoretical coherences explain the violence against partners. The interpretation frameworks of the phenomenon of domestic violence are laid down – in different contexts and with explaining factors – within the coherences of social learning theory, resource theory, patriarchy theory, theory of exchange, theory of social situation and ability of coping and the system theory.

The social learning theory traces this phenomenon back to the fact that the child learns how to behave as adult in the roles of husband and wife from the parents and the child also learns the violence also if she/he was abused in the childhood or regularly witnessed that her/his parents chose this form of solving conflicts. The child learns, moreover finds justification for this attitude. The people who live in such an environment more likely get into abusive relationship as women, men, abused or abuser.

The resource theory assumes, since violence and threatening in some extent present in every social class, the presence in the family is inevitable. The theory is built on the thesis that states more social, financial and other personal resources someone has, the greater chance he can assert himself within a group. When someone has many sources, she/he doesn't need to use violence openly and clearly because the rest of the people accept his dominance without it. However, the situation is different in the case, for example, when “the husband has low educational attainment, does not earn much, has no profession that could demand respect in the family so he is ‘forced’ to use violence maintain his dominant role” [7:104].

The patriarchy theory explains it differently; it states that the domestic violence can be traced back to the men's traditional patriarchal dominance and the women's inferior role. In his context, the violence is a power issue that is induced by the women's second-rate role. According to the theory, domestic violence is maintained and reproduced not by the family issues but by the society.

However, the theory of exchange explains the violence from the economy's point of view and in the dimensions of cost and profit. It states, if the ‘reward’ is bigger than the ‘input’ in the case of abusing the partner then for the individual it is worth wearing this attitude. That is, if the cultural support and acceptance of violence is great, the expected impeachment and the risk of punishment are small then the people more likely to behave like this.

The theory of social situation and ability of coping deals with it as a complex issue. It states that the domestic violence is caused by the combination of two factors. One of the reasons is the social and financial situation prevailing in the family that is accompanied by stress and they are unable to handle because of the lack of coping strategies. An example is that the family's low income status, poverty that create unsolvable problems for them often induce violence. This is reinforced by cultural norms, in other words, the individual learns what she/he sees around him/herself, that is, in a society built on violence or transmits violent norms, the most effective way to solve conflicts is using violence.

At finally yet importantly, we mention the system theory explanations that state the violence presenting the families are not individual pathologies, it rather reflects the family as a whole system's dysfunction.

The international literature distinguish several categories of partner abuse: (1) physical abuse (various forms of beating and kicking), (2) sexual violence, (3) physical or mental terror (humiliation, degrading and intimidating behaviour), (4) controlling behaviour (when the violent individual prohibits the partner to be in a company that can be family member, friend or he can prevent employment, that is, limits the woman's contacts with the outside world). These forms are hardly ever appear alone but combined or alternately.

2. Methodology

Our research was made with qualitative technique that is based on not probabilistic but on expert sampling. Within this framework, 89 interviews were made with women who live permanent poverty. The duration of each interview was 1,5-2 hours. As for selecting the interviewees, we considered on criteria – income conditions – to be essential. We got to the interviewees the intercession of nurseries, kindergartens, teachers and by the suggestion or/and the intercession of support organizations, civil people, local mail carriers, health visitors, family doctors, family care centres. During the selection, we did not aim to achieve any representativeness since or main aim is to find this kind of women who live at such a level of poverty and to have a conversation with them after earning their trust. Eighty-nine interviews were made and were recorded with a Dictaphone then every word was written down.

3. The forms and consequences of abuse suffered by women

Our findings show that, among the interviewees all the types of abuse mentioned in the introduction occurred and as the literature correlations point out these are mostly combined. Among the physical forms of abuse, the most common is slapping and hitting by hand but the abuse with an object is common too, for example, stick, knife, axe. Kick and keep kicking are common too.

When he slapped me on the left side of my face, my face and eye were swollen my lips were skewed and were blue. I didn't leave the house for two weeks and let nobody in because of my look. He was scared then. I don't say he didn't hit me after that but it happened less frequently, he ripped my hair and he was careful not to leave trace." (33 years old woman, has secondary school education level, has 3 children, unemployed)

"He has threatened my knife that he will cut my throat. Otherwise, the belt is part of our everyday and sometimes the fist. Defence is useless. Against a 1,92 meter tall and 110 kilogram men, the chances are like between an ant and an elephant. Not to say, I know the police men by name. Thank to the neighbours that I am still alive because if they wouldn't call the police I would be dead" (53 years old women, has vocation, has 4 children, on disability pension)

The violence against women is mostly combined with continuous psychological pressure and humiliation as well. During the mental abuse the men continuously and frequently criticize and mock the women and torment them with jealousy and prohibit them to keep contact with the outside world (friends, relatives, colleagues),

frequent threatens are typical as well as keeping in fear. According to the literature, the men aim with this to make the abused women feel alone and humiliated and live without self-confidence, in fear and anxiety.

“I am continuously afraid of him and I think this fear is not fear anymore, it transformed into anxiety. I wish this suffer would end soon. A moment can be deprived from being a human, I think.” (34 years old women, has diploma, has one child, unemployed)

“He always humiliates me. I just listen; what else could I do? What about when he follows me to the toilet with an axe? I have nowhere to go with 3 children. I can’t be unemployment” (39 years women, has primary school educational level, has 4 children, receives subsidy for child care)

“I was afraid of him many times. Many, many times. Sometimes it crosses my mind that he would be able to kill me (...) I pick up the children and if there is no other way, we leave. We walk in the city until he falls asleep then we go home. (30 years old women, has primary school attainment, has 6 children and receives subsidy for child care)

Rape in a relationship is an essential part of the process of abuse and one of the main manifestations of the exercise of power. In this process, the abusive man has total domination on the women and he possesses her whole body, mind and nervous system. Tóth Olga [6] mentions relating sexual violence against woman within domestic violence, that this might be the most controversial area, that is, its existence is often questioned: “Many think because of the marriage and its functions as an institution, the sexual needs of one of the partner have to be met by the other at all cost. If the other is not willing to do it and the other partner (mostly the man) force woman to do it, then it cannot be in the same category like the other forms of sexual violence. We cannot know how much this perception is spread in our society (mainly due to the lack of researches relating it) but we can assume that both men and women think so.” [6:5] This is based on that logical assumption, that the Hungarian society is very conservative so we cannot assume that our society would have modern views on sexuality that is otherwise very discreet topic.

As we presented previously, the sexual life of the majority of women living in extreme poverty is characterized by the total lack of harmony and one of its “symptom” is that the men force the women to have sex. A very typical case is when the drunk man is violent with the wife and a proportion of women tolerate it, mainly because they do not want to wake the children up who sleep in the same room or because they are scared that she would be beaten; some mentioned that they are scared of that their partner would send them away with the children, however, they have nowhere to go.

“Well, he bothers me when he is drunk and often doesn’t let me sleep all night.” (30 years old woman, has secondary school education, has one child receives subsidy for child care)

“He bugs me all the time when he is drunk. It is disgusting but I bear because I have to.” (44 years old woman, has primary school education, had 4 children, cleaning lady.)

This act ignores the sexual modesty strongly relating to human dignity, needs to preserve private spheres i.e. the freedom to decide on own sexuality. At the same time, it is true just like in other categories of role, the behaviour of women has great effect, they often do not consider it as rape but some kind of inconvenient task that when their spouses want to have sex against her will.

According to Tóth Olga's findings relating sexual abuse, those women form the most vulnerable group who are housewives or unemployed because many of these women would not punish this kind of abuse. Simultaneously, those people think the least that sexual abuse in the family should be punished who live in the smallest settlement.

Among the interviewees, this statement prevails since those women who allowed this kind of abuse mostly have low educational attainment and live in village

“Well, punish? No, no. I think, it's not needed to punish. I don't know. Punish for it? Well, I don't know. With force I can't be make have sex eventually.” (36 years old women, has primary school attainment, has 3 children, unemployed)

One striking findings – reflecting the view of the women from the lowest social class – of Tóth Olga's research of 1998 on domestic violence is that women whose educational attainment is less than primary school think beating wives should not be punished less than the average; among them, every fifth women thought that abusing wife is natural.

In this regard, among the opinions of violence against women has an interesting turn. To the question of whether they judge that the man beats his wife or partner, the answers were extremely divided. Vast majority think it should be punished and despise it, most of them are also victim of violence. There are same opinions of women who say the violence against women is totally acceptable or until an extent. Those women gave this kind of answer who never experienced abuse or they are abused but they think that they deserve to be beaten by their partners. Among them we can find 30 years old village dweller with 2 children as well as 45 years old city dweller with 9 children or childless woman with secondary school attainment.

“Well, I think one or two slaps are permissible; when the woman gets one or two slaps, it is permissible. One or two slaps happen in a marriage too. It's not the end of the world, but when he beats her into blue and green that is not good. Many many women deserve the heat and they deserve it. She deserve to be beaten by his husband mainly if she goes to the pub with her husband instead of going to home to her children when she gets her little money” (31 years old woman, has primary school educational level, has 2 children, unemployed)

“Well, how much they deserve. There are maybe who don't deserve and there are who do. It depends what kind of person she is. My husband never hurt me but I know someone who is beaten by her husband” (45 years old woman has primary school education level, has 9 children, unemployed)

“Well, there are women and some men who turn to be hysterical and slap or shaking might fix them more than if someone would start to talk to them.” (26 years old woman with secondary school attainment, childless, unemployed)

The previously mentioned phenomenon is also striking, the most serious and most frequent abuse occurs in those families in which the men are unemployed but the women are not. Among them, almost every of the women reported some kind of abuse. In the rest of the categories, the violence against women is also common but it seems that this is less serious and frequent. Within domestic violence, the violence against women has significantly serious mental consequences. The abused women's answers to the question relating to their view on future reflected despondency, desire to escape or total resignation. Most of the answers reflect hatred, vulnerability and many wished their partner's death.

“A rat! If the law didn't punish it, he would be rotten already in the ground from my hands” (44 years old woman, has primary school attainment, has 4 children, works as a cleaning lady)

“Poor women get the slaps, what can they do? They might poison and tell that the men might have drunk or eaten something somewhere. Some would deserve it.” (39 years old woman, has primary school education attainment, has 4 children and receives subsidy for child care)

For our final, summarizing questions the women did not give any positive adjective to describe their partners, many of them considered their partners as parasites and questions what they are needed for at all. They think if they were single, their lives would be easier, better and more balanced than currently with their partners. However, solving separation seems to be impossible, their vulnerability, damaged social and family relationships do not let them escape from their situation.

“...If this keep going like this, then I would like to live alone rather, I just can't manage it because I can't maintain a lodge from this little salary. This is the problem so I always have to take the quarrels all the time.” (52 years old woman, has primary school attainment, has 2 children, works as a cleaning lady)

“I thought about moving and living separately too but there is a problem, I have nowhere to go. He doesn't move because the apartment is common and I won't move out of it because I am the one who worked for it. I thought about divorce but we can't because we don't have money and be told he won't move if we divorce because he has good place here.” (30 years old woman has secondary school attainment, has 1 child, receives subsidy for child care)

4. The effects of conflicts and abuse on sexual relationships. The characteristics of sexual attraction among the women

The described above has serious consequences on the sexual relationships between the partners as well. According to Pongráczné & S. Molnár's [5] research results, balanced sexual life is significantly important criteria for people who are satisfied with their lives; indigent people or who classify themselves into the lowest

class, do not think the quality the quality of sexual life to be important. As the authors noted, as a result of experiencing marginal situation the strive for the pleasure that is easiest to get is reduced

Although, we only asked only women in this study, our results totally confirms the correlations above. We need to add that many interviewees answered restrained with one or two words only, shyly, moreover, some of them reacted angrily and in some cases, the women were not willing to talk about this topic. We need to tell that in the lives of women living in extreme poverty, the communication that makes sexuality taboo, that is, rooted in the past has great effect on them so it makes our task harder to discover the situation thoroughly.

“People say, if someone has everything and usually live in better living conditions then her sexual life might be better.” (45 years old woman has secondary school attainment, has 3 children, unemployed)

It is very typical that man and woman do not discuss issues relating their sexuality; it is still a taboo between them.

As we mentioned previously, human needs are depended on various values and preferences and built up hierarchical in everybody. We also presented that according to Buda and Szilágyi's theory [2], the sexual-erotic (tenderness and mutual pleasure seeking) needs are on the third level, right above the need for appreciation and respect. Many things result from it. Firstly, in order to have the need for tenderness and mutual seek for pleasure to be formulated as need, the needs on the below levels should be met, that is, not only the need for security but for appreciation and respect too. In the previous subparagraphs we presented that these are not men in the case of the vast majority of women while in the case of men, they are.

As a consequence, in a significant period of the women's lives (thus forcibly in the men's too) the forms of sexuality that strongly based on mutuality is pushed into the background. However, the attitude that consider sexual intercourse as a men-right and women-task gets amplified:

“I didn't really want but he is a man and made of man. I thought if I don't let he will go out with somebody else. I was fear for him. I knew he was going out with someone. I had my reasons for my fear, later it turned out what happened! Yes, it happened many times that he forced me to have sex with him. If this was punishable, my husband would be.... But it is not a compliment, it's our fate. It's the women's task.” (32 years old women, has vocational school attainment, has 2 children, works as seamstress)

“I didn't dare to talk back and rather ... hhh. Well yes, I let many times because I could be left alone then, I felt humiliated because I couldn't do anything. Not to mention when he almost gauged out my eye and I said I fell on the corner of the fridge. Of course, the ophthalmologist knows the truth. I almost went blind because of that bastard. I hate that bastard for this.”(48 years old women, has primary school attainment, has 2 children, living on disability pension)

These situations are mostly constituted to be rape but the women do not consider it as rape regardless of that they get into degrading and vulnerable situation. Within this perception, the attitude appears that the women “punish” men who do not take care of their families by not willing to have sex regularly. As they say, the men do not fulfill their duties so they do not fulfill the women’s “duties”.

“Sexual life? We don’t have any! He would expect but I don’t ... since he doesn’t take care of the children. (39 years old women, with primary school attainment, has 4 children, receives subsidy for child care)

For all these, we have to take account that this attitude is amplified by the fact that the partners of these respondents are alcoholic and in some case it is accompanied by addiction to gaming, moreover, some mentioned that their partners have someone to have sex with. According to the majority of the women’s reports, the sexual harmony – if they had – disappeared from their lives and their husbands do not attract them anymore. We found many reasons for it, including the mutual estrangement resulting in that sex is not a part of their lives anymore:

“Well, what can I say? In the last 4 years, poor, frankly, we haven’t slept together for two years. There is no problem about it. I don’t go out and my husband doesn’t go out to find someone.” (45 years old, has primary school education, had 9 children, unemployed)

“There is no such problem because since my daughter was born two years ago, we haven’t had sexual life.” (34 years old woman, has diploma, has 1 child, unemployed)

The other reason has completely different nature and relates to the women’s sexual attitude. As we described above the strict traditions and rearing transmitted for them that they are not allowed to express and have to oppress their sexual interests and desires. Their childhood was characterized by this strict and in their adulthood, it resulted in that they did not learn and feel shame to formulate their needs to their partners so they are in a passive role in their relationship. The majority of men are fine with it but for some men it causes dissatisfaction and conflict.

“Well truth to be told, that’s all, because he is tired, but yes, if I told him.. I never start, only he does. I need to be raped he says.” (44 years old woman, has primary school education, has 4 children, unemployed)

“Yes, I never want, he always wants because I am always tired.” (52 years old woman, has primary school education, has 2 children, cleaning lady)

The third and most common reasons which with the women explain their deteriorated sexual life are connected to the men’s negative change of behavior. The most commonly mentioned and the most difficult is the men’s alcoholism:

“Well, I don’t have relish anymore. It happened that he wanted but a shabby person like him don’t attract me, with his stinky from alcohol and neglects himself. This daily drinking and when he started beating and his constant stinky breath are something disgusting. Lying beside a drunk man every night is something disgusting.” (26 years old woman, has secondary school attainment, childless, cleaning lady)

“Sure there’s a conflict! There is! I don’t sleep with a drunk man whose mouth is stinky and smells like a pub. Disgusting! Moreover, it happened that he came home crapped and peed himself. Phew! No! I haven’t sleep beside him for a while, I sleep with the children. In this small house, the smell of alcohol, what is it here. No! I don’t need! God forbid! We have quarrel that we don’t fuck anymore. He yells simply and the children just stare and cry then hide in the corner. They are living in constant terror. He always threatens me with beating, offends and humiliates me. He is sexually overheated. I told him to go out to the garden toilet and do something with himself if he can’t control himself. No, I don’t need! He can’t behave in front of the children he is an uncultured jerk. (35 years old woman, has vocational school attainment, has 3 children, receives subsidy for child care)

The other typical reason is rooted in that because the gaming addiction and alcoholism the men regularly risk the family’s safety and the tensions resulted from the existential uncertainty, that is, resentment, hate, anger resulted from blaming men significantly deteriorate sexual energies and sexual attraction:

“In the beginning it was harmonic but after he gamed our house away, the work of our life, how could it be harmonic? He became more and more violent and what is worse, he couldn’t perform because of the alcohol. He blamed me for it. But I don’t want to talk about anymore.” (53 years old woman, has vocational school attainment, has 4 children, disabled pensioner)

The third reason that has destructive power relating their sexual life is the violent and degrading behavior of the men.

“yes, we have conflicts because of it, because we don’t do so often like we used to. On and a half month ago we had had it every day but then we had a conflict when he hit men and I didn’t dare to tell my parents but because of the children I said okay and since that we haven’t had. And he comes that he misses it. He stopped saying this since I told he don’t attract me often he hit me and he told other things too, offended and humiliated me so since that we haven’t had. (25 years old woman, has primary school education level, has 2 children, unemployed)

The fourth reason for the bad sexual life was that the women mentioned the men’s occasional sex partners

“Sexual life, he lived his sexual life with prostitutes and that’s all. I was the fucking bitch, the decent women are always the fucking bitches, it happens that drunk alcoholic men see

everything conversely. ” (44 years old woman, has primary school attainment, has 4 children, cleaning lady)

It seems the situation of poverty and consequences of it results in that for most of the women, the sexuality is not a scene for satisfying emotional needs rather it become a task of the women just like the housework or it is just a n uncomfortable situation that they try to avoid. Their human relationships, emotional and sexual contacts are low quality, their every day are characterised by lack of love and almost total deprivation from sexual pleasures.

The examination on what mean problem for the women proved that the financial basement of the marriage or cohabitation has effect on the quality of family life and rise and persistence of conflicts. According to Buda and Szilágyi [2], a marriage can be considered successful if it is persistent and stable, meets the social expectations, the people living in it are satisfied with it and consider it good quality and these reflected by their attitude and behaviour towards each other. The expectations for the marriages can be different in each class of the society but the subjective criteria depend on personal expectations and needs that are determined by different values and preferences. Like the theory of exchange, the theory of value-balance considers the essence of the marriage in the exchange between the partners, namely in mutual and continuous exchanges of the different biological and sexually, emotional and intellectual, economic and social, cultural and moral values. According to Lőcsei [4], based on these, the quality and stability of a relationship depend on whether these values overall are met and keep being balanced. Unlike the assumed conscious and rational calculation based on theory of exchange, the theory of balance takes into account the exchange category of instinct-emotion. It considers value-balance a continuously changing, dynamic state that has different level of satisfaction. The imbalance of value-balance threatens the persistence of the marriage. Based on these, we can conclude that the interviewed women's relationships are incredibly instable and they do not meet the social expectations or the women's expectations. As a result, their lives are characterised by extraordinary dissatisfaction that is reflected by their attitude toward men. The correlations of value balance point out that the previously mentioned sexual, emotional, intellectual, economic, social, cultural and moral exchange are not mutual, they are typically unilateral. In agreement with Lőcsei's findings, we can say that these values are not satisfied persistently and do not find balance in the cases of the examined women so this process is really a prolonged deficit state.

5. The characteristics of neurotic and depressive disorders among women

The women, who have to experience the prolonged deficit state of being mentioned above, have to take into count further consequences: neurotic and depressive disorders. These are realized mostly in constant change of mood, dejection, anxiety, headaches, sleeping disorders. According to the correlations of researches relating this, the scores of neurosis increase with age and it is already higher in women than in men. Depressive anxiety problems occur more often in middle aged or elderly women's lives than in men's, that has psychosocial reasons, according to the surveys on health. Psychological factors like hostile attitude, lack of life goals and the so-called dysfunctional attitudes and some certain ways of solving conflict (coping). Social background factors like marital status, attainment, income, occupation, problems relating to further studies and career and lack of social support [3]. It is apparent from the analysis that the effect of these factors are significantly different on

men and women. In addition, some attitudes also have effects on the balance that can turn to be dysfunctional in many cases. Kovács & Jakab & Kopp author trio refers to the study that has seven values system earmarked to measure: need for external appreciation, need for love, need for performance, perfectionism, rightful expectations of the environment, need for omnipotence (feels responsible for everything) and external control. The results show, apart from the need for performance all the dysfunctional attitudes are typical of the women and over the age of 40 they get more frequent. Further result is that the lower educational level creates significantly higher scores of depression for both men and women. However, we can also say that while there is no significant difference between men and women under the age of 40 regarding educational level, there is significantly higher rate of women have primary school or lower educational level than among men over the age of 40. The analysis of income showed similar results as well, that is, those people who have so little income that cannot buy basic food for life, have significantly higher score of depression regardless of gender, but it can be told that this problem is more frequent in the case of women in every age group. This difference is significantly in middle age and elderly. Being at home and unemployment create high scores of depression. Particularly interesting the examination of the extent of social support, that is, in a difficult life situation a person who from and what extent of support can she/he expect. Our results showed that less extent of social support caused higher score of depression for both men and women. However, the women disadvantage can be observed here too, in the correlation that the middle aged and elderly women can expect less support. The support was examined in this research through the followings :examined through the following: parent, child, spouse, partner, relative, friend, neighbor, co-worker, classmate, church groups, clubs, civic groups to, caring professionals.

We did not examine these effects directly among the interviewees but based on the results above we can conclude that the situations of women living in extreme poverty are made more difficult due to neurotic disorders. Among the psychological factors, we highlight hostile attitude, lack of life goals and ways of solving problems (copying) that cause anxiety problems for them. The reasons relating social background factors are mainly connected to the lack of social support.

“I got into hospital because I just couldn’t cope with that one day to the next I lost what I studied for what I liked to do. I was in a moderate depression I went to treatment for a half a year, finally I was cure: it was hard to be honest, because I still feel lump in my throat when I think of what happened. It hurt me so much and everything went wrong at home, I lost the stability, I was alone much so I can’t say that the family was with me because they had their things to do, had to go to work and I had to cope with it alone. When I went somewhere and apply a job to find a job soon. I was rejected because they wanted somebody younger. It was like his for a half of a year, then I noticed the pills help” (46 years old women, has vocation, has 2 children, unemployed)

The low educational level, small income that threaten existence security, higher age, being at home and unemployment are much more significant risk in the case of women, presumably, there often women’s situations more worse than that of men.

6. Conclusions and Summary

In sum, it is apparent from the women's responses that the alcohol is a significant source of conflicts in the families and as a result, maintaining emotional and financial stability is harder for the majority of them. The abuse of alcohol changed the men's ways and caused distortions of the personality that are ruined the roles developed in the family's systems. Vast majority of these families are unable to fulfil the most important functions because they cannot provide the satisfaction for emotional need, safety, stability and security for the members. Las but not least, the excessive alcohol abuse caused behavioural change among the men that – as Buda [1] wrote – resulted in aggressive behaviour, insufficient family communication, isolation of relationship.

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