



Impact Of Almajirai Involvement In Violent Crimes In North-Western Nigeria: Implications For Counselling

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ABSTRACT

Qur'anic school education or Almajirci form of learning as the term is sometimes called is a very crucial form of education in any Muslim society. This form of education, aims at an early stage, to inculcate into the mind of children the fear of Allah (SWT), the love to follow the teachings of the Prophet (SAW) and in short to imbibe all praiseworthy behaviors and shun all conducts that are universally and religiously considered bad. The students as well as products of this noble form of education are supposed to be refined in conduct and exemplary leaders in the society. Current observable conducts among some these students as well as the products of this noble form of education behaving contrary to these values that they are expected to imbibe raise serious concern to all stakeholders in the education industry. It is based on this concern that this study investigated the resultant consequences or impacts that Almajirai involvement in violent crimes in the North-Western Nigeria will precipitate on the region. The research adopted a descriptive survey approach method. It raised research questions on forms and consequences of prevalence of violent crimes among the Almajirai in the study area. The population of the study consists of over four million (4m) Almajirai students that are scattered across the seven (7) North-Western Nigerian States of Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa. A total of eight hundred (800) Almajirai students and twenty (20) Almajirai Malams were sampled and purposively selected from four States of the zone, namely Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara and Katsina, for the study. An Almajirai Violent Crimes Questionnaire (AVCQ) and Interview Schedule for the Almajirai Malams was developed and used in the research. The instrument (AVCQ) was validated by experts from the Department of Education, Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto. Using a method of test retest method of ascertaining reliability, a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.72 was obtained and therefore the instrument was adjudged to be reliable. In the analyses of the generated data, descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used. The results obtained from the analyses revealed among other things that Almajirai involvement in violent crimes in North-Western Nigeria led to series of pre- and post-election violence, insecurity, manipulation of Almajirai by corrupt politicians, prevalence of juvenile delinquency among the group, recruitment by religious extremists like Boko Haram and banditry and the likes. The study discussed the counseling implications of these consequences on North-Western Nigeria and roles that the professional counselors can play. Finally, the study recommended that Almajirai should be given desired attention by government, traditional rulers and village heads; enlightenment programme should be provided to address the growing rate of violent crimes such as arm banditry, herdsmen attacks, kidnapping, among others.

Keywords: Almajirai, Education, consequences, Qur'anic school, begging, violent, crimes

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INTRODUCTION

Almajirai (singular, Almajiri) is a term used to describe beggars, more especially the school age and teen-aged beggars; otherwise known as the “street kids” and “wanderers”. Almajiri system refers to a traditional method of acquiring and memorizing the Glorious Qur'an in Hausa/Fulani community. Boys (Almajirai) at early ages are sent by their parents or guardians to the far and near villages, towns or cities for the search of the Qur'anic education under an Islamic scholar called Malam. This form of school existed for centuries and it provided training and produced scholars, teachers, Khadis, Imams, preachers, and Jihad leaders like Usmanu Danfodiyo, Abdullahi b. Fodiyo, Muhammadu Bello, etc in this part of Africa. The Almajirci school system (Almajiri system education) has undergone a very radical but negative transformation in recent years as a result of socio-economic and demographic changes. In the early days of this education system, seasonal migration of the students was from the cities and towns to the villages or settlements that are away from the cities and towns. This was anchored on the belief that in the villages, there was nothing that would distract the attention of the children nor adulterate their conduct and as such, they would devote their time to reading and recitation of the Holy Quran. In those days, the children would be seen under trees, on the farm, concentrating on their studies.

However, due to degeneration the Almajirai school system in recent years, the children are taken out of their villages and brought into the cities where, in addition to attractions, they spend most of their time begging for alms. They move place to place in the markets, motor parks, restaurants, beer parlours and around churches in pathetic conditions begging for food and money. Little or no time is given to Quranic studies which was the main objective for which they were taken out of their homes. Almajirci has thus metamorphosed into begging from where various negative behaviours are acquired. Lolo and Adiya (2019) while discussing the moral problems of begging being resorted to by Almajirai, gave five problems like aimless roaming of streets, begging to meet daily needs of feeding, acquiring immoral behaviours like stealing and homosexuality, withdrawal from the Qur'anic schools and joining of gangs and becoming victims of some people who engage in human ritual. Thus changes that Almajirci education system undergone in recent years has made the children to be abused. The practice provides a recruiting ground for criminals of various kinds and other shady behaviour such as inculcation in the children Area boys, theft pickpocket, drug abuse, narcotics. The children (Almajirai) are used by their Mallams to acquire wealth, daily and even nightly routines. They are involved in street and house to house begging for food, cloth and money, as well as doing menial jobs like washing plates, sweeping and washing clothes for others for little pay. Consequently, the Qur'anic learning becomes insignificant secondary pre-occupation (Ibrahim, 2011). This is because according to Liman, Adamu and Ibrahim (2019), they are being employed to carry out mini-domestic works to the detriment of their primary objectives of learning the Qur'an.

This article intends to present the findings of a research on the impact or consequences of the current trends of Almajirai involvement in perpetration of violent crimes in North-Western Geo-political Zone of Nigeria

Statement of the Problem

Involvement of Almajirai students in violent crime must be a source concern for all sensible citizens of Nigeria particularly those of Northern Nigeria. This involvement Almajirai in the perpetration violent crimes has made the Almajirai schools environment unsafe for teaching, learning and researching. In the early 1970s and 1980s, when the Almajirai system was not infiltrated by degeneration, the school environment was safe and secured for learning and physical development of children. Today the situation has changed drastically and the school environment has become a source of worry, anguish and misery for Almajirai and their Mallams (teachers), students and parents and extension, the whole society. Khalid (2000) observed that Almajirai schools change from its origin or purpose to the centre of violence, torture and unwarranted intimidation executed by the seniors to the junior one. They plan and execute violent crimes like stealing in neighbouring houses. Their conduct deviates from the philosophy upon which the Qur'anic school education was anchored. Their conduct is tough; they behave tough and can easily go to fellow Almajirai schools to perpetuate evil. This malady appears to have rendered Almajiri schools unmanageable with pervasive violence perpetuated by Almajirai especially if the population is high. It is

not yet known empirically the impact or consequences of Almajirai students' involvement in violent crimes on the people of North-Western Geo-political Zone, however, it is clear that Almajirai are linked with many violent crimes being perpetrated in the region. It is against this background that the present study was undertaken to examine critically the violent crimes Almajirai students commit and their resultant consequences on the inhabitants of North-Western Nigeria and Nigeria as a whole. Therefore, this study investigated the involvement of Almajirai in violent crimes, their forms and impact or consequences on the people of North-Western Nigeria. Thus, the following research questions were raised:

- What are the forms of violent crimes prevalent among Almajirai students in North-Western Nigeria?
- What are the consequences of Almajirai (students) involvement in violent crimes on the people of North-Western Nigeria?
- What are the ways that counseling service can help to reduce or avert some of the severe harmful consequences?

Theoretical Framework

It is very important to note that the Almajiri population in Northern Nigeria is high and must therefore not be neglected. Hassan and Muhammad (2019) noted that as of 1999, the population of Almajirai in Northern Nigeria was 9.5 million. This means that by now, the number must have exceeded 10 million. In the North-Western Geo-political Zone of the country consisting of Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa States, the Almajirai population is currently estimated to be over four million who do not benefit from the existing formal and non-formal education. The population keeps increasing while provision of schooling facilities for them continues to degenerate. This is in tandem with the "Youth Bulge Theory" propounded by a German social scientist, Gunnar Heinsohn and popularized in the 1990s by the American political scientists, Gary Fuller and Jack Goldstone (Aghedo and Ake, 2013). This theory according to Schomaker, in Aghedo and Ake, (2013) states that:

Societies characterized by a youth bulge (a burgeoning youth population) while simultaneously facing limited resources and, in particular, a lack of prestigious positions for 'surplus' youngsters—i.e. the third, fourth, fifth etc. born children—are much more prone to social unrest and acting belligerent towards their neighbours than those societies without these demographic stressors

This theory is anchored on the premise that countries with weak political institutions but with rapid population growth are vulnerable to social unrest, rebellion, and violent conflicts because of unemployment which will make male youth to seek for socioeconomic advancement through extralegal means. Most sub-Saharan African countries, Asia, the Middle East, and the Pacific Islands that have a large youth population fit into the theory (Aghedo and Ake, 2013).

Youth Bulge is particularly suitable in relation to Africa because of the unemployment and poverty profile of the continent and the fact that the youth constitute more than 35 percent of the population. The population of people less than 14 years is even over 44 percent in such countries as Sierra Leone (Bricker & Foley, 2013) and in Northern Nigeria most of the Almajiri pupils are within that age range.

In Nigeria, a country that is characterized by corruption, poor governance, ineffective public institutions, and an attendant high rate of unemployment and poverty, the youth often use their energy and vigor for antisocial and violent purposes. Almajiri students are part of the unemployed youth and as seen above, constituted a sizeable proportion of the youth population in Nigeria. Therefore, this theory is particularly relevant to this research as it portrays the situation of Nigeria that is characterized by weak political institutions which is saddled with social unrest, rebellion, and various forms of violent conflicts perpetrated by unemployed male youth. With millions of undergraduate unemployed couple with tens of millions of pupils out of schools of both formal and informal education, and roaming about, the dangers potentially awaiting Nigeria and the North-west particularly is colossal. Therefore, the relevance of this research is glaringly clear.

METHODOLOGY

The design adopted in this research was descriptive survey research method. The population of this study comprised of over four million Almajirai students scattered across the seven (7) North-Western Nigerian States of Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano and Jigawa. A sample of eight hundred (800) Almajirai students and twenty (20) Malams (teachers) were randomly selected from Almajirai schools in the study area as follows: Sokoto (200), Kebbi (200), Zamfara (200) and Katsina (200) while five (5) Malams were drawn from each of the four states. The instruments for the study were questionnaires titled "Violent Crime Questionnaire" (AVCQ) and Interview Schedule for Mallams developed by the researchers. The AVCQ consisted of two parts, A and B. Part A consisted of 12 items on the forms of violent crimes while Part B consisted of 10 items showing the resultant consequences of the involvement of Almajirai in violent crimes. The questionnaires were translated into Hausa language for the Almajirai students and their Malams (teachers) to easily comprehend. The scale was designed into modified Likert scale of Agree (1) and Disagree (2). The Interview Schedule was designed to solicit questions on the forms of violent crimes prevalent in the region and their consequences on the Almajirai Malams (teachers) and people of North-western Nigeria

The instruments were validated by experts from the Department of Education, Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto who evaluated the relevance of each item in the instrument based on the objectives. A test re-test method of reliability was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. A Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) of 0.72 was obtained using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20 and therefore, the instrument was adjudged to be reliable. Data from the field was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The results of the data obtained from the field are presented in the tables below. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. In the analysis, mean of 1.00 – 1.50 indicates levels of "Agreement" while mean 1.60 and above indicates level of "Disagreement". The forms of the crimes and their consequences as found out in the course of the research are shown as follows:

Table 1: Forms of Violent Crimes Prevalent among *Almajirai* Students in the Sampled States of North-Western Nigeria

Forms of Violent Crimes	Sokoto		Kebbi		Zamfara		Katsina		Grand Analysis of Sampled States	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Kidnapping	1.3500	.47817	1.6650	.47317	1.6550	.47656	1.8150	.38927	1.6212	.48538
Arm banditry	1.3600	.48120	1.5450	.49922	1.5850	.49396	1.7900	.40833	1.5700	.49539
Arson	1.4200	.49480	1.6750	.46955	1.5250	.50063	1.2150	.41185	1.4588	.49861
Thuggery	1.5050	.50123	1.0200	.14035	1.1350	.34258	1.2200	.41529	1.2200	.41451
Burglary	1.5300	.50035	1.1300	.33715	1.1950	.39719	1.2300	.42189	1.2712	.44488
Area boyism	1.4400	.49763	1.2550	.43695	1.2050	.40471	1.1050	.30732	1.2513	.43400
Rape	1.4550	.49922	1.8000	.40100	1.7200	.45013	1.6900	.46365	1.6662	.47185
Sexual assault	1.5300	.50035	1.8600	.34786	1.8600	.34786	1.7950	.40471	1.7613	.42659
Robbery	1.5500	.49874	1.7350	.44244	1.7050	.45719	1.8700	.33715	1.7150	.45170
Theft	1.3850	.48782	1.0000	.00000	1.0700	.25579	1.1200	.32578	1.1438	.35106
Assault	1.5800	.49480	1.7450	.43695	1.6900	.46365	1.1650	.37211	1.5450	.49828
Manslaughter	1.6150	.48782	1.9800	.14035	1.9300	.25579	1.8950	.30732	1.8550	.35232

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022. Note: mean 1.00 – 1.50 indicates levels of “Agreement” while mean 1.60 and above indicate level of disagreement.

Table 1 above shows the forms of violent crimes prevalent among the *Almajirai* students of North-Western Nigeria. The table shows that the respondents agree that "Theft" (mean = 1.1438) was the most common violent crime among the *Almajirai* in the region while it was Kebbi State has the highest and followed by Zamfara. This was followed by "Area boyism" (1.2513), then "Thuggery" (1.2200), "Burglary" (1.2712) and "Arson" (1.4588). Also, as shown by the mean responses, it can be seen that "Manslaughter" (mean = 1.8550) was a crime that was strongly opposed to be prevalent among the *Almajirai*. This was followed by "Sexual Assault" (1.7613), "Robbery" (1.7150), "Rape" (1.6662), "Kidnapping" (1.6212), "Arm Banditry" (1.5700) and "Assault" (1.5450). The mean number of respondents who disagreed that violent crimes such as arm banditry, assaults and kidnapping also indicates that these crimes cannot completely be dissociated from the *Almajirai* of North-Western Nigeria. From the interview schedule conducted on the *Almajirai Mallams* (teachers) of the North-Western Nigeria, it was further affirm that some of the *Almajirai* partake in fighting, stealing in the market, assault, smoking of Indian hemp, banditry and area boyism. Also, it was reported by one of the *Malams* of the case of *Almajiri* who is a member of the dreaded blood lusty gang Boko haram. Majority of the *Mallams* interviewed also pointed out that these violent crimes especially fighting, stealing in the market, assault, smoking of Indian hemp, banditry and area boyism is so prevalent among the *Almajirai*.

Table 2: Consequences of *Almajirai* Students Involvement in Violent Crimes in the Sampled States of North-Western Nigeria

Consequences	Sokoto		Kebbi		Zamfara		Katsina		Grand Analysis	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Pre and Post-election violence	1.2800	.45013	1.0000	.00000	1.0600	.23808	1.6100	.48897	1.2375	.42582
Insecurity	1.3850	.48782	1.3350	.47317	1.2750	.44763	1.6450	.47971	1.4100	.49214
Prevalence of juvenile delinquency	1.4300	.49632	1.4300	.49632	1.4300	.49632	1.6300	.48402	1.4800	.49991
Destruction of lives and property	1.5250	.50063	1.4850	.50103	1.3550	.47971	1.7850	.41185	1.5375	.49890
Manipulation by corrupt politicians	1.6250	.48534	1.0650	.24714	1.2250	.41863	1.7500	.43410	1.4162	.49324
Recruitment by religious extremists	1.5550	.49821	1.6100	.48897	1.5300	.50035	1.2650	.44244	1.4900	.50021
Sustaining of fatal injury or death	1.4900	.50115	1.6100	.48897	1.6050	.49008	1.2250	.41863	1.4825	.50001
Arrest by correctional agencies	1.4900	.50115	1.7100	.45490	1.6750	.46955	1.8900	.31367	1.6913	.46227
Total abandonment of school	1.5200	.50085	1.6650	.47317	1.7850	.41185	1.8500	.35797	1.7050	.45633
Looting of properties during disaster	1.5100	.50115	1.7700	.42189	1.6650	.47317	1.9250	.26405	1.7175	.45050

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022. Note: mean 1.00 – 1.50 indicates levels of “Agreement” while mean 1.60 and above indicate level of disagreement.

Table 2 shows the consequences of *Almajirai* students' involvement in violent crime in North-Western Part of Nigeria. From the table, pre- and post-election violence (1.2375) is the major crime perpetrated by *Almajirai* of North-Western Nigeria. This is followed by Insecurity (1.4100), Manipulation by corrupt politicians (1.4162), Prevalence of juvenile delinquency (1.4800), Sustaining of fatal injury or death (1.4825) and Recruitment by religious extremists (1.4900). The respondents partially disagree that *Almajirai* involvement in violent crimes lead to Destruction of lives and property (1.5375). However, they strongly disagree that *Almajirai* involvement in violent crimes results in Arrest by correctional agencies (1.6913), Total abandonment of school (1.7050) and Looting of properties during disaster (1.7175). The result from the interview schedule shows that most of the *Mallams* believe that *Almajirai* involvement in violent crimes makes them to develop less interest in school and learning activities, which in turn undermine the image of the *Almajirai* who are being looked upon by the society as a nuisance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first research question of this study sought to determine the forms of violent crimes carried out by *Almajirai* of the North-Western part of Nigeria. From the findings in Table 2, it was shown that majority of the *Almajirai* participate in crimes such as Theft, Area Boyism, Thuggery, Burglary and Arson. This finding was supported by that of Khalid (2000) who observed that *Almajirai* schools, changed from its origin or purpose to the centre of violence, torture and unwarranted intimation executed by the seniors to the junior one. According to him, the *Almajirai* plan and execute violent crimes like stealing in neighbouring houses, talk tough, and behave tough and can easily go to other *Almajirai* schools from their own in a bid to perpetuate evil. This finding was also supported by Sati (2015) who stated that crimes such as kidnapping, arm banditry, thuggery, burglary, arson, area-boyism, rape, sexual assault, robbery, assault, manslaughter are potentially related directly or indirectly to the *Almajirai* and which have become predominant in the recent years. Also on the forms of violent crimes by *Almajirai* in North-Western Nigeria, it was reported by one of the *Malam* that in Zamfara state, an old *Almajiri* student was found among the bandits who kidnapped twin sisters who were about to marry in Dauranvillage. According to the *Malam*, the ex-student attended *Almajiri* school in Maiduguri, Borno state and later he joined the group of Arm bandit in Shinkafi Local Government of Zamfara State. They were caught in 2018 by Police. Also, in Funtua Local Government, Katsina State in the year 2007, there were cases of groups of *Almajirai* in several buses holding pieces of wood and cutlasses, shouting and singing a song of politician slogan along Bypass road. This is a pure evidence of *Almajirai* manipulation by politicians for political thuggery in the state.

Research question two focused on the consequences of *Almajirai* involvement in violent crimes in the North-Western Nigeria. This research pointed out that pre- and post-election violence is a major product of the *Almajirai* of North-Western Nigeria. The finding also linked insecurity, manipulation by corrupt politicians, prevalence of juvenile delinquency, sustaining of fatal injury or death and recruitment by religious extremists to be the consequences of *Almajirai* partaking in violent crimes in the region. This finding was supported by Winters (1987) who stated that between 1980 and 1985, Northern Nigeria witnessed four main religious crises and the participants in these riots were the *Almajiri*. In the 2004 religious crisis in Kano city, the violence unleashed on innocent residents was successful because the participants comprised mainly *Almajiri* (Human Rights Watch, 2005).

53% of the *Almajirai* in Sokoto State are from Niger Republic, while the state has 47% including neighboring state. The Kebbi state has two categories of students namely, international and national students. The international students refer to students from other countries like Benin Republic and Niger Republic while the national students are students from within Kebbi State and its neighbouring Nigerian states. In the state, *Almajirai* from Benin Republic makes up 37% of the total number of *Almajirai* and Niger Republic (33%) while Kebbi and neighbouring states take 30% respectively. Also in Zamfara state, the number of *Almajirai* students from Niger Republic occupy 21% of the population while Zamfara state and its neighboring state make up 79% of the population of *Almajirai* students. In Katsina State, 45% of the *Almajirai* are from neighbouring Niger Republic and Benin Republic while 55% are from within and neighbouring Nigerian states. As also shown in the age category of the *Almajirai*, it was revealed that

high number of *Almajirai* students are underaged between 5 – 10 years. All these point to the fact that there is lack of parental care and irresponsibility in the part of government. These statistics shows that many of *Almajirai* in North Western Nigeria are non-citizens of the country. This leaves a question to be asked how the immigration officers who have the responsibility of managing the influx of non-citizens in and out of the country to allow this to happen.

Counseling Implications to the Problem of *Almajirai* Involvement in Violent Crimes in North-Western Nigeria

Counselors need to educate the society at large on the consequences of *Almajirai* involvement in violent crimes and advise stakeholders to desist from such practices. Therefore, the group counseling technique is advocated in this research as a counseling measure to tackling the problem of *Almajirai* involvement in violent crimes in North-Western Nigeria. This can be done in the following ways:

1. The professional counselors should be acquainted with the objectives of Islamic teachings which broadly speaking, are to refine characters, follow the orders of Allah and His Prophet, doing acts that bring the people closer to Allah.
2. Enlightenment programme for the *Almajiri* Students, their *Mallams*, the traditional leaders of the various Muslim communities, parents and other relevant stakeholders. In other words, a counseling session that comprise of Government officials, NGOs, public servants, traditional rulers and *Almajiri* stakeholders should be organized by the professional counselors so as to enlighten them on the plight of the *Almajiri* child and the consequences of neglecting these plights. The causes of the present predicaments of the *Almajiri* students should highlighted and the impact on the society.
3. Need for the professional counselors to lay emphasis on the situation of the *Almajirai* child and make people to come up with measures to remedy the unfavourable situation of *Almajirai* child. They should stress that *Almajirai* should be given equal right to proper education and basic human rights through provision of proper security and be included in various government educational policies.
4. *Almajiri* students on graduation are to be Imams, Qadis (judges), scholars as well as assisting government in the implementation of government policies in their local communities and not beggars, area boys, bandits, thieves, armed-robbers and other negative behaviors.

CONCLUSION

This research investigated the impact or consequences of *Almajirai* (students) involvement in violent crimes in North-Western Nigeria and providing counseling measures to the phenomenon. It resides on the forms and consequences of these violent crimes. North-Western Nigeria has witnessed a rapid surge in the rate of violent crimes in recent years (Sati, 2015). These crimes range from kidnapping, arm banditry, thuggery, burglary, arson, area-boyism, rape, sexual assault, robbery, assault, manslaughter, etc. However, crimes such as theft, area boyism, thuggery, burglary and arson have been shown to be associated with the *Almajirai* of North-Western Nigeria. The consequences of these outcome has been shown to leads to pre- and post-election violence, insecurity, manipulation of *Almajirai* by corrupt politicians, prevalence of juvenile delinquency, sustaining of fatal injury or death of *Almajirai* child and recruitment by religious extremists like Boko haram.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of study and the conclusions thereof, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) Since this research has shown that crimes such as theft/stealing, area boyism, thuggery, burglary and arson are most prevalent crimes committed by *Almajirai* of North-Western Nigeria, it is therefore recommended that there should proper supervision and provision of basic needs such as food, clothes, other necessary materials as well as more favourable and conducive learning environment by government and *Almajirai* stakeholders.
- (2) *Almajirai* involvement in violent crimes in North-Western Nigeria has resulted in series of pre- and post-election violence, insecurity, manipulation of *Almajirai* by corrupt politicians,

prevalence of juvenile delinquency, recruitment by religious extremists like Boko Haram. Therefore, the issue of *Almajirai* should be given its desired attention by government, traditional rulers and village heads so as to manage the growing rate of violent crimes such as arm banditry, herds men attack, kidnapping, etc.

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