



The Value of Children for Low Income Families in Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

Economics is a factor that influences the decision to have children. The cost of caring for, raising, and educating children is one aspect of managing births. However, in rural farming communities, families have the advantage of having many children. They can function as family workers in the agricultural sector. Gunungkidul Regency, a rural area of Yogyakarta with a majority agricultural sector, has a total fertility rate of 1.96 (2020 Population Census). Around 15.6 percent of Gunungkidul residents are below the poverty line. Why does Gunungkidul Regency have a low fertility phenomenon while the environment and population characteristics allow for high fertility? The results of a qualitative study of low-income families show that they do not want to inherit poverty. Limited access to education, loss of happy childhood times because they have to work, and the destruction of hopes and desires. This condition is very burdensome and hurts feelings. Education is one way to avoid being poor. The hope is to get a formal job with a steady income. Limiting

births is a way for children to get maximum education. The geomorphological conditions of the mountains cause limited accessibility when there is no means of transportation. Parents do not expect their children to return the favor in the future. Caring for and raising children responsibly is a parent's obligation. Determining the number of children to have depends on the wishes and abilities of the parents.

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty, as defined by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2024, signifies the economic incapacity to satisfy fundamental food and non-food necessities, gauged through expenditure. Consequently, the poverty line denotes individuals with an average monthly per capita expenditure below this threshold. The Poverty Line (GK) is composed of the Food Poverty Line (GKM) and the Non-Food Poverty Line (GKNM). Thus, individuals with an average monthly per capita expenditure below the poverty line are classified as impoverished. For instance, if an occupation's daily expenditure amounts to only 2100 kilocalories per capita per day, based on a predefined package of essential food items outlined by the BPS, encompassing 52 types of commodities such as grains, tubers, fish, meat, eggs, milk, vegetables, nuts, fruits, oils, fats, and others, the population can be classified as impoverished.

The discourse on poverty holds significance as a country cannot achieve sustainable development without meeting the standards set by the United Nations, specifically the goal of eradicating poverty. According to the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) in 2024, for a nation to ensure the prosperity of its citizens, it must fulfill the 17 goals outlined at the UN General Assembly in September 2015. Globally, the aspiration by 2030 is to leave no one behind in the pursuit of prosperity. The 17 goals encompass:

(1) No Poverty; (2) Zero Hunger; (3) Good Health and Well-being; (4) Quality Education; (5) Gender Equality; (6) Clean Water and Sanitation; (7) Affordable and Clean Energy; (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth; (9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure; (10) Reduced Inequalities; (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities; (12) Responsible Consumption and Production; (13) Climate Action;

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(14) Life Below Water; (15) Life on Land; (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions; (17) Partnerships for the Goals.

According to Medianti (2023), Yogyakarta (DIY) is the poorest province in Java. In the same year, 2023, there were reports labelling Yogyakarta as a city with a low total fertility rate (TFR) or low birth rate. Ahdiat (2023) states that Yogyakarta is the second province with a low TFR after DKI Jakarta. A low TFR indicates that fewer women are having children or that the average number of children born to a woman during her reproductive age is low. While a low TFR may initially seem negative, in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it can have positive implications. A lower TFR can lead to improvements in individuals' quality of life, as smaller families often have better access to education, healthcare, and reduced pressure on natural resources and the environment.

The ideal family size is becoming smaller. In Indonesia, the practice of limiting family size to two children is still prevalent. Historically, having many children was highly valued, as reflected in the slogan "banyak anak, banyak rezeki" (many children, much fortune) during the Suharto era from 1959 to 1996. Children were considered prestigious, and married couples without children were viewed as less than ideal. However, with advancements in science and technology, Indonesia, once among the most populous nations alongside China, now faces challenges associated with overpopulation. Without corresponding investments in high-quality human resources, overpopulation can hinder development, and Indonesia may lag behind other countries.

The quality of human resources serves as an indicator of a nation's level of development. With a large population, the Indonesian government has undertaken various initiatives to manage population growth. Faruqi (2022) explains that since 1970, Indonesia has established a population control institution known as the Family Planning Organization or Family Planning Program (BKKBN). During this period, the program aimed to control population growth through the introduction of contraception and initiatives to improve public health. Population growth was directly linked to the health outcomes for women and children, with high rates of maternal and child mortality.

Contrary to popular belief, Rahmadhony et al. (2021) note that the government did not have specific population control policies during the Suharto regime. Instead, the focus was on transmigration, particularly in densely populated areas like Java and Madura. The slogan "banyak anak, banyak rezeki" (many children, much fortune) during the Sukarno era contributed to high population densities. However, Denada et al. (2022) consider this slogan to be a myth. Factors influencing individuals' desire to have children include perceived ideal family size, socioeconomic status, housing location, and educational attainment. Gallagher (2001) also highlights the emotional benefits of having children, as they strengthen family bonds and provide parents with a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

The concept of limiting family size, as encapsulated by the slogan "two children is enough," emerged during the Suharto regime around 1969. Faruqi (2022) notes that starting in 1970, programs were launched targeting both population control and healthcare improvements. This was crucial as Indonesia faced various diseases such as smallpox, tuberculosis, malaria, cholera, PES, and frambusia, while hygiene, sanitation, and healthcare facilities were inadequate. Reports indicated an imbalance between the number of hospital beds and the population, with a ratio of 8 beds per 1000 people in 1959-1965 (Faruqi, 2022). To address these challenges, the family planning program with the slogan "two children are enough" was introduced, signaling a commitment to reducing the total fertility rate (TFR).

TFR, as noted by Billari (2009), is linked to an individual's well-being and happiness. It is the parents' responsibility to foster positive family relationships, provide care and support to their children, serve as role models, and be creative educators. When the number of children aligns with the parents' capabilities and limitations, it can create an enjoyable and harmonious environment, thereby fostering positive relationships. Moreover, parents should not only meet their children's material needs but also allocate sufficient time for nurturing and engaging in meaningful conversations with them, fostering a friendship-like bond.

Contrary to common belief, having children does not always guarantee happiness. Brown (2007) suggests that child-rearing can decrease the happiness of the working-age population, especially due to the increased financial and emotional burdens, particularly during the early stages of child-rearing.

Plotnick (1997) further emphasizes that the decision to have children is complex, particularly for economically disadvantaged families, as children can add financial and societal burdens. To break the cycle of poverty, Plotnick (1997) argues that governments must implement policies that support poor families and children, such as providing parental subsidies and childcare support services.

Gunungkidul is a mountainous karst area dominated by the agricultural sector with poor socio-economic conditions and low total fertility rates. Meanwhile, theoretically children can function as family labor which allows families to have more than two children. Or in other words, the presence of children is positive for the family. Why do the facts about the number of children in families in Gunungkidul not match existing theories?

2. METHOD

This study uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative method was used to process data from the Indonesian Household Life Survey (SAKERTI) or the Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS). The Survey of Aspects of Indonesian Household Life is a detailed survey of households, communities, and facilities conducted in developing countries by RAND (Research and Development), in collaboration with research institutions in each survey. SAKERTI is a comprehensive longitudinal survey of Indonesian households and is the most comprehensive survey ever conducted in Indonesia. The sample taken from the data is the households of Yogyakarta Special Region Province in 2022. The sample used in this study is 2022 households. After the data cleaning process, the respondents that are usable for this study are 2,990 households.

The qualitative aspect of the study focuses on understanding the significance of children for impoverished families. This was achieved through in-depth interviews with residents of Yogyakarta who belong to the category of poor families. In-depth interviews were conducted with 6 poor women based on education, employment, migration experience, and involvement in village and hamlet level women's organizations. As a comparison, interviews were also conducted with low fertility families with better economic capabilities (3 households). Interviews were also conducted with family improvement business group managers and family planning field officers. Data analysis was carried out using STATA 12.0, with the method of analysis employed being descriptive analysis.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Happiness, Children and Poverty

We started this discussion by examining the level of happiness among impoverished families. Nearly half of the poverty-stricken families surveyed in the IFLS expressed contentment. For the purposes of this study, "poor families" are defined as those whose incomes fall below the provincial average. It is assumed that families with incomes below this standard may not be financially secure.

Interestingly, financial constraints do not necessarily diminish happiness. This implies that impoverished families may derive happiness from non-economic factors, referred to as subjective well-being. Happiness encompasses feelings of satisfaction, enjoyment, pleasure, and a sense of leading a meaningful life. The following excerpt illustrates a statement from a poverty-stricken family in Girisubo Sub-district, Gunungkidul Regency, Yogyakarta.

"Alhamdulillah, our children are able to pursue their education up to the district level (senior high school), and we are grateful that they have the opportunity to advance to the provincial level. We are willing to support whatever path our children choose. Our hope is that our children will not follow in my footsteps, limited in skills and only able to engage in traditional storytelling (Ngarit). By obtaining an education, they will have the opportunity to secure employment and, inshallah, achieve greater success than I have."

"I believe happiness is achieved through social interaction. It means being able to care for someone who is sick, visiting neighbours, attending religious gatherings (Pengajian), and maintaining good health. Being wealthy isn't necessary; money doesn't bring happiness. In my experience, having money often leads to illness and a lack of quality time with family. It can make one feel isolated."

Mardayati (2013) posits that happiness can be gauged through familial and societal structures. Spending time with family, engaging in interactions, and participating in community activities contribute

to an individual's happiness. Mardayati's (2013) research, conducted in the Pemulung area, illustrates how one's presence in society serves as a social validation that fosters happiness. It highlights a scenario where individuals possess equal rights and responsibilities within social contexts. Fulfilling social needs becomes a fundamental aspect of livelihood, albeit potentially accompanied by social burdens.

Table 1. Distribution of Happiness Levels of Poor Households in Yogyakarta Special Region Province

The Level of Happiness	N	%
Extremely unhappy	561	18,76
Unhappy	378	12,64
Happiness	1.851	61,91
Extremely Happy	200	6,69
Total	2.990	100

Source: IFLS 2022 (analyzed)

Putra (2019) explains that factors that influence individual happiness other than income are hope, faith, grateful behavior, health, social capital, and culture. The positive perspective suggests that gratitude is a form of revolutionary adaptation aimed at creating well-being and satisfaction in life. Thankfulness is the embodiment of moral behavior in accepting the realities of being alive. Happiness is related to the ability to manage emotions. Thankfulness is a condition of being patient and tawakal.

Happiness is something that is contemplated and desired with expectations. Purwitasari (2020) suggests that happiness can be observed through generosity and the ability to express gratitude. Being kind and helpful, and paying attention to the interests of others contribute to this. The value of assisting one another serves as positive capital for life, enabling the mobilization of social solidarity. This serves as a medium for confronting the challenges of changing times that endanger people's livelihoods.

Agricultural traditions necessitate farming communities to collaborate from sowing seeds and planting them to nurturing and harvesting crops. This collaboration characterizes agricultural life and fosters the development of social relations. According to Subagyo (2012), rural community life is defined by social practices passed down from generation to generation, focused on cultivating the land, planting, tending, and harvesting crops.

The ability to position oneself as an ordinary human being, complete with imperfections, and to express empathy and sympathy for others is crucial. This simplicity leads to a life of happiness. Additionally, the ability to be grateful and appreciate the gifts received, rooted in religious values, deepens the level of happiness. Happiness, however, can also be quantified by economic means. Nurvianti (2010) contends that for some individuals, happiness is linked to material possessions. The greater one's possessions, the happier they tend to be, echoing Roosevelt's statement regarding Flow theory from positive psychology. Individuals with higher incomes have greater opportunities to fulfill their desires, particularly those concerning goods and services. Furthermore, their financial capabilities often elevate their social status. Putra (2019) found that, on average, wealthy individuals report higher levels of happiness.

Thirty percent of families reported feeling unhappy. According to Gali (2021), the presence of children contributes to happiness through the free time spent with the family. Parents' lives are often consumed by work, leaving little room for leisure. This scenario is particularly common among impoverished individuals. The economic pressure exerts a significant impact on the psychology and emotions of parents. Women, while managing domestic responsibilities, strive to maximize their time by engaging in productive activities.

Here is an excerpt from a young mother (19 years old) with a two-year-old child. She resides with her in-laws in a relatively modest house measuring around 36 square meters. This young family, starting with an early marriage, relies on the husband's job as a satay skewer (bakso tusuk) seller. The uncertain income of her husband necessitates her to work diligently to sustain their livelihood.

“Even though I didn't finish high school due to having to drop out, I have managed to bake cakes and sell them at stalls. It's not a bad way to make a living. Additionally, I wash clothes for boarding students and some neighbors. I do all of this to ensure my child's happiness, just like other children. I hope my son doesn't end up like me; I hope he has a much better life. Hopefully, any mistakes made are mine alone.”

Similarly, a young mother in a favorable economic situation expressed similar sentiments. Their family's life is more stable because both the husband and wife are employed with a monthly fixed income. Blessed with one child, the family also views work as an obligation for parents to secure a livelihood for their children in the future. The parents aspire for their children to graduate from school and pursue

better careers than they have. Based on the life stories of two young families with different economic backgrounds, they share the same expectations for their children's futures, aspiring for them to surpass their own lives. Parents desire their children to be intelligent and capable. This intelligence encompasses cognitive abilities, spiritual awareness, and existential understanding. Novrinda (2015) elaborates that parents bear significant responsibility in guiding and educating their children, aiming for them to develop into independent, responsible individuals capable of confronting life's challenges in the future.

Children and Family Expectations

The key to a successful life is happiness. Consequently, whether we realize it or not, humans are constantly striving to achieve happiness. Happiness is attained by fulfilling life's needs, and there are various ways for individuals to achieve it. People work to earn money and pursue careers, while others form families to satisfy their need for love and affection. The interpersonal interactions within a family significantly impact the harmonious or disharmonious state of its members. A harmonious family is characterized by strong and positive relationships between spouses, resulting in well-adjusted children. Conversely, a family is considered disharmonious if one or more members experience conflict, tension, disappointment, and perpetual dissatisfaction with their circumstances and existence.

Based on the results of research conducted by the Frontier Consultant Group in 2007 (Wijayanti & Nurwiyanti, 2010), it is shown that among the six provinces in Indonesia, the happiest average population is in Central Java Province. The happiness index in Central Java reached 48.17, exceeding the Indonesian average index. This is followed by North Sulawesi (47.95), West Java (47.85), East Java (47.19), DKI Jakarta (46.20), and North Sumatra (46.12). Interestingly, despite lower income levels compared to those in DKI Jakarta Province, the average population living in Central Java Province displays higher happiness levels. This could be attributed to their lower expectations and the ingrained Javanese attitude of "nrima" within the community, which fosters a sense of calmness and acceptance towards existing conditions. Consequently, their lives are more relaxed, allowing them to appreciate what they have.

Expectations represent desired pleasures or ideas for the future. Nurniah (2015) suggests that individuals are motivated to pursue certain actions to achieve their goals if they believe that their efforts will lead to success. According to Pardede (2014), maternal education significantly influences mothers' expectations for their children. The expectations formed by mothers, based on their own education, are subsequently transferred to their children in terms of educational attainment. For instance, if a mother has attained a certain level of education, she expects her child to at least achieve the same level. It is evident that a mother's expectations play a role in shaping her child's educational achievements. Mothers experience happiness when their children fulfill these expectations.

The data processing results from IFLS 2022 indicate that families with higher maternal education tend to perceive the presence of children as adding more happiness compared to mothers with fewer children. There exists a correlation between women's education and their participation in the workforce. Women with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in employment, thereby possessing stronger financial capabilities. Children not only alleviate the family's economic burden but also enhance social status when families can afford to send their children to higher education. These parents are typically more prepared and mature upon entering marriage, having carefully assessed their socioeconomic circumstances to provide for their children's futures. Here is a statement from one housewife who is employed full-time and enjoys good economic conditions. She has two children who have attained higher education levels, as well as two adopted children who are currently in elementary and junior high school.

I was already working when I got married. Initially, I wanted to have four children. However, after the birth of my first child, my desire diminished because it wasn't easy to provide proper education for our children. Despite being civil servants with a fixed income, it wasn't sufficient for our needs. The arrival of the second child was more about fulfilling the parents' wish for the older child to have a younger sibling. After having two children, there was no intention of having more. As time passed, our financial situation improved. To make our home more comfortable, we decided to adopt one orphaned child and another child from our neighbourhood to assist with educational needs.

From the results of these interviews, conclusions can be drawn, first, the concept of "child" does not have to be a biological child. Happiness and excitement in a household can be filled with the presence of adopted children.

Adopted children who are raised well, do not discriminate, meaning parents act fairly, inshaallah, they will also love and respect us like our own children.

Second, the parents' ability to raise and care for children is the main consideration in deciding the number of children.

Having lots of children, both boys and girls, is probably every family's wish. Especially after the children grow up and are successful.... very proud. However, it is a process and requires time, energy and financial struggle. Parents are aware of that. Having a few children who are prosperous and successful is happier than having many children whose future life is unclear.

Thirdly, parents no longer consider the function of children in the household.

It is our obligation to raise and care for our children, so we don't need to demand that our children will behave the way we do in the future. One day children will have a family that they are responsible for. Thank goodness parents can help, if not, just pray, don't be a burden on them.

Table 2: Happiness Levels of Families Living Below the Poverty Line Based on Dependent Variables

The dependent variable	Number of Children 1-3 people	Number of children > 3 persons
	(%)	(%)
Total family	21,8	24,2
Extended family	24,0	23,3
Education	15,9	27,7
Wellbeing	15,1	9,6

Source: IFLS 2022 (analyzed)

Based on the table above, it can be concluded firstly, happiness is still measured by the presence of family members. Family happiness arises when household members live together. The desire to have children is generally greater than the number of children you have. The Demographic and Health Survey (2017) shows the desired total fertility rate of 2.3. Meanwhile, Yogyakarta's total fertility rate in the same year was 2.1.

Second, parents feel happy when they are able to send their children to the highest level of education possible. There is awareness that education is an effort to improve family welfare. There is hope that with higher education, children will have adequate income. Children's lives are expected to be better than their parents' lives. Expensive education costs cause parents to have to arrange their births or children have negative value for parents. Maslow, as described by Alex (2003), states that humans are motivated to fulfill their needs in life, which are organized in a hierarchy from the lowest or basic (physiological needs) to the highest (self-actualization). According to Maslow's theory, once basic needs are satisfied, the next level of need becomes dominant. The hierarchy of human needs proposed by Maslow includes physiological needs, security needs, social needs, and esteem needs.

The theory of wealth flow, as proposed by John Caldwell, suggests that the decision to have children is an economically logical one. Households with financial means may choose to have more children because each child ultimately contributes to the parents' wealth, provides security in old age, and contributes to prosperity in society. This implies that economically affluent families tend to experience greater happiness when they have many children, as having children provides them with an overall sense of life satisfaction.

In communities with lower economic capacity, however, an increase in the number of children often creates tension for women or mothers as they must divide their time between work and household responsibilities. According to Warell (2002), women work primarily out of economic necessity. Another contributing factor is higher education, which leads women to opt for employment. A third factor is the desire for greater appreciation and the opportunity to fulfill their potential.

Choudhury (2014) proposed a theory of subjective well-being utilizing a holistic approach. This holistic perspective involves quantifying the main components of overall quality of life. The theory posits that subjective well-being is comprised of four dimensions, namely Psychological Well-being, Physical Well-being, Social Well-being, and Spiritual Well-being.

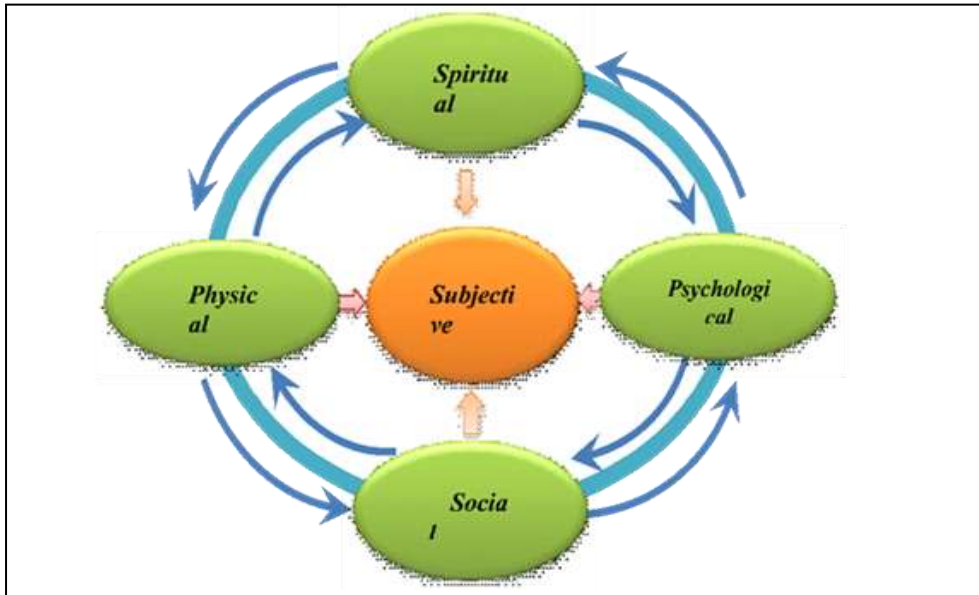


Figure 1. Holistic Model of Subjective Wellbeing

Figure 1 explains that subjective well-being can be seen from the physical, psychological, social and spiritual sides. Between aspects influence each other. For example, a society that is not physically prosperous does not mean that it is not psychologically prosperous. Spiritual abilities and social environment also influence the dynamics of subjective well-being.

The following is the opinion of one underprivileged family

We are happy because we have a house, can eat, all the children go to school and thank God their grades are good. We can also live like neighbors, of course we have no debt. Live as you are, sincerely, and always grateful.

Psychological well-being encompasses individuals' perceptions when subjectively assessing their lives. Physical well-being refers to the ability to perform basic activities, including lifestyle, nutritional coverage, and the balance between body, mind, and spirit. Social well-being relates to the ability to interact within society, encompassing interpersonal relationships, social networks, and community support. Lastly, spiritual well-being includes vertical relationships, which pertain to one's obedience to God, and horizontal relationships, which involve connections with the environment, others, and oneself.

According to Veenhoven (2012), subjective well-being is a reflection of both quality of life and happiness. In his view, happiness encompasses an individual's evaluation of their life, including cognitive assessment (life satisfaction) and affective assessment (mood and emotions). An individual is considered to have high happiness if they are content with their living conditions and experience numerous positive emotional states.

Subjective well-being is a perception that can encompass various factors such as utility, happiness, life satisfaction, and personal wealth (Landiyanto et al., 2010). It is characterized by individualized and emotional aspects that fluctuate according to mood and environment (Gönner et al., 2007). Gönner et al. (2007) suggest that subjective well-being is influenced by three core aspects that cover basic needs such as food, health, housing, and education. An increase in consumption in these essential areas typically leads to higher subjective well-being, and vice versa.

Nielsen et al. (2010) define subjective well-being as measurable life satisfaction across seven domains: standard of living, individual health, achievement, personal relationships, sense of security, relationships with society, and future security. Additionally, Alartseva & Barysheva (2015) argue that the subjective dimensions of well-being encompass moral and psychological aspects. Therefore, the subjective measurement of an individual's well-being relies on their own perceptions. Subjective well-being serves as a gauge of well-being based on each individual's assessment of their happiness and life satisfaction.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that an individual's response to poverty varies depending on the severity of poverty and their personal characteristics. Extreme poverty can traumatize parents, leading them to

decide to have fewer children, often just one, as they wish to avoid passing on poverty to their offspring. The hardships and unfulfilled rights experienced impact the decision to have children, as there is a fear of being unable to provide adequately for multiple children amidst economic struggles. Ensuring a bright future for their children is paramount for parents, and they view education as key to achieving this goal. Parents see education as a means to escape poverty and therefore limit the number of children they have. This study's findings align with previous research indicating that attitudes are heavily influenced by knowledge, experiences, and expectations. Bitter experiences and aspirations for a better life for their children, along with growing up in a large family setting, shape parents' decisions to limit the number of children they have.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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