

## Effect of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) to Different Gender of Survivors: A Systematic Review

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### Abstract

Child sexual abuse (CSA) occurs with alarming frequency around the world. Survivors of CSA come from all cultural, racial and economic groups. CSA will leave a long-term effect on the survivors. The effects are always complex, varied and somehow, will destroy the entire life of the survivor. Hence, the purpose of this review is to understand the effect of child sexual abuse to different gender of survivors. The effect of CSA may be different according to their gender nature, culture and family background. By understanding the maladaptive behavior, emotional distress and interpersonal problems resulting from CSA to both male and female, counselors can provide professional and adequate counselling services for the survivors. The role of counselor in the counselling session to help the survivors is also being discussed in this review.

**Keywords:** Child Sexual Abuse, Gender, Survivor

### Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is characterized by a child's involvement in sexual activities without understanding, the inability to provide informed consent, or engaging in activities for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent. Such actions may also contravene societal laws or taboos (WHO, 2016). Harvey et al. (2007) similarly describe sexual violence as encompassing any sexual act, attempts to solicit a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or actions directed against a person's sexuality, utilizing coercion, threats of harm, or physical force. This definition applies to any person, irrespective of their relationship to the victim, and is applicable in various settings, including but not limited to home and work. Child sexual abuse (CSA) has been shown to result in both immediate and enduring effects on the physical and psychological well-being of survivors. These consequences include conditions such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia, physical injuries, and an increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

The CSA victims, before they seek help and turn into survivors, are often silenced by the perpetrator, their family members, community and society at large. The feeling of shame, guilt and confusion are still present although the victims survived from CSA (Nasim & Nadan, 2013). These negative feelings will take place in the interpersonal relations context even when the CSA survivor breaks their silence. Some family members or community may not take this matter seriously when the victims of CSA turn for help. On the contrary, many of them will just ignore the seek from the CSA victims. Feiring, et al. (2002) stated that a disclosure that is not being taken seriously or a disdainful response can be traumatic in itself. The victims will live in a fear and trauma of a lifetime even when they after all survived from the CSA.

CSA is acknowledged worldwide as a public health crisis and constitutes a severe form of violence against children. Nevertheless, a considerable number of individuals who have experienced sexual abuse during childhood choose not to disclose their experiences, often for various reasons. Research indicates that a significant portion of adults never reveals such abuse until they reach adulthood. A high number of respondents only disclosed to researchers for the first time during the interview session. It may take them a long time or refuse to disclose such abuse due to multifactorial and involves many pathways. For example, as it may because of the frightening aftermath and the community may stigmatize these group of people. Childhood abuse can lead to a variety of maladaptive behaviour of adolescent victims. In Hunter's (2009) discussion, various environmental challenges potentially arising from survivors of CSA are highlighted, including issues like poverty, unemployment, parental alcohol and drug problems, and insufficient family functioning. Interventions are required for these adolescents to mitigate problematic behavior and integrate them into socially regulated norms. Consequently, counselors play a crucial role in facilitating the assistance process for this specific group of individuals (Hanish & Moulding, 2011). Through effective intervention, their problem behaviour can actually be strengthened.

Effect of child sexual abuse to human behavior are complex. There are various effects, outcomes and long-term consequences for CSA, in terms of its severity, complex and interlace factors. Numerous studies in this domain concentrate solely on the impact on either male or female survivors. While some researchers indicate that female survivors of CSA tend to undergo more pronounced anxiety, depression, PTSD, and adjustment problems than their male counterparts, a more thorough examination of the data suggests that such conclusions may oversimplify the nuanced nature of these effects (Hunter, 2009). The gender differences especially regarding children and adolescents concerning the consequences of sexual abuse remain understudied and misunderstood. It is evident that studies which add to the literature of the effect of CSA on survivors of different gender are needed.

The likelihood of adolescents developing problem behaviors increases with the early occurrence of childhood abuse (Frederico et al., 2008). This systemic review purpose is to study the influence of child sexual abuse (CSA) survivors in different gender. Counsellor needs to be able to demonstrate competencies in handling children with varying experiences in different gender. The premises is that the children have to recognize their experiences which had deep influences on their lives in order to get involved in the therapy. By understanding the impacts, counselor will be able to provide various competencies with survivors of abuse (Smyth, 2000). Thus, the counsellor plays a significant role to understand the impact of CSA to male and female survivor and to ascertain the role of counsellor when

dealing with CSA victims. In summary, the primary goals of this literature systematic review are as follows:

- i. To identify the effect of CSA to male survivors in the life cycle.
- ii. To identify the effect of CSA on female survivors in the life cycle.
- iii. To determine the counselor role to CSA survivors.

## **Methods**

### **The Search Strategy**

The reviewer endeavored to find more recent literature published within the last five years (2014 to 2018). However, due to the limited number of articles, the review was expanded to include works from the past ten years, covering the period from 2008 to 2018. The search utilized two databases, namely the Sage database and the SCOPUS database.

The initial search employed the following keywords: a) child sexual abuse, b) survivor, c) different gender, d) effect. This initial search yielded 558 articles, reviews, and books. The number of results was subsequently reduced by applying the inclusion criteria outlined in Table 1 and exclusion criteria detailed in Table 2. Further refinement involved filtering the search results to focus on articles related to psychology, social science, and art and humanities. The results were then narrowed down to articles specifically addressing male and female perspectives. To streamline the search, articles in the fields of medicine and nursing were excluded, along with literature reviews, books, and book chapters. The search concluded upon identifying the top 10 most relevant journal articles, which were subsequently thoroughly studied and reviewed.

Table 1  
*Inclusion Criteria of the Systematic Review.*

<b>Inclusion Criteria Presented in Order</b>	<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Literatures Identified</b>	<b>Remaining Literatures</b>
<b>Key terms</b>	Child sexual abuse, gender,	558	558
<b>Year</b>	From year 2008 to 2018	194	194
<b>Subject area</b>	Psychology, Social Science, Art and Humanities	125	125
<b>Document type</b>	Article	105	105
<b>Keyword</b>	Male, Female	84	84

Table 2  
*Exclusion Criteria of the Systematic Review.*

<b>Exclusion Criteria Presented in Order</b>	<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Literatures Identified</b>	<b>Remaining Literatures</b>
<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>			84
<b>Subject area</b>	Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacology, toxicology and pharmaceuticals, Biochemistry, genetics and molecular biology	67	17
<b>Source type</b>	Book	7	10

The progression of the systematic review (depicted in Figure 1) commenced with an initial search employing the terms child sexual abuse, survivors, gender, and impact. Subsequently, the search parameters were refined to include the year of publication, population, article type, and subject area, as illustrated in Figure 1. A total of 558 papers were initially identified in relation to the key terms. Among these, only 194 papers were published between the years 2008 and 2018. The identified papers underwent screening based on their titles and abstracts, resulting in the selection of 125 papers aligned with the subject areas of psychology, social science, and art and humanities. The articles were further narrowed down to 84, focusing specifically on male and female survivors.

This review omitted articles within the fields of medicine, nursing, pharmacology, toxicology, pharmaceuticals, biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology. Additionally, articles sourced from books were excluded. Ultimately, 10 relevant literatures were chosen from various

journal

sources.

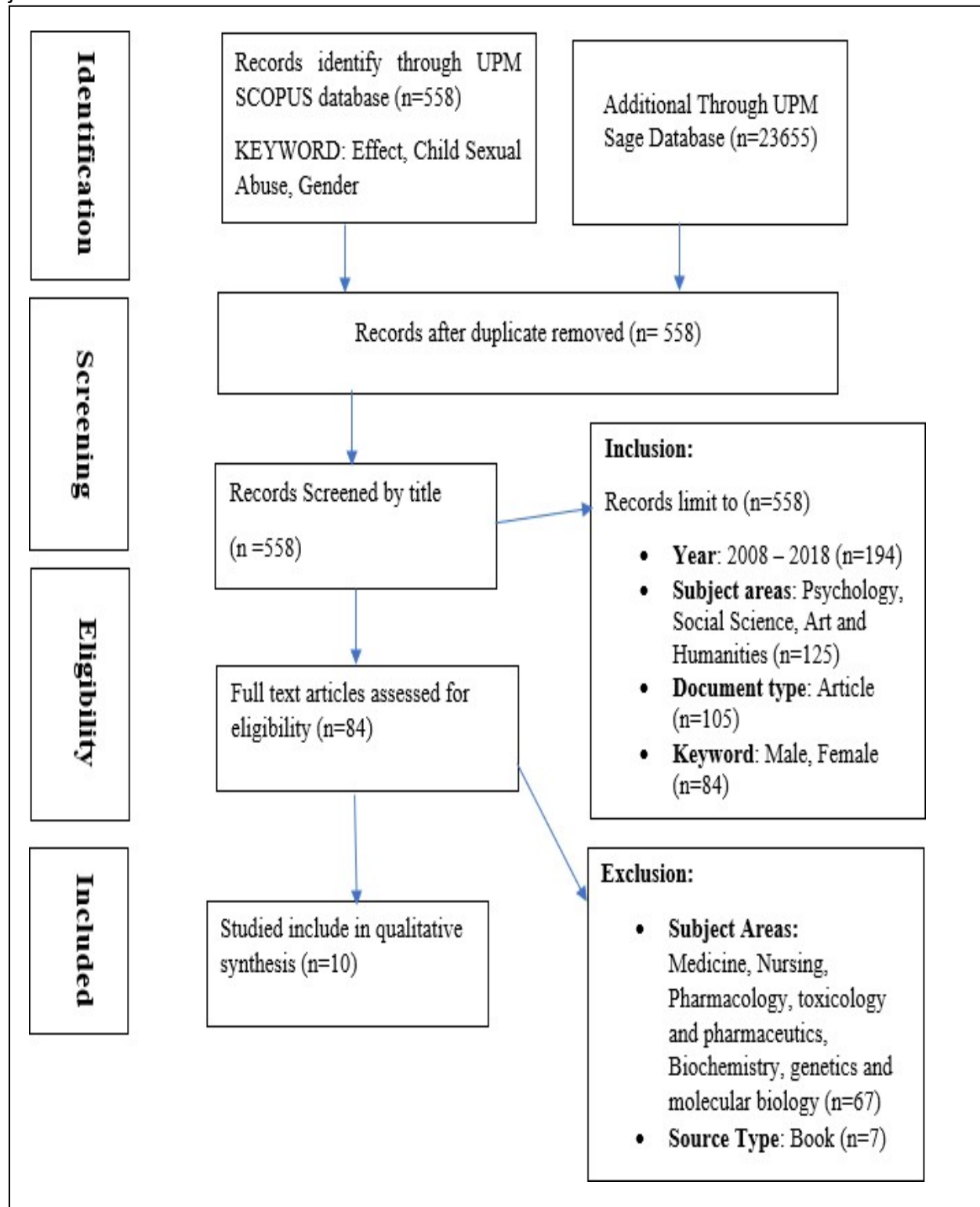


Figure 1: Flowchart of Systematic Review Process.

### Findings of Literature Review

Table 3 displays the details of the selected articles concerning the impact of CSA survivors across different genders. The table comprehensively outlines the author, year of publication, journal article title, study setting, participants, and main findings for each literature. Its purpose is to offer a clearer and enhanced perspective on the information related to the impact on CSA survivors of different genders. Notably, the studies included in this review were conducted in the United States, Australia, Ireland, Spain, and Canada, reflecting the limited availability of empirical studies exploring the effects of CSA on survivors of different genders in other countries.

Table 3  
*Summary of studies*

Author (Year)	Title of Article	Country	Participants	Main Findings
<b>Erdmans, M.P., &amp; Black, T. (2008)</b>	What They Tell You to Forget:1 From Child Sexual Abuse to Adolescent Motherhood	USA	27 mothers participating in a home-visitation parenting program for mothers at risk of child maltreatment.	CSA brings impact to the female social activities, behavior, unhealthy sexual violence and their entire life.
<b>Sorsoli, L., Kia-Keating, M., &amp; Grossman, F. K. (2008)</b>	“I keep that hush- hush”: Male survivors of sexual abuse and the challenges of disclosure.	USA	16 male survivors of CSA were interviewed regarding experiences of disclosure	Male survivors of CSA struggle with their distinct personal, relational and sociocultural
<b>Hunter, V.S. (2009)</b>	Beyond Surviving Gender Differences in Response to Early Sexual Experiences With Adults	Australia	13 women and 9 men who experienced CSA in their early childhood	Narratives of silence, ongoing suffering, transformation, and transcendence
<b>Hanisch, D., &amp; Moulding, N. (2011).</b>	Power, Gender, and Social Work Responses to Child	Australia	10 social workers were being interviewed	Narrative therapy brings a strong emancipatory orientation,

	Sexual Abuse				normalizing the effects of abuse
<b>Brazelton, J.F. (2015)</b>	The Secret Storm: Exploring the Disclosure Process of African American Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse Across the Life Course	USA	17 African American women over the age of 40 were interviewed and explored		A life course perspective as a theoretical lens to view how disclosure changes throughout the life cycle
<b>Márquez-Flores, M.M., Márquez-Hernández, V.V., and Granados-Gómez, G. (2016)</b>	Teachers' Knowledge and Beliefs About Child Sexual Abuse	Spain	450 teachers completing a questionnaire regarding their knowledge and belief about child sexual abuse.		The knowledge about CSA among school teachers is deficiencies and there is the need for training in this field
<b>Wekerle, C., Black, T. (2017)</b>	Gendered violence: Advancing evidence-informed research, practice and policy in addressing sex, gender, and child sexual abuse	Canada	CSA victims and survivors		CSA maybe conceptualized as trauma events that often relate an overlap with other adverse childhood events.
<b>Rapsey, C., Campbell, A., Clearwater, K., &amp; Patterson, T. (2017)</b>	Listening to the Therapeutic Needs of Male Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse	Australia	9 male survivors were interviewed in a semi-structured interview.		The obstacles that are encountered in seeking treatment for CSA male survivors will

				reduce the quality of life.
<b>Sivagurunathana, M., Orchard, T., MacDermid, J.C., &amp; Evans, M. (2018)</b>	Barriers and facilitators affecting self-disclosure among male survivors of child sexual abuse: The service providers' perspective	Canada	11 male survivors of CSA were interviewed	Counselor understand and respond to personal characteristics, interpersonal relations, institutional elements, and societal norms faced by the survivors.
<b>Papalia, N., Ogloff, J.R.P., Cutajar, M., Mullen, P.E. (2018)</b>	Child Sexual Abuse and Criminal Offending: Gender-Specific Effects and the Role of Abuse Characteristics and Other Adverse Outcomes	Australia	2,677 community controls were linked to statewide police records and public mental health service databases, with a follow-up period of 13–44 years.	CSA survivors were likely to engage in criminal behavior and offending
<b>McLean, L., Bambling, M. &amp; Steindl, S.R. (2018)</b>	Perspectives on Self-Compassion from Adult Female Survivors of Sexual Abuse and the Counselors Who Work with Them	Australia	Counselling session is conducted between 7 female survivors of sexual abuse and 7 sexual abuse counselors	Barriers and compassion are the two core domains that stopped the female sexual abuse survivors for change.



**Discussion****The Effect of CSA to Male Survivors**

Although the literature of CSA focused on male survivors is quite affirmative in recent years, most of the studies that address CSA generally give attention to female survivors. Male are often seen by our society as superior, strong, and even antagonistic. Hence, it is difficult for them to admit themselves as a CSA survivor and commit to research.

The emotional and beliefs of CSA male survivors will always be affected. Gagnier and Collin-Vézina (2016) found that men who have experienced sexual abuse are made invisible, trying to escape from their experiences and seeking help. Some male survivors who have been victims of CSA will change their view of themselves as men, feeling that as if they had failed to stop the abusive situation. Societal norms regarding masculinity (Marudan Sivagurunathan, et al, 2018) also identified as major impact to male CSA survivors. Male were often described as being socialized to be strong, able to protect themselves, not to be a victim and not show vulnerability. By admitting themselves as a victim of CSA, they may feel that they are not fulfilling the gendered roles that society has set out for them. They experienced some maladaptive belief such as sense of guilt for the role they played during the abuse (Child Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2007). The belief of being powerless to stop what had happened to them is unaccepted. They seemed themselves as damaged goods after the CSA experiences.

Sorsoli et al. (2008) found that the male CSA survivors reflect an intense urge to erase the CSA experiences from consciousness. Male tend to understand their abuse themselves, rather than having a counselling session and fixed by a professional (Rapsy et al., 2017). They have a fear that because of abuse others will treat them differently (Child Welfare Information Gateway [CWIG], 2007). They refused to talk, share and disclose about their CSA experiences. The reaction of deny found on the male CSA survivors may be a defense mechanism for them. This statement is supported by Lisak (2005) who found that the sociocultural demands for men suppress the personal pressure for men to minimize or deny abuse. This may be an advantage for them because study shows that the male CSA survivors who overcome personal barriers may encounter more difficulty in socio-cultural (Sorsoli et al., 2008). Such effects need to be altered and were worked upon during this study for well-functioning of abused adolescents.

**The effect of CSA to female survivors**

CSA is a traumatic issue that is lifelong and an experience that leaves a “mark” on women for life. Female survivors will always have the belief that early sexual experiences have already destroyed and soiled them (Brazelton, 2015). On the contrary, these have impacted the CSA female survivors on willingness to disclose the narrative. Some of the victims chose to be silent because it was socio-culturally unacceptable. Splitting of faithfulness in between families may be cause by sexual abuse. The literature showed that about half of the female CSA survivors had reported having a family relationship with their abuser (Morais et al, 2015). The perpetrator of CSA might be their father, brother, uncle or someone they trusted and close to them. If their parents or guardians feel complicit and liable, the victims are not too likely to be trusted. This must not be omitted.

The primary impediment resulted in psychosocial problems which included feelings of fear, humiliations and self-reproach. Erdmans and Black (2008) found that by the time female survivors of CSA get into stages between adolescence and young adulthood, they will have to make every effort to manage their emotions at every stage of life including to start

relationships and parenting their children. For example, maltreated CSA problems will influence their decision on selecting a partner. Furthermore, for those who in parenting choices, might have had chances in triggered sexual abuse of their own children. Tzadok and Davidson-Arad (2016) mentioned that some of the women are able to use their own strengths and resources to prevail over their childhood maltreatment without any support from their families, thus proving the quality of the advantages that can be found internally. These women have gone through various routes to deal with and recover. However, Papalia et al. (2018) studied that gender plays a significant role in criminal offending, whereby the relationship between CSA exposure and subsequent general offending and violent offending was stronger among females. This shows that if a female is exposed to CSA, her risk for engaging in general and violent crime will increase than the male exposed to CSA.

### **The Role of Counselor to Survivors in Life Cycle**

Counselling CSA victims is challenging yet rewarding. Counseling session must be conducted to meet individual's needs because each individual is unique. The gender of the child victim, the gender of the offender, level of the family functioning and the level of the family's culture are the factors that will influence the therapeutic process of counselling session (Hunter, 2006).

The counsellor plays a significant role toward CSA victims and parents by providing therapeutic counselling. Counsellor aids in retaining sympathy and commitment by determining the causes and ability for change. Counsellor need to understand the impact of past relatable experiences and prepare for potential resistance and response for their efforts of caregiving (McLean, et al. 2018). There will be advantages of counsel by maintaining a positive relationship between counsellor and clients. This setting can facilitate the establishment of initial experience for the client safely, and it is important that the counsellor asks about the traumatic experience in the post-disclosure session. According to the article mentioned by Sorsoli, Kia-Keaton's and Grossman (2008), at the first time of disclosure, it is necessary to acknowledge the potential difficulties of disclosing and overseeing emotional regulation. It will be helpful if the counsellors able to point out the relevant information significantly, thus, they could slowly explore more from the topics themselves. Moreover, for counsellors and clients, it is important to pay attention to motivating compassion, said McLean et al. (2018). There will be the possibility of causing further harm to their clients if the counsellor is seemingly uncomfortable with the discussion or does not know about the abuse due to some processes. There are several factors that caused the client to refuse disclosure including discomfort toward the environment and also the feeling toward the counsellor and relationship as well. For example, the counsellor body language restless or shown don't want or can't handle it could influence the clients emotionally and psychologically being defensive. Delaying treatment interventions may adversely affect the recovery process and well-being of CSA victims. The capacity of self-sympathy can be impacted by the relationships nature and reactions obtained from others.

Elevation of exposure to traumatic events in adolescents will lead to sequelae of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research done by Brazelton (2015) reported that some of the female survivors realized that the secret of CSA is much more complicated than just finding someone to tell and the healing did not come from disclosure. Creating awareness and education programs to the community including the parents, family members as well as CSA survivors will have a positive influence on CSA disclosure. Apparently, encourage

the school children to ask questions and create therapeutic environment by providing education regarding CSA in the school system facilitate the school children to step forward when the event of sexual abuse. Establish a safe network by supporting, definitely the loop will not repeat again after that.

### **Limitation**

This review has several limitations. Firstly, the selected studies were confined to European countries, specifically Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, Spain, and the United States. Consequently, the review predominantly reflects the impact on CSA survivors of different genders in these nations. This limitation arises from the scarcity of available empirical studies on counseling services tailored to CSA survivors of different genders in Asian countries. Therefore, caution must be exercised in generalizing the findings of this review to all countries. Additionally, the chosen studies primarily focused on the effects of disclosure for CSA survivors. Consequently, there is a need for further research to uncover more relevant articles addressing the impact of CSA on survivors of different genders.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review is significant in furthering understanding about the impact of CSA survivors of different gender. Generally, CSA leaves long-term consequences to the survivors' life cycle including their emotion, beliefs, interpersonal and intrapersonal. It is difficult and complex to understand the effect of CSA on both male and females due to the large variety of influential factors. Reinforcing messages from parents, teachers, and all those who have contact with children survivors will help them to express their negative emotion and behavior through a proper way.

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