

Maternity Leave Benefits Offered in Private Professional Colleges of Punjab: Nature, Extent, and Repercussions on Women Academicians

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Abstract

Maternity (usually) is an integral part of a woman's life. It does not solely define her; however, it forms the base of humankind. With the increased participation of women in the workforce, it is imperative to understand the impact of maternity on their work and career choices. Additionally, it is crucial to highlight the level of maternity benefits being offered to women academicians and analyse if they are conducive enough to sustain women academicians effectively in the workforce.

For our survey, we recorded responses from female academicians employed in private colleges of Punjab using questionnaire 1. Another questionnaire was shared with private professional colleges of Punjab which were included in NIRF 2018 and 2019. A low response rate was recorded from colleges, hence for analysis, data filled by women academicians was utilized. To maintain confidentiality no organization name has been mentioned in the paper. On analysis, data portrays noticeable gaps in maternity benefits being offered by these organizations which further has bearings on the future career decisions of women teachers post maternity. It was concluded from the study that in the absence of paid maternity leave, women academicians in the future have a higher tendency to let go of professional opportunities and choose easier assignments.

KEYWORDS: Maternity benefits; Maternal wall, Maternity benefit act (amendment), 2017, Maternity risk.

Introduction

When the Indian government in the year 2017 brought in the Maternity benefit act 2017, attention was drawn to a much-needed area of concern that involved a significant portion of the workforce. Currently, in India, women's participation in the workforce stands at 28.5 percent of the total female population as opposed to the 82 percent participation of their male counterparts (Catalyst, 2018). This has been an alarming trend as these figures are not in tune with the increased literacy rates in the women population. Hence, the situation reflected that the female population of the country was more educated but chooses or was forced to choose a non-employed status. Though the government has been trying interventions in several aspects, the situation has yet to take positive overturns.

On deliberation pertaining to reasons for such trends one of the factors that come forth was the maternity aspect of a woman's life, both pre-and post-maternity. A number of studies have established a significant relationship between women entering motherhood and their preference to have less challenging jobs or exit the work sector altogether.

Punjab in recent years has evolved as a major educational pivot as it has been home to sixteen private universities and numerous private institutes offering varied professional courses. The workforce in all such establishments has been dominated by women employees but mostly on operational or mid-managerial levels. Hence, employee engagement in the educational industry has been a crucial area (Namrata et al., 2016).

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For a long time, certain roles have been conventionally associated with individuals as per their gender. By tradition, males were expected to go to work and provide for the family whereas women were assumed to remain at home and primarily stay engaged with the housework. Even though women were performing some kind of work, the description associated with it was of that a “free service.” Although the housework performed by women had both societal and economical connotations, the same has never been recognized. The non-recognition of the housework performed by women can be due to the historic definition linked with work and the workplace (Patel, 1995).

This disparity at home also transpired in workplaces, more predominantly so when women entered maternal roles. It has been a common perception that women’s priorities change after having children and are expected to put their careers on seize, resulting in them not being offered more significant roles professionally. This inclination has not just been exclusive to India or the Asian continent but has been prevalent globally.

The transition of women into maternity has usually been a complex experience for them. It has been more pronounced for women when they were employed during this period (Bibring and Valenstein, 1976). An employed and expecting woman has been expected to navigate equally with their work and the changes associated with pregnancy, like physical and psychological changes. This transverse subsequently raised the need for both employer and family support during this time. Giving birth to a child necessitated a great deal of planning, recuperating, and caring for oneself and the child; hence the notion of maternity leave and benefits came into being.

Numerous organizations at the international level have consistently acknowledged the necessity for maternity protection of female employees at workplaces. In the year 1975, the International labor organization (ILO) embraced the “Declaration on Equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers” which included the right to maternity protection and family planning for employed women. The declaration concluded maternity protection and family planning as critical needs for employed women. Along similar lines, in 2004, ILO again highlighted this area when they adopted a resolution on maternity rights protection and the promotion of work-life balance. In both instances, ILO recognized that maternity leave had been a trigger for prejudice at workplaces which eventually led to inequality in work opportunities for employed women.

Earlier the legislation on disability in its provisions included maternity leave and its related aspects. The practice was so as there were no recognized legislations or guidelines related to maternity benefits. There were no clear statutory guidelines for organizations, and numerous women were either forced to avail themselves an unpaid maternity leave or had to lose their employment. Employed women who in an effort to safeguard their employment opted to work till their last trimester have had health-related repercussions, both maternal and child. (Bala, 2012).

It has been imperative to understand that a women’s physiology enabled the human race to be immortal; it was she who maintained the survival of the human race on our planet. However, organizations conceded this aspect of her physiology as a “maternity risk.” Employed women in the age group of 25 years to 33 years were sometimes deprived of justified opportunities as some organizations dreaded their absence due to maternity leave. This scenario at times forced some employed women to postpone both their marital and maternity commitments.

Employed women have been consistently encountering impediments pre and post their maternity leave. Before, the impediments have been the duration of the maternity leave, the financial aspects of the leave (paid or unpaid), and the job security associated with the leave. In instances

when employed women successfully attained a maternity leave, she was confronted with challenges like separation anxiety, abstruse job description, change of boss or position, low self-esteem, lactation support, and postpartum depression post their maternity leave.

Only a handful of organizations have had provisions to counter such impediments to assist women employees to easily transition into maternity without career compromises.

Consequently, the nature and extent of maternity leave over the years have had a significant influence on women's career trajectories, the wage gap, and their career progressions. This could have been a contributing factor to the scant women's presence in the top one third of the managerial triangle. Hence, it was dwelled upon in the paper.

Review of Literature

Existing research in the area of interest indicated that there was a paucity of organizations that offered effective and required maternity leave-related benefits. It was also observed from existing literature that the nature of maternity leave offered had an impact on employed women's career, family and health (Hyde et al., 1995; Woldfogel, 1998; Nowak et al., 2013)

Samuel and Elyse in 1994 in their research paper titled "Women and the Workplace: Accommodating the Demands of Pregnancy" examined the impact of work and profession on the choices employed women made pertaining to maternity and matrimony. They proposed the concept of gender neutrality in policies at workplaces. They considered the employer's aspect in the study as well and proposed partial allocation of financial benefits (given by governments in some western countries) given to new mothers to employers. The paper distinguishingly acknowledged the cost of providing maternity leave to employers, which was not just financial.

Ruhm in 1998 in his research paper titled "The economic consequences of parental leave mandates: lessons from Europe" studied the economic outcomes in nine European countries during the time period from 1969 to 1993 related to rights to paid parental leave. As usually most parental leave in western countries was exhausted by employed women, there was relatively a smaller group to study parental taken by men. Using these two groups, he analysed how changes in paid leave affected the gap between labour market outcomes based on gender. The paper majorly concluded that the right to parental leave was associated with increases in women's employment but depicted a relative reduction in their wages compared to their male counterparts at extended durations of time.

Williams in 2003 in her article titled "Beyond the Maternal Wall: Relief for Family Caregivers Who Are Discriminated Against on the Job" discussed the concept of 'maternal wall'. She highlighted it as a bias against women who explicitly or implicitly indicate future maternity. In her article, she recognized the existence of a wage gap between male and female employees due to maternity leave. She also recognized penalties experienced by employed women due to maternity.

Han and Jane in 2003 in their research paper titled "Parental Leave: The Impact of Recent Legislation on Parents' Leave Taking" evaluated trends of leave availing among male and female workers. They analysed the trend in the United States of America from 1991 to 1999. They studied it as a natural experiment where, the Family and Medical Leave Act 1993 introduced in the United States of America acted as the trigger event. The paper also attended to post maternity leave challenges faced by employees both in terms of post-leave career progression and the wage gap. The paper concluded a strong relationship between legislation and leave availing in female employees but relatively had little effect on male employees. They found that this in turn impacted female career progression and their relative wage levels.

In the Indian context, a study conducted by Bala Shashi in 2012 in her report titled “Implementation of Maternity Benefit Act” traced the evolution of the Maternity Benefit Act over the years in India. She parallelly also traced the evolution of maternity benefits being offered in private organizations in India. She explored different repercussions related to the provisions of the Maternity Benefits Acts and also tied them to different maternity benefits being offered by organizations. She explored repercussions in terms of physical, psychological, and financial aspects. She had recommended an elongation of the period of maternity leave from 12 weeks to 24 weeks, a recommendation that was adopted in Maternity Leave Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017.

On analysis of extant literature in the area of interest, it was observed that a relationship between organizational policies concerning maternity leave benefits and female employees’ post-maternity future career choices existed. The research had concretely established the existence of *maternal wall* that women employees faced and its further impact on their career trajectories. The studies significantly recognized a bias towards female employees post they indication of starting a family or when they start a family.

As most studies have been conducted in developed and western countries from which India as a country has both social and financial disparities. And since there is a disparity between maternity benefits being offered between nations, it is crucial to understand that these results cannot be completely applicable to India as a country. In addition, with the increase of women in the workforce, it is essential to perform similar studies in India to get a more comprehensive description of the research problem.

Objectives

1. To determine the nature and extent of maternity leave benefits being offered in private professional colleges of Punjab;
2. To explore the impact of maternity leave benefits being offered in private professional colleges of Punjab on women academicians employed in private professional colleges of Punjab.

Research Methodology

The research methodology defined to achieve the objective of the study plays a crucial role in solving the research problem. To comprehend the objectives of the paper, an explorative and descriptive research design was selected.

Sampling Methodology

The paper in consideration took sample from the population of female teachers working in private, professional colleges in Punjab. Private colleges were included in the sample framework of the said study due to the disparity in maternity benefits being offered. Government colleges were not included as government colleges’ offer uniform maternity leave. The maternity leave offered in government establishments is for six months and are paid in nature.

In addition, colleges that offer professional courses namely nursing, management, dental, medical, pharmacy, engineering, law, and bachelor of education were included in the sample. It was deliberately done so as these colleges have a more competitive work environment and offer wider opportunities for growth to academic employees.

For the purpose of the study, data was gathered from private institutions that were included in the NIRF list for 2018 and 2019. In addition, some non-NIRF institutions that were sister concerns

of the institutions were included in the NIRF list for 2018 and 2019. The time frame of the study is years 2018 to 2019.

It is imperative to understand that, almost 50 percent of the data is from NIRF institutes that were included in the 2018 and 2019 NIRF listing. There were a total of 12 institutes from where data for the study was collected. As it was purely for academic purposes, the identity of the institutes covered is not declared in any part of the paper. All respondents were assured confidentiality which has been maintained.

As there is no state level consolidated list of women academicians who availed maternity leave and then joined back, snowball sampling was utilized to collect responses from 200 women academicians. The researcher went to each institute to collect data. Owing to the pandemic few responses were also collected electronically via means of 'QuestionPro'.

Since the institutions included in the study were private establishments, they were not under the purview of Right to Information (RTI) 2005. Hence requests for information made to these institutions were mostly not honoured. For institutions that choose not to share information, data was compiled based on the responses of women academicians working in these institutes.

In addition, there were variations in responses reported by respondents from the same organization, hence, to accomplish the objective of the study some approximations were made.

Sample Size

Primary data from 200 women academicians who were currently teaching in different private professional colleges in Punjab was collected by means of both interviews and closed-ended questionnaires using a Likert scale. Apart from that, data was compiled pertaining to the extent and nature of maternity benefits offered in their institutes, in accordance to either information shared by respective institutes or from the questionnaires filled by women academicians employed in these institutes. Certain approximations were made.

Data Analysis Tool

Though the questionnaire covered 15 variables under four areas, namely financial, psychological, physical, and career-related, for the purpose of this paper variables namely perceived pay gap (under financial support factors), job security, and postpartum depression (under psychological support factors), and future career choices and perceived level of guilt (under career-related factors) were analyzed and discussed.

The value of Cronbach's Alpha for the tool (questionnaire 1) was found to be 0.820 and was .833 when based on standardized items. Since both values were greater than 0.6, it showed there was consistency in the response thereby making the scale reliable.

Statistical and inferential techniques and tests were applied for analysis of the data collected for the study. Program software like STATA and SPSS were utilized to achieve the objectives of the study.

Results and Discussion

Maternity leave by usual perception has been considered as a cost sustained by any organizations in terms of both money and talent. But research has consistently proven it as the opposite. A study conducted by the Center for Economic and Policy Research in the United States of America determined that maternity benefits given to employees had no detrimental effect on the profitability or the performance of an organization. The financial cost incurred by the organization was counter-balanced by the creation of inclusive work culture and a loyal

motivated workforce (Kukreja, 2019).

On analysis of the data collected for assessing the nature and extent of maternity benefits being offered in private professional colleges of Punjab, it was observed that 91.70 percent of institutes included in the study had more than 1000 students enrolled with them and corresponding to that there was 75.03 percent of institutes who employed more than 100 faculty members with them. On the lower side, there was one institute in the sample that had less than 500 students enrolled with them, however, no institute in the study had less than 50 employees employed with them. In addition, there were 3 institutes that had employees between 50 to 100 employed with them (see Table 1).

Table 1. Student and Faculty strength in organizations included in the study

Variable	Less than 500	500 to 1000	1000 to 5000	More than 5000
Student Strength	8.30 (1)	NA	41.70 (5)	50 (6)
	Less than 50	50 to 100	100 to 500	More than 500
Faculty Strength	NA	25 (3)	33.33 (4)	41.70 (5)

Source: Authors calculation based on primary data

In line with the provisions of the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017, as it has been mandated by the law that employers share information related to maternity leave with their employees at the time of offering the job, give six months of paid maternity leave, and have some provisions for special leave in relation to adoption and miscarriage. The Act also entitles contract workers to get maternity leave and all related benefits as per the legislation.

However, as per the data collected, only three institutes in the study shared maternity benefits details offered by them explicitly, electronically, or in hard copy with their female employees at the time of joining or offering the job. In the sample, two institutes included maternity benefits offered related information in the offer letter, hence sharing it in hard copy. But most institutes did not share any such information. The information was shared only on request (see Table 2).

Table 2. Details of Maternity Leave offered in organizations included in the study

Variable	Yes	No
Information sharing related to Maternity Leave 1	25 (3)	75 (9)
	Written (Hard Copy)	Written (Electronically)
Information sharing related to Maternity Leave 2	8.30 (1)	16.70 (2)
	26 Weeks	12 to 26 Weeks
Maternity Leave Duration	41.70 (5)	58.30 (7)
	Yes	No
Maternity Leave for adoption	16.70 (2)	83.30 (10)
Maternity Leave for contractual Staff	NA	100 (12)

Special Leave for Miscarriage 33.33 (4) 66.66 (8)

Source: Authors calculation based on primary data

Nevertheless, on a positive aspect, all organizations offered maternity leave of more than 12 weeks duration to their female employees. However, an ideal and mandated, 26 weeks of maternity leave is only offered by five institutes in the study. As for the provision for special leave in case of adoption and miscarriage, it was offered by only two and four institutes respectively. None of the institutes in the study had any provisions or policies in place to offer maternity leave to their contractual female employees (see Table 2).

Reflecting on the financial aspects of maternity leave, most of the institutes in the study, that is 9 out of 12, offered paid maternity leave. But, only four out of these nine gave these financial benefits on monthly basis to their female employees while they were on their maternity leave. As for the rest five institutes, they only released the due amount to their female employees after they joined back work post their maternity leave. In certain cases, these financial dues were released after the female employee completed a certain duration of time post their re-joining (post-maternity leave). Further, only three out of the four offered a full salary to their female employees while on maternity leave (see Table 3).

Table 3. Details of Maternity Leave offered in organizations included in the study

Variable	Yes	No
Financial Support during Maternity Leave 1	75 (9)	25 (3)
	Every Month	In lumpsum after joining back
Financial Support during Maternity Leave 2	44.40 (4)	NA
	The same amount as the salary	Basic salary without benefits
Financial Support during Maternity Leave 3	33.33 (3)	44.44 (4)
	Yes	No
Medical Coverage 1	33.33 (4)	66.77 (8)
	Full Coverage	Partial Coverage
Medical Coverage 2	50 (2)	NA
	Yes	No
Medical Bonus	NA	100 (12)
Non-Cash Benefits	NA	100 (12)
Work From Home option post Maternity Leave	NA	100 (12)

Source: Authors calculation based on primary data

The majority of institutes offered a capped or a partial part of the salary to their female employees while on maternity leave. Out of the nine, four institutes offered only a basic salary, and a further two offered a capped amount to their female employees for the maternity leave period (see Table 3).

The medical expense related to the delivery of the child was covered by four out of twelve institutes in the study where only two of them covered the full amount. The other two offered only a capped amount. Of the institutes included in the study, none of the institutes offered any medical bonus or non-cash benefits to its female employees entering parenthood. At the time of data collection, no institute in the study offered work from home option (see Table 4).

Table 4. Details of Maternity Leave offered in organizations included in the study

Variable	Yes	No		
Creche Facility	25 (3)	75 (9)		
Creche managed by qualified staff	22.22 (2)	77.77 (7)		
	4 Visits	2 to 4 Visits	1 Visit	No Visit
Number of visits to creche permitted	NA	100 (3)	NA	NA

Source: Authors calculation based on primary data

Though mandated by the law, only three out of nine institutes had a functional creche on their premises, and only two of the three had qualified staff employed to manage it. All three institutes that had creche on their premises allowed their employees to visit the creche two to four times during the day.

It can be observed that there is significant room for improvement in terms of maternity leave and related benefits offered by the institutes included in the study.

A considerable number of respondents in the sample agreed that as most organizations did not offer very supportive policies both prior to and post maternity leave, new mothers sometimes have been compelled to take up less challenging assignments to accommodate their new responsibilities.

To further explore the impact of nature and the extent of maternity benefits being offered in private professional colleges in Punjab, we ran linear regression between the dependent and independent variables in the study. We explored how the paid or unpaid nature of maternity leave impacted the level of the perceived pay gap, perceived level of job security, future career choices, and the perceived level of self-guilt among women academicians. The findings are compiled in Table 5 and 6.

The following results were generated where results were significant at 0.00 level for four out of the 5 above-mentioned variables, implying that the paid and unpaid nature of maternity leave impacted the perceived level of job security, perceived level of postpartum depression, the future career choice of women academicians post their maternity leave and perceived level of self-guilt among women academicians. However, the impact on the perceived pay gap was observed to be non-significant. Since these are behavioural variables and we were currently inclined to prove that there existed an impact, the given level of adjusted R square is acceptable (see Table 5).

However, when observing the beta coefficient for dependent variables individually, the results for the perceived pay gap are non-significant. Implying that impact of maternity leave being paid or unpaid does not significantly impact the level of perceived pay gap felt by women

academicians (see Table 6).

Table 5. Regression Statistics where the independent variable is the financial nature of the maternity leave

Variable	R-Squared	Adjusted R-Squared	P Value
Perceived Pay Gap	0.002	0.002	0.321
Perceived level of Job Security	0.232	0.230	0.000
Postpartum Depression	0.024	0.022	0.001
Future Career Choices (Preference for easier assignments)	0.030	0.028	0.000
Perceived level of self-guilt	0.013	0.012	0.002

Source: Authors calculation based on primary data

The perceived level of job security is found to be impacted by the financial nature of the maternity leave offered by the institute. Implying that if the maternity leave is paid in nature, the respondents in the survey felt more secure about their job while on maternity leave.

Table 6. Regression Statistics (Continued)

Financial Nature of Maternity Leave	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P>t	[95% conf. interval]	
Perceived Pay Gap	0.152	0.153	0.99	0.322	0.149	0.455
Job Security	1.542	0.141	10.92	0.000	1.264	1.820
Postpartum depression	0.409	0.130	3.14	0.002	0.153	0.666
Future Career Choices	0.519	0.148	3.50	0.000	0.227	0.811
Perceived level of guilt	-0.359	0.154	-2.33	0.002	-0.662	-0.056

Source: Authors calculation based on primary data

Females who can avail a six-month paid maternity leave with job security have a higher chance of returning to their old employer, staying in the workforce, and having a better pregnancy outcome regarding maternal and child health (Lalive et al., 2014).

In addition, it was observed that the financial nature of maternity leave influenced the propensity of women academicians to develop self-guilt in the future. It may be due to the underlying feeling that even though they were offered unpaid maternity leave, they choose to join back work after maternity leave, which could have created a dissonance towards work. This, in turn, could have decreased work value, and add to the factors that trigger self-guilt in new mothers.

It was imperative to understand that these dependent variables will in turn impact the future career choices made by women academicians. Women academicians who were offered unpaid maternity leave felt less secure about their job and would have a higher chance of developing postpartum depression, and a propensity to develop self-guilt (see Table 6).

We must be mindful of the long-term impact of postpartum depression. Postpartum depression is

a state of non-psychotic depression that develops in females within and year of giving birth (Stewart et al., 2003). It is highly prevalent and exceptionally understated in India (Upadhyay et al., 2017). Women academicians who develop postpartum depression may find connecting back to work after their six-month maternity more complex.

Hence these factors impact the work effectiveness of women academicians after their maternity leave. Making these aspects more prudent for organizations to reflect in. Educational institutes in addition to other factors have academicians as a vital aspect of performance. This highlights the importance of the dependent variables discussed in the study.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, it is suggested that paid maternity leave should be offered to women academicians. The institutions included in the survey had higher student enrolment which is indicative of their financial health. Hence, organizations that have financial room should offer paid maternity leave to women academicians employed with them irrespective of whether they are regular or contractual.

In addition, it is imperative that these financial benefits are given to women academicians while they are on leave and not conditional on their re-joining. A new child though is a blessing but has some financial costs associated, making timely financial support from employers will be highly beneficial for the new parents and will impact their future career choices. Also, the salary paid during maternity leave should be at least 60 percent of the usual salary of the women academicians if not 100 percent. The practice of capping these benefits to basic salary or less is unethical and will not be wholesome.

Supplementary to maternity leave, institutions should also have leave provisions for adoption and miscarriage. These instances are also evolutionary for a woman and should be equivalently acknowledged. Also, it is mandatory by law.

Lastly, institutions should have transparency around the maternity leave and maternity benefits offered by them. This information should be shared in the offer letter as dictated by the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017. Provision for a creche facility should also be created at institute premises for employees.

Managerial Implications

The significance of gender diversity in organizational productivity has been repeatedly proven and established in extant literature. Studies like ours aid managers recognize the existence of any 'maternal wall' bias in their organizations. It is imperative to recognize such biases, as they hinder in the creation of inclusive work culture. In addition, having such biases can cost organizations the loss of a substantial pool of talent.

Additionally, recognition of these impediments faced by women academicians will enable organizations to form suitable interventions. Such interventions enable the creation of gender-equitable organizations, which are proven to have a competitive advantage and higher productivity for organizations (Schwab et al., 2016). In addition, committed employees are expected to work harder for the achievement of organizational goal (Gill and Gupta, 2017).

Limitations

Though the data collected from the institutes included in the sample was indicative of the diminutive nature of the maternity benefits being offered, however, since the study had only a small number of institutes, more institutes should be surveyed to draw more exhaustive results.

In addition, since the institutions included in the study were private establishments, they were not under the purview of Right to Information (RTI) 2005. Hence requests for information made to these institutions were mostly not honoured. For institutions that choose not to share information, data was compiled based on the responses of women academicians working in these institutes. There were variations in responses reported by respondents from the same organization, hence, to accomplish the objective of the study some approximations were made. This too can be considered a limitation of the study. However, it may also be indicative of a non-transparent and ambiguous system in institutes regarding maternity leave policies.

Further Scope of the Study

Concurrent with the limitations discussed, more institutions may be surveyed to draw more concurrent results. Institutes should be onboarded about the rationale of the study and its future impact so as encourage them to share data.

In addition, the current study discussed the nature and extent of maternity benefits offered by private professional institutions in Punjab, however, an employer perspective was not taken. Though it is imperative that women academicians are offered a full benefit maternity leave, there are financial and operational costs associated with it. Organizations do not just have an increased financial burden; they also must replace the employee for the leave period or request other employees to cover the work. Further research to explore this interaction is necessary to propose a conducive solution for this predicament.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the current state of the private professional colleges is not very conducive for women academicians post their maternity leave. There is a lack of organizational support both in infrastructure and facilities to diminish the impact of the maternal wall. These factors are hurdles to career progression once the woman academician embraces motherhood.

It will be unfair to conclude that all organizations are unjust to women academicians' needs post maternity. However, it can be concluded that there is plenty of room for improvement.

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