

# The Types and Factors of Subsistence-Giving from the Perspective of Shariah

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# The Types and Factors of Subsistence-Giving from the Perspective of Shariah

Syh Noorul Madihah Syed Husin, Tengku Fatimah Muliana Tengku Muda, Sumayyah Abdul Aziz, Siti Fatimah Salleh, Siti Khatijah Ismail, & Wan Mohd Yusoff Wan Chik

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#### Abstract

In Islam, subsistence-giving is an obligatory act upon children to their parents – subject to certain criteria. Although the obligatory act of subsistence-giving is made clear by Muslim jurists (fuqaha), there are still children who failed to fulfil their filial duty upon their parents. Cases of neglection, especially on parents who are of old-age and disabled, are widely reported by the media. Therefore, this study is an attempt to identify the types as well as factors in subsistence-giving by children. This quantitative study was conducted among 291 respondents among academics from three public universities in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia via questionnaire surveys. The data then were analysed using IBM® SPSS 20 with special emphasis on its descriptive statistics to discern both types and factors in subsistence-giving by children to their parents. Meanwhile, the most preferred frequency for subsistence-giving is on a monthly basis. However, the study also indicates that subsistence-giving does not correlate with their parents' needs or their sibling position in the family. **Keywords:** Sustenance, Subsistence, Subsistence-giving

# Introduction

To realize a harmonious familial relationship between parents and children, Islam outlines few rights and responsibilities to be fulfilled by both parties. Subsistence is deemed as a right to be provided by a child to parent(s). The majority of the jurists (jumhur fuqaha) are of the opinion that it is obligatory upon the children to provide subsistence to their parents – provided that they are financially capable and their parents are in need of such assistance (Al-Kasani, 2000; Al-Dardir, n.d.; Al-Shirazi, 1995; Ibn Qudamah, 1997).

Recently, the issue of subsistence-giving has been gaining traction in the media due to negligence cases, which have been wildly circulated especially through social media. For example, there are cases whereby poor and destitute parents who are not able to financially support themselves. According

to Tan & Ng (2000), there is a number of parents who practically have to solely rely on their children for sustenance. In Islam, such condition already satisfies the criteria of subsistence-giving by a child to his/her parents. In fact, according to the Holy Quran (Surah al-Isra: Ayat 23):

And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], "uff," and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word.

Therefore, in principle, such cases should never have occurred. Especially for those Muslim children who are financially well-off as they should not need a reminder to take care of their parents. Negligence in subsistence-giving does not only occur to parents who are of old age, but it also happens to parents who need special assistance especially the disabled ones. In a study with regards to subsistence-giving to parents who are physically disabled, Salleh & Husin (2014) found that several respondents were not consistently giving subsistence to their parents and worse still, some of them shirked the responsibility altogether. This might cause deep resentments among those affected parents.

The main objective of this study is to examine the types and factors of subsistence-giving by children from the perspective of Shariah. The study, however, chose to delimit the examination among working children to determine the types of subsistence that they are giving (or lack thereof) while juggling between a demanding career and honouring the filial duties to their parents. Apart from that, most working, Muslim children also fulfil the criteria set by Islam in terms of subsistence-giving.

#### Methodology

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objective, the following are the research design, instrumentation, and data analysis used in this study:

# **Research Design**

This is a quantitative survey study. According to Piaw (2006b), a quantitative survey is a study associated with sample selection from the population of interest, collection of data from the respondents and finally, analysis of data to answer the research question. The population of interest was academic staffs from three public universities in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia i.e. Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) dan Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). The population stood at 1,282 (401 from UniSZA, 493 from UMT and 388 from UiTM). Out of this population, 291 samples were taken using a stratified random sampling procedure according to the population percentage of each university. This sampling frame modelled after the sample table proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The following are the selection sample table for each university:

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Table	Table 1: Total Sample According to the Population Ratio						
No.	University	Population	Sample				
1	Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin	401	91				
2	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu	493	112				
3	Universiti Teknologi MARA	388	88				
Total			291				

The sampling criteria were set to academics in the above-mentioned universities as they are mostly of middle-to-high income, tertiary-educated professionals that fulfil the subsistence-giving criteria.

#### Instrumentation

The questionnaire survey form was used as an instrument to collect data. It was constructed and collected using Google Forms platform by Google LLC. The questions were in Bahasa Malaysia as it is the national language of Malaysia and it is mainly used as the lingua franca in the population's region. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A collects the respondents' demographic information while Section B collects the data on trends of subsistence-giving to parents. It was distributed and collected from 31 July to 19 September 2018.

#### Data Analysis

The data were analysed using IBM<sup>®</sup> SPSS 20. Descriptive statistics were used to discern the types and factors of subsistence-giving. According to Plaw (2006a), descriptive statistics can be utilised to explain characteristics of variables such as mean, standard deviation, median, mode and normal distribution. The results were presented in both percentage and frequency distribution.

### Findings

#### **Demographic Respondent**

According to Mahmood (2008), the frequency distribution technique can determine the data density in a quick manner within every category. To get a better picture, the respondents' demographic profile is tabulated in the following Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents					
Gender	Frequency	Percentage			
		(%)			
Male	89	30.6			
Female	202	69.4			
TOTAL	291	100.0			
Age	Frequency	Percentage			
		(%)			
29 and below	3	1.0			
30 to 39 years	143	49.1			
40 to 49 years	107	36.8			
50 and above	38	13.1			
TOTAL	291	100.0			
Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage			
		(%)			
Single	28	9.6			
Married	256	88.0			
Widowed	7	2.4			
TOTAL	291	100.0			
Monthly Income	Frequency	Percentage			
		(%)			
RM 3,000 - RM 3,999	21	7.2			
RM 4,000 - RM 4,999	25	8.6			
RM 5,000 - RM 5,999	36	12.4			
RM 6,000 - RM 6,999	41	14.1			
RM 7,000 - RM 7,999	52	17.9			
RM 8,000 and above	116	39.9			
TOTAL	291	100.0			
Monthly Expenditure	Frequency	Percentage			
		(%)			
RM 1,900 and below	8	2.7			
RM 2,000 - RM 2,999	47	16.2			
RM 3,000 - RM 3,999	68	23.4			
RM 4,000 - RM 4,999	70	24.1			

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RM 5,000 and above	98	33.7	
TOTAL	291	100.0	
Highest Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Bachelor	20	6.9	
Masters	116	39.9	
PhD	155	53.3	
TOTAL	291	100.0	
Spouse's Employment Status (If Married)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Yes	218	85.2	
No	38	14.8	
TOTAL	256	100.0	
Parents	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Only one is alive	109	37.5	
Both are alive	146	50.2	
Both have passed away	36	12.4	
TOTAL	291	100.0	
Father's Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Working	35	12.0	
Retired	111	38.1	
Not working	46	15.8	
Not relevant	99	34.0	
TOTAL	256	100.0	
Mother's Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)	
Working	18	6.2	
Retired	62	21.3	
Not working	163	56.0	
Not relevant	48	48 16.5	
TOTAL	256	100.0	

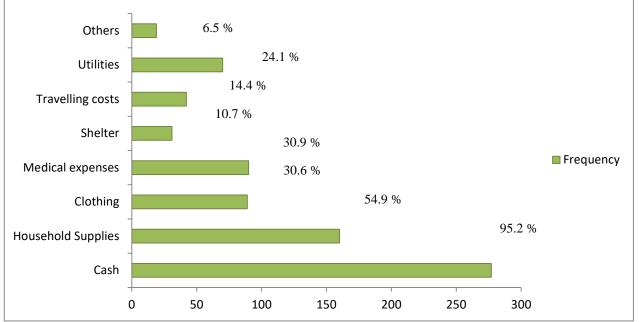
In terms of gender, female respondents made up more than two-thirds (69.4%) of the respondents. Most of the respondents are of 30 to 39 years old (49.1% or 143 respondents) age group and married (88% or 256 respondents).

In terms of monthly income, more than half of the respondents are in the RM7,000 and above brackets (57.8%). This is in line with the respondents' career as lecturers in the Malaysian public universities. The monthly expenditures also exhibit a positive correlation with their respective income. Whereas only 21 respondents (7.2%) are at the other end of the income bracket (RM3,000 to RM3,999).

Table 2 depicts more than half of the respondents attained the highest academic credential i.e. PhD (53.3%). This tallies with the income level and monthly expenditure respectively. This is because of

the pay scale of the Malaysian public universities commensurate with the highest education level. The table also shows that almost all respondents (256 respondents) are married and 85.2% (218) of the respondent's respective spouse has a career of some sort. Table 2 also shows most of the respondents (87.9%) have either both or at least of their parents who are still alive. Out of those numbers, less than half of the fathers are retirees (38.1) and the majority of the respondents' mothers are housewives (56%).

# Forms of Subsistence-Giving



In fulfilling their filial duties, the survey found various types of subsistence-giving (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Types of Subsistence-Giving

Figure 1 shows the types of subsistence-giving by the respondents. The most popular type of all is cash (95.2%). About more than half provide household supplies to their parents (54.9%). Meanwhile, close to two-thirds of the respondents provide for their parents in terms of clothing and medicines respectively (30.6% and 30.9%). While the minority of the respondents either perform their filial duties via paying off their parents' utilities' bills (24.1%), covering travelling costs (14.4%) and living place provision (10.7%).

# **Frequency of Subsistence-Giving**

The survey found that in terms of frequency, the respondents choose to perform their filial duty differently. It can either be as frequent as daily, weekly, monthly, or even on a yearly basis (Figure 2).

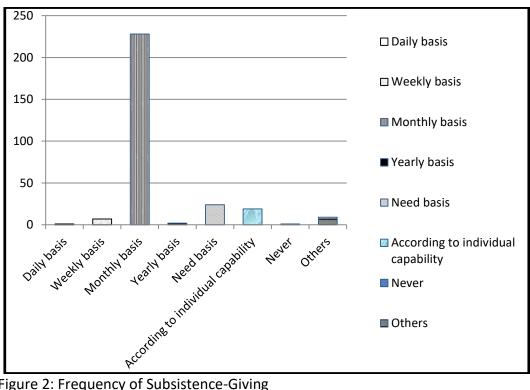


Figure 2: Frequency of Subsistence-Giving

The figure above reveals almost a unanimous pattern – monthly basis and according to their parents' needs and the respondents' capability. On the other hand, only a very small minority give their subsistence to their parents on a yearly basis.

# Factors in Subsistence-Giving

Subsistence-giving (or lack thereof) to parents are subjected to several factors. The factors are as follow:

Table 3: Factors in Subsistence-Giving						
Item	Yes	No	Not	Total		
			applicabl			
			е			
B14a: I give subsistence to my parents as they are	56	161	74	291		
incapable of self-sustenance	(19.2%)	(55.3%)	(25.4%)	(100%)		
B14b: I did not give any subsistence to my parents	2	89	200	291		
as I am the youngest one	(0.7%)	(30.6%)	(68.7%)	(100%)		
B14b: I did not give any subsistence to my parents	10	120	161	291		
as they are capable of self-sustenance	(3.4%)	(41.2%)	(55.3%)	(100%)		
B14d: I always give subsistence to my parents as I	256	10	25	291		
am capable of doing so	(88.0%)	(3.4%)	(8.6%)	(100%)		
B14e: As a daughter, I do not really give	3	146	142	291		
subsistence to my parents as I have other male	-	-		_		
siblings that can do so	(1.0%)	(50.2%)	(48.8%)	(100%)		
B14f: I always give subsistence to my parents as an	281	3	7	291		
act of love	(96.6%)	(1.0%)	(2.4%)	(100%)		
B14g: I did not give subsistence to my parents as I	9	128	154	291		
am not financially capable of doing so	(3.1%)	(44.0%)	(52.9%)	(100%)		
B14h: I did not give subsistence to my parents as I	3	124	164	291		
am not the eldest one	(1.0%)	(42.6%)	(56.4%)	(100%)		

Table 3 exhibits 8 (eight) items that examine the factors in subsistence-giving. Out of these 8 items, 3 items (B14a, B14d & B14f) used positive statements and the remaining items used negative statements on factors of (not) giving subsistence to their parents (B14b, B14c, B14e, B14g & B14h). These items represent 3 factors i.e. an act of obligation (B14a, B14c, B14d & B14g), sibling position (B14b, B14e & B14h) and an act of love and devotion (B14f).

The obligatory act of subsistence-giving can be seen from at least two aspects – the parents' need for subsistence and their children's ability to provide them. The study shows that most respondents who give out subsistence to their parents are still doing so even their parents have the ability to sustain themselves (55.3%). In fact, almost half of the respondents (41.2%) disagree with the fact that they should not give any subsistence even if their parents are of a well-to-do family. Nevertheless, there are a small number of respondents (3.4%) who did not give any subsistence amount as their parents are capable of self-sustenance.

In lieu of subsistence-giving as an obligatory act, Table 3 shows a significant majority of the respondents (88%) agreed that subsistence-giving mostly boils down to their financial capability (Item B14d). However, 10 respondents disagree with the statement as they will still give due consideration in providing subsistence to their parents irrespective of their financial standing. In other words,

(in)capability is not a pre-condition of subsistence-giving. In fact, Item B14g seems to support the earlier statement as an overwhelming minority of the respondents (3.1%) did not give any subsistence to their parents due to their incapability while almost half of them (44%) rejected outright the notion itself.

Table 3 shows three (3) items on the second factor related to sibling position (B14b, B14e and B14h). These items were worded in a negative way to examine whether there is a correlation between sibling position and subsistence-giving to their parents. The study, however, found that sibling position is a non-factor in giving subsistence to their parents. It can be seen from the significant disagreement of the respondents on Items B14e and B14h (99% and 99.3% respectively). Apart from that, the respondents, who are the last in the sibling position seems to take pride in their filial duty when 89 of them disagree with Item B14b. For Item B14e (female sibling), slightly more than half of the respondents (50.2%) did not find it to be a prohibitive factor at all. The same finding is also applicable to Item B14h that rejects the idea of only the first-born child is responsible for subsistence-giving.

The study found that a substantial majority of the respondents (96.6%) associate subsistence-giving as an act of love or devotion to their parents (Item B14f). This goes to show that the respondents hold a unanimous agreement or consensus on the fact that it is one of the most dominant factors in subsistence-giving.

#### Discussion

The above-mentioned findings can be discussed from the following two viewpoints:

#### The Pattern of Subsistence-Giving

The most revealing pattern of subsistence-giving by the respondents is via cash transfer. Nassuruddin & Azahari (2017) discovered almost the exact pattern among their respondents. Apart from its liquidity nature, cash is the most convenient form of subsistence-giving as it gives the recipient i.e. parents to manage their finances on food, clothing, utilities according to their specific needs. Apart from that, it also allows for some form of flexibility especially for parents who are able-bodied to manage their needs and to a certain extent, wants.

Although the Shariah is somewhat silent on this cash form of subsistence-giving, the cash itself may act as a substitute for their parents' needs and/or wants. According to al-Zuhaili (2015), the compulsory subsistence that needs to be provided to its recipients should be in the forms of food, clothing, shelter, house furnishings, and housemaid. All these needs can be easily attained using cash that was given by the respondents. This practice is consistent with maqasid al-Shariah (objectives of Islamic law) in fulfilling the basic needs of hajiyyat, which is also aligned with the contemporaneous application of cash in zakat payment.

Household supplies are the second most common form of subsistence-giving that is also consistent within the ambit of Islam. For example, it may include, inter alia, foodstuff and food preparation devices. According to Zaidan (2000), the forms of subsistence that are highly encouraged in Islam

include food, clothing, shelter, medical treatment-related cost, medication, housemaid and marry off the single recipients, if need be. This is especially true for parents who are not able-bodied and have difficulties in acquiring the supplies themselves. Ismail & Ibrahim (2002) found that parents need food and drinks the most for their basic sustenance. The study also found on top of that, they need some form of cash, medication and affection.

In lieu of the social aspect of subsistence-giving, household supplies mean a lot especially to parents who are of old age and have movement restriction. Indirectly, this form of subsistence also encourages visitation by the children. This will, in turn, render both physical and emotional support to their parents. Abu Samah et al (2006) for example, found that parents need social support foremost. It includes visitation, financial help and affection from all family members. In a study on senior citizens, Ahmad & Ismail (2006) found that 37.3% of children who are married were only visiting their parents once in a couple of months in comparison with children with the more frequent visitation of 15.1%. Household supplies provision will also provide social support to parents and at the same time, cultivating the culture of frequent visitations. In terms of capability and convenience, it is an initiative to substitute financial subsistence. For those who are financially incapable to give financial subsistence, giving out household supplies is the next best alternative. For example, Nassuruddin & Azahari (2017) found that children tend to resort to household supplies in exchange for financial subsistence when they are in financial difficulties.

Apart from the above two forms of subsistence, the study also found another two popular forms of subsistence-giving i.e., clothing and medical cost. The finding is consistent with Nor and Ghazali (2016) which found that sons tend to assume more responsibility in ferrying their parents to and from the hospital whether for medical appointments and/or treatments. This is especially true for parents who are financially vulnerable and in need of medical attention i.e., medical cost and medicines (Ismail & Ibrahim 2002 and As-Syatiri, 2007). However, the study found that only a third of the respondents are doing so. This can be explained in at least two ways. First, the parents are not in need of such help and second, the children have overlooked to provide for medical-related subsistence. Nevertheless, the second account should not have transpired as Islam has outlined the need to provide medicine and medical care to parents, especially for ailing parents. For example, Ismail & Ibrahim (2002) found that children highly ranked the provision of medicine and medical care, next only to the provision of food and shelter.

Next, the study found that subsistence-giving on a monthly basis by the respondents dominates the frequency pattern. This can be partly explained by the fact that most respondents are civil servants who receive their respective salaries also on a monthly basis. Notwithstanding, several respondents did not make any mention on their subsistence-giving frequency as they are providing them on a need basis. From the Shariah perspective, the Quran and sunnah do not specify any pattern, frequency or even forms of subsistence-giving. According to Al-Sartawi (1997), the obligatory act of subsistence-giving as mentioned in Surah al-Isra: 23 does not outline any precondition and/or specific rate whether in terms of timeline or its amount. In fact, Ibn Qudamah (1997), argues that the rate of subsistence should be individually determined according to the parents' specific need. In other

words, the issue revolving the amount and/or frequency is considered as an abstract concept, to begin with. Therefore, when few respondents give their subsistence on a need basis, that does not mean that they are neglecting their filial responsibilities. In fact, the Shariah considers that the children have fulfilled their obligation if their parents do not wish for other things at any given time. The same applies to those who give their subsistence only when they can afford to do so. So long the arrangement is agreeable by their parents, this is non-issue from the Shariah perspective. According to Al-Jaziri (1999), subsistence-giving becomes obligatory when the parents are poor or destitute. Al-Syarbini (1994) and Zaidan (2000) on the other hand, outlined the precondition of subsistence-giving that is conditional upon their financial capability so long it does not give a negative impact on their living standard.

#### **Factors of Subsistence-Giving**

In discussing the factors related to subsistence-giving, the literature revolves around at least these three factors i.e., the act of obligation, sibling position and act of love and devotion. The study found that the majority of respondents give subsistence to their parents beyond the obligatory act as required in Islam. This is because they overwhelmingly rejected the statement on subsistence-giving as a need basis. Even if their parents are able to self-sustenance, they will still contribute their fair share of subsistence. This is well beyond the minimum required amount as outlined by Al-Jaziri (1999), which stated that is subsistence-giving is considered as an obligatory act if one's parents are poor and destitute.

From the Shariah perspective, what was contributed by the respondents is in no way an obligatory act. However, their insistence on giving subsistence to their parents is a commendable act. This is line with the spirit of ihsan (benevolence) especially towards one's parents, which is inscribed in the Holy Quran:

يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنفِقُونَ ۖ قُلْ مَا أَنفَقْتُم مِّنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ <sup>5</sup>وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ They ask you, [O Muhammad], what they should spend. Say, "Whatever you spend of good is [to be] for parents and relatives and orphans and the needy and the traveller. And whatever you do of good - indeed, Allah is Knowing of it." (Surah Al-Baqarah 2: 215)

According to the tafsir (commentary) by Ibn Kathir (1998), Muqatil bin Hayyan explicated on subsistence that is categorised as mandub (recommended) only. It is especially true to those who have extra income and it should be channelled to the target group including that of our parents.

Apart from the parents' financial status, it is equally important to consider the financial capability of the children as well. The study also found that one of the main reasons why they are giving subsistence to their parents is because of their good financial standing. This finding shows that the respondents do think that with good and stable income comes with the conscience to fulfil their filial obligation. This is consistent with al-Nawawi (n.d.)'s opinion that subsistence-giving to one's parents should only be fulfilled once the basic and daily needs of one's nucleus family have been fully contented. Notwithstanding, this finding cannot be generalised as a few respondents do state their lack of subsistence-giving on the factor(s) other than one's incapability of doing so.

Sibling position does not have any bearing on Shariah's position on subsistence-giving. However, the researchers have decided to include the factor to examine whether it has any effect on the respondents' subsistence-giving decision. The overwhelming majority of the respondents consider sibling position-related items as a non-factor. Be it whether they are the first-born or youngest child, male or female sibling, it does not affect their amount or frequency of subsistence-giving. This is consistent with Sya'ban (1993) opinion that subsistence-giving is an obligatory act and it does not account gender or sibling position as a factor. In fact, according to Zaidan (2000), the only factor that matters is one's financial capability of doing so. In general, every child should partake in subsistence-giving to their parents if they have a surplus income irrespective of their sibling position.

Subsequently, the third factor i.e., subsistence-giving as an act of love does affect the respondents' commitment. It is consistent with what was elucidated by al-Kasani (2000), which are of the opinion that subsistence-giving is a way to express one's gratitude to his/her parents for their upbringing. Although al-Maidani (1999) argues that it is the cardinal duty of one's parents to raise their offspring well albeit they can no longer do especially when they are of old age. Granted, a child can never repay their parents' deed. However, one must at least try to give subsistence to his/her parents as much as possible for as long as possible.

#### Conclusion

The study found two most popular types of subsistence-giving i.e., cash and household supplies. The more popular form of the two is cash transfer, which is a non-issue from the Shariah perspective as it is liquid enough to satisfy the contemporaneous needs of one's parents. Apart from that, there are a small number of respondents that provide subsistence to their parents in forms of medicine and clothing. The researchers are of the opinion that this is specific to parents who are old age and in need of physical assistance. Apart from that, the respondents also tend to opt for cash transfer as it is not an encumbrance as compared to other types of subsistence-giving. However, it is interesting to note that the parents' financial standing does not have any bearing on their children's subsistence-giving. Even if their parents are well-to-do, they still contribute their fair share, and this is a highly admirable act – consistent with the commendable concept of ihsan to parents in Islam.

One major implication that can be derived from this study is the discernment of the tremendous popularity of cash as a form of subsistence-giving as well as its monthly pattern. The nature of cash is an enabling factor for both parties – it is liquid enough for the parents and of convenience for the children. Nevertheless, subsistence-giving needs to go beyond the transactional nature of cash transfer especially to parents who are of old-age that needs medical care and household supplies. Therefore, the way forward is to develop a subsistence-giving model that enables those who transact via cash to simultaneously provide both medical care and household supplies for their respective parents, if need be.

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