

# Sexual Harassment in the Workplace by the Occurance and the Consequences: A Research on Women Who Exposed to Sexual Harassment

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## Abstract

*The research aims to identify and define the dimensions of sexual harassment that women are exposed to in the workplace and strategies to cope with harassment. In the research, "in-depth interview" was used as qualitative research methods and semi-structured interview form was used as data collection tool. The study was conducted with 498 women exposed to sexual abuse. The data were analyzed by NVIVO 10 qualitative analysis program. Considering the contents of sexual harassment, although there are a range of harassment forms, in a hierarchy of severity, these can be named as harassment through stalking, physical, verbal, and visual harassment. Women have difficulties in recognizing and identifying harassment in the workplace. In particular, it appears that they have entered into the process of concealing and neglecting with different definitions, which they have used to abuse the words 'harassment' and 'harasser'. Guilt, weakness, humiliation, fear, anger, helplessness, not knowing what to do, denial are the emotions that arise after harassment. After harassment, women who are harassed remain silent due to fear of losing their jobs and receiving negative reactions. Women who are exposed to harassment are trying to protect themselves from harassment by "self restraint and avoidance" approach.*

**Keywords:** *harassment, sexual harassment, sexual harassment at work, women, workplace.*

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## Oluşumu ve Sonuçları İtibariyle İşyerinde Cinsel Taciz: Cinsel Tacize Maruz Kalan Kadınlar Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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### Öz

*Araştırma, kadınların işyerinde maruz kaldığı cinsel tacizin boyutlarını ve taciz ile başa çıkma stratejilerini belirleme ve tanımlama amacını taşımaktadır. Araştırmada, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden derinlemesine mülakat, veri toplama aracı olarak da yarı yapılandırılmış mülakat formu kullanılmıştır. Araştırma, cinsel tacize maruz kalan 498 kadın ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler, NVIVO 10 nitel analiz programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Cinsel tacizin içeriği göz önüne alındığında, bir önem hiyerarşisinde çeşitli taciz formları olmasına rağmen, bunlar takip, fiziksel, sözlü ve görsel taciz yoluyla taciz olarak adlandırılabilir. Araştırma bulguları tacize uğrayan kadınların, işyerinde tacizi tanıma ve tanımlama gücüne işaret etmektedir. Özellikle 'taciz' ve 'tacizci' kelimelerini kullanmaktan çekindikleri farklı tanımlamalarla gizleme ve önemsizleştirme sürecine girildiği görülmektedir. Suçluluk, güçsüzlük, aşağılanma, korku, öfke, çaresizlik, ne yapacağını bilememe, yadsıma taciz sonrası ortaya çıkan duygulardır. Suçluluk, güçsüzlük, aşağılanma, korku, öfke, çaresizlik, ne yapacağını bilememe, yadsıma taciz sonrası ortaya çıkan duygulardır. Taciz sonrasında, tacizle karşılaşan kadınlar işi kaybetme ve olumsuz tepkilerle karşılaşma korkusu nedeniyle sessiz kalmaktadır. Tacize maruz kalan kadınlar 'kendini kısıtlayıcı ve kaçınmacı' yaklaşım ile tacizden korunmaya çalışmaktadır.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler: taciz, cinsel taciz, işyerinde cinsel taciz, kadınlar, iş yeri.*

## Introduction

Sexual harassment is regarded as verbal or physical behavior towards an individual without their consent, including sexual remarks, offers, and insults or displaying visual sexual content. Sexual harassment at the work is defined as the exposure of an individual to sexual verbal or physical behavior and remarks at a working environment or workplace. Sexual harassment can include such behavior as sexual demands, verbal offense, making comments about the appearance, private life of an employee, making jokes and asking questions with sexual connotation, sharing inconvenient images and videos, making sexual advances through letters or e-mails, whistling, inconvenient gestures and mimics and insults about the employee's gender. Being first and foremost a type of discrimination, sexual harassment at work involves all sorts of disturbing remarks and behavior related to somebody's gender.

Women have had to deal with different problems with their entry into working life. Besides the women's efforts in solving these problems, the policies of the employer and the state were supportive. However, the occurrence of "sexual harassment and its consequences are difficult to identify and solve, both for women and for businesses. It is seen that women tend to hide due to reasons such as dismissal, exclusion or family learning. Therefore, it leads to the growth of the problem by folding or trying to solve it by its own effort. In this study, the dimensions of sexual harassment which are not easy to express as a problem and search for a solution and women's strategies are analyzed. Thus, the causes of the problem and ways of struggle are put forward and women, business and public policies will be guided in the process of combating sexual harassment. Especially recognition and identification of sexual harassment, the causes of sexual harassment, the difficulty in accepting sexual harassment as a problem, the determination of the current situation in the enterprises is in high importance in the establishment of the measures and policies to prevent sexual harassment in the work place.

## Sexual Harassment and Gender Equality

This study is based on the concepts of sexual violence of the World Health Organization (WHO) and sexual harassment in EU Directive 73, 2002. The WHO has defined sexual violence as actions to say unwanted sexual promises, to make sexual behaviors and offers, to use the person as a sexual object for commercial purposes. It refers to the act of sexual assault by indirect or direct coercion against the sexuality of a woman in all circumstances, regardless of the nature of the relationship between the parties to sexual violence and the physical space. The aim here is to subdue by putting pressure, coercion and control on women. The European Parliament and the Council aimed at harmonizing the directive 2002/73 in the European Union and the legal arrangements of the member states for equal treatment. With the adoption of this directive, member states will treat sexual harassment as a form of

discrimination on the basis of gender and impose sanctions (Gomes et al., 2004:292). Equal opportunity in the EU is one of the key characteristics of the EU's working life, as equal participation of women and men in working life as an important pillar of the EU employment strategy. In this context, the report published by Rubinstein in 1987 shows that the problem of sexual harassment in workplaces has reached significant dimensions. In the 1990s, the EU Commission began to work on the issue. Directive 2002/73 is intended to ensure integrity between different practices in the European Union countries and to establish standards for sexual harassment (Gomes et al., 2004: 292). Directive 2002/73 targeted these issues:

- Identification of sexual harassment,
- Preventive measures for sexual harassment,
- Judicial and administrative procedures,
- Compensation of victims of sexual harassment
- The establishment of national commissions to ensure equal employment conditions.

The Directive considers harassment and sexual harassment as gender-based discrimination. Sexual harassment is defined as undesirable behavior that leads to or violates human dignity, orally, non-verbally or physically, in a hostile, particularly hostile, humiliating, embarrassing and aggressive environment. There are three basic elements of sexual harassment. These are: Unwanted, against human dignity, abused working environment (humiliating, hostile, embarrassing and aggressive).

Sexual harassment in the workplace leads to gender inequality as an element of discrimination. It is seen that gender inequality increases sexual harassment and the consequences of sexual harassment lead to gender inequality. Models have been developed for the causes of sexual harassment (Livingstone et al., 1982). The biological model sees sexual harassment as a result of natural sexual motives and attraction among people and bases them on the strong sexual motives of men. The sociocultural model deals with the inequality caused by the patriarchal structure between men and women. As can be seen, there is a causal relationship between sexual harassment and gender inequality.

### Review of the Related Literature

Until late 1970s, unwanted and disturbing sexual remarks, attitudes and behavior towards an employee at the working environment had not been defined and these had been considered as personal problems. After 1980s, depending on the increasing participation of women in working life, such behaviors started to be categorized as a problem of working life. Sexual harassment as a concept was defined in Catherine Mac Kinnon's book, *Sexual Harassment of Working Woman: A Case of Sex Discrimination* (1979) as a

consequence of the encounter between unequal positions of power and as sexual demands that are forced upon the ones that are exposed without their consent (cited in Sherwyn et al., 2000:76).

In various researches (Charney & Russell, 1994; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Marin & Guadagno, 1999) it was suggested that a majority of those exposed to sexual harassment are women and such attitudes were practiced by men against women that the harassers are men and those targeted in sexual harassment are most generally women (Ryan & Kenig, 1991). Additionally, considering the working environment, sexual harassment does not only take place among colleagues within an organization but can also be committed by customers towards the employees of an organization (Hughes & Tadic, 1998).

Researches reveal that women that are exposed to sexual harassment and the men that commit harassment do not have any characteristics that can be generalized. The profession, age, socio-economic level and physical features are not indicative of their being exposed to sexual harassment (Palum et al., quoted in Bakırıcı, 2000). However, several factors make it easier for the harassers to take action. Divorced women or women living alone, women that are economically weak and women that are not experienced in working life, women that are underpaid, undereducated or women that work in temporary jobs and women that work in organizations that men are dominant in number or in jobs that are considered traditionally as "men's jobs" are targeted more frequently by sexual harassment (Fain & Anderton, 1987; Gutek & Dunwoody, 1987).

Gutek asserts that in the work places, the sexuality of women is perceived more than that of men and the visibility of women's sexuality increases the acts of harassment. However, the sexuality of men are not in the forefront. Attributes such as competitiveness, assertiveness and power, that are naturally associated with the male gender, does not draw so much attention although they are expressed in remarks and jokes connoting sexuality (Gutek, 1989). The socio-cultural standpoint, on the other hand, suggests that sexual harassment results from gender inequality fostered by the patriarchal system. This viewpoint regards sexual harassment as a consequence of men's powers coming out of their personal and socio-cultural positions as well as considering sexual harassment as an instrument used by men in order to sustain their economic and political domination over women. Accordingly, sexual harassment results from the social inequalities of the distribution of power and status differences among genders (O'Leary-Kelly et al., 2004:89).

In literature, there is a variety of classifications of sexual harassment. Fitzgerald et al. (1999) classifies the term as harassment by intimidation, disturbing sexual interest, sexual enmity and gender discrimination. Due to the wide range of personal interpretations of sexual harassment factors by each individual, it is quite challenging to make a clear description of sexual harassment (Gilbert et al., 1998:48) whereas another significant matter about sexual harassment is that because of the harasser does not act explicitly, the

person exposed to harassment can have doubts whether to interpret the act as sexual harassment (Wayne et al., 2001:180).

The perception of sexual harassment depends on the strength of the act and the characteristics of the targeted person (Cleveland, 1994). Sexual harassment at work place can be seen in any organization. For example, in the army (Fitzgerald et al., 1999), at a church (Chibnal et al., 1998), a hospital (Robbins et al., 1997; Romito et al., 2004), in a hotel (Guerrier & Adib, 2000), at a university (Mecca & Rubin, 1999) in short, in all kinds of organizations.

Sexual harassment is a crucial issue impacting working life (Fitzgerald et al., 1999). Regarding the frequency of sexual harassment, it was found that as the frequency of being exposed to sexual aggression increases, the possibility that such acts are perceived as sexual harassment also increases (e.g., Ellis et al., 1991; Hurt et al., 1999).

The impact of sexual harassment on the working life and career of women is an important factor. Sexual harassment increases the stress level among the targeted individuals. Renick (1980) expresses that those who are harassed are more inclined to be involved in accidents and they tend to ask for longer sick leaves. Harassment may also deteriorate relations within work places (Di Tomaso, 1989). The person that is harassed is driven out of the social communication networks that play an important role in promotions and improvements. The incident of harassment may also turn out as an agreement by the harasser with the other male employees and as the isolation of the targeted person. Harassment can cause alienation among women towards their job and they can also lose their will to succeed. In many occasions, sexual harassment results in women's changing their positions where they gained experience or being transferred to another department at the work place. It is clear that such consequences have negative impacts on career and promotion opportunities of women. The results of the research reveal that one in ten women leave their jobs as a result of sexual harassment. It is discussed that seeing themselves as victims is emotionally challenging for women (Toker, 2016).

## The Research

### *The Purpose of the Research*

The study was designed in a descriptive characteristic, aiming at defining an existing situation. The research aims at determining and describing the dimensions of the sexual harassment faced by women in their work places as well as their strategies in coping with harassment. The way the women that were subjected to harassment at their work places interpreted the causes and results of sexual harassment were researched.

In this research, the definition of the EU Council's Regulation as "any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive

environment" was based on and the research was built up within this framework.

### *The Research Sample*

The research was carried out with 498 women who were subjected to sexual harassment at their work places. The sample was created with random sampling method. The sampling was created by using simple random sampling method, which is one of the random sampling methods. After determining the population simple random sampling is generated by creating a list that expresses the groups that create the population and random selection of units to be included in the sample from the list. Sampling was carried out in two stages. Sampling was carried out in two stages. In Stage 1 women were asked whether they were exposed to sexual harassment at work. At this stage, a list of women stating that they have been subjected to sexual harassment at work has been created and 1000 working women have been included in the list. In Stage 2, interviews were conducted with 498 women among women who stated that they had been subjected to harassment by using simple random sampling method. The average age of women that participated in the research is 32. 201 of the women are married, 150 are unmarried, 37 are engaged, 110 are divorced and widowers. Three hundred and ninety women that were subjected to sexual harassment at work are from the private sector and 108 of them are from the public sector.

### *Research Method*

In the research, one of the qualitative research methods, in-depth interview was used and semi-structured interview was used as a data collection tool. The interview form consists of two sections, one of which contains demographic information and the second of which contains 15 questions about the process of the incident of harassment.

The body of literature points out to the fact that in qualitative research, there needs to be other concepts to be substituted for validity and credibility (Creswell, 2013). In this respect, four strategies are mentioned for ensuring validity and credibility in qualitative research. These strategies are plausibility, transmissibility, consistency and confirmability (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). During the preparation of the interview form, the existence of these four strategies was ensured. In this context, a pilot study was conducted with 30 women and in the revision of the interview form; opinions were taken from two experts.

As ethical principles; in this confidentiality is provided that only the researcher knows the identities of the participants and also the researcher ensured that participants' identities are not revealed to anybody. The study based on voluntary participation and also informed consent is obtained in the research. 45 to 60 minute-long interviews were made with the participants. Sound recording was made during the interviews and afterwards, these

records were transcribed. Pre-interviews were made with participants and the purpose and the process of the research were explained. The research was completed in a period of 6 months. During the research process, preliminary interviews were made with the participants, the purpose of the research and the research process were explained. In this context, interviews were held with women who agreed to participate in the research. Collected data was analyzed with the NVIVO 10 qualitative analysis software. In the assessment of qualitative research software such as NVIVO are generally preferred. NVIVO offers advantages related to the classification, coding, theme building and modeling of collected results. During the analysis phase of this research, first of all, the data was coded and content analysis was made on the reiteration of certain words.

### *Research Findings*

Considering the process of harassment, 250 women expressed that they were harassed by their superiors, 150 women expressed that they were harassed by their colleagues and 98 women expressed that they were harassed by customers or third persons. It was concluded that most of the harassers were superior level employees and employers. Women who are subjected to harassment list the cause of harassment as mentality and perception, the insufficiency of education, repressed sexual drive, lack of character and dissatisfaction, false consciousness of individuals, weak morality, men's belief in their superiority to women, and the men's lack of education.

It is observable that harassment may last for 1 day up to 6 years. Considering the contents of sexual harassment, although there are a range of harassment forms, in a hierarchy of severity, these can be named as harassment through stalking, physical, verbal, visual harassment and harassment through oppression/use of force.

It is seen from Table 1 that the majority of women participating in the research are married and have high school education. Physical and verbal harassment occurs at the places where women are alone (toilet, changing room, the office of the manager, car, corridor, archive, around the building) as others occur at any place.

Table 1. Demographic Information

		Number of Woman
Marital Status	Married	201
	Single	150
	Engaged	37
	Divorced- widow	110
Number of Children	1	100
	2	158
	3	32
	4	11
Education level	Illiterate	1
	Literate	12
	Primary school	42
	Secondary education	201
	Associate's degree	100
	Bachelor's degree	129
Master degree	13	
Sector	Public	108
	Private	390

Table 2: Types of Sexual Harassment

Physical harassment	Touching certain body parts Holding hands or putting hands on shoulders Kiss attempt Hugging Fondling Rape attempt Rape Pulling or opening the clothing Smelling or exhaling
Verbal harassment	Sexually explicit talk, Asking for sex Sexually suggestive compliments or implications Talking about sexual relations Gossiping about
Visual harassment	Staring in a constant and disturbing manner Staring at intimate body parts Sending or showing sexually explicit images
Harassment through stalking	Stalking on arrival and departure, Calling for Providing a collaborative environment Close contact work environment Sending gifts
Coercion-threat-promise	Threat of dismissal Gossiping about Promise for a raise Promise for an advantage

Table 3: Defensive Behaviors

Number of Women	Defensive Behaviors
351 women	"I didn't wear inappropriate clothes", "I was always keeping myself apart" "I avoided" "I did not do anything"
106 women	"He always does" "He also did it to the others"

351 of women who are subjected to harassment perform defensive behavior saying "I didn't wear inappropriate clothes", "I was always keeping myself apart", "I avoided", and "I did not do anything" before they talk about the incident of sexual harassment, as for 106 of women try to prove that they were not the only one by saying "he always does" and "he also did it to the others".

Word frequency analysis of the narratives of women on harassment and period of harassment are conducted in this research. Frequency analysis is one of the methodologies used for digitizing and analyzing qualitative data. Frequency analysis is conducted for each question and the five most commonly used words and word groups in the narratives are presented simplified in a single table. In the research, word frequency analysis was done in the narratives of women about harassment and the process. Frequency analysis is one of the methods used in the quantization and analysis of qualitative data. Frequency analysis was made for each question and the 5 most used words and word groups in the narratives are given by simplifying them in a single table (Table 4).

The analysis of Table 4 show that women experienced difficulty in defining and recognizing harassment at work. Women especially abstain from using the words harassment and harasser and enter into the process of obfuscation and trivialization by using different expressions. The feelings of guilt, weakness, abasement, feat, anger, despair, being in a quandary, and denegation emerge after the harassment.

Women who were subjected to harassment do not share it immediately and rather speak out after 1 day and 3 months. At first, harassment is usually shared to close friends and acquaintances that are not from work. There are not any informative or preventive regulations about harassment in the workplace, but it seems that the workplaces where harassment incidents increased started to take action. 10 women expressed that they were informed by the union.

Ten women stated that they put their foot down, 100 women quitted or changed job/workplace, 20 women filed a complaint to the executives, 2 women told their families, 6 women filed a judicial complaint, and 360 women remained silent and did not do anything. As it is seen, women who experience harassment remain silent due to the fear of losing the job and facing negative

reactions. Others express that they have to remain silent—in their own words—“swallow” it. When the motivation of this situation is inquired, “the fear of notoriety”, “the fear of dismissal”, “concerns about the breakdown of the marriage”, “not knowing what to do”, “having no proof”, and “the idea that it will not happen again” are stated.

When the defense mechanisms of women who were subjected to harassment were analyzed, remarkable efforts are avoiding the harasser, trying not to stay alone, trying to keep it secret, changing the dressing style, the effort of changing the workplace or department. Women stated that they act distant, limit their clothing and behavior, avoid talking to men and behave in a dignified manner to avoid harassment at the workplace. As it is seen, women try to be safe from harassment at workplace through “self-limiting” and “avoidant” approaches. Because of the complaints of some women, 5 of the harassers were dismissed, 3 of them were sued, and 81 of them received warning as there were not any sanctions for the rest.

Table 4 : Analysis of Word Frequency

Fact	Word Frequency
Defining sexual harassment at work	“that event-the event” “the one I experienced” “bad thing” “attack” “harassment”
The period of harassment	“I have no guilt” “I did not do anything” “why did it happen” “what was my fault” “very bad”
Struggle against harassment	“I ran away” “I wanted to die” “I was scared” “I remained silent” “I looked for help”
Speaking out about harassment and asking for help	“I didn’t know what to do” “I couldn’t tell” “I couldn’t accept” “this would happen to anyone” “I should remain silent”
The cause of the harassment	“Negative environment” “man’s” “faith of women” “obligation” “workplace deficiencies”
The responsibility to prevent harassment	“state” “jurisdiction” “police” “employer” “family”
Defining harassment	“he” “bad man” “the one who did this” “attacker” “harasser”
Defining oneself	“desperate” “pitiful” “guilty” “fool” “coward”

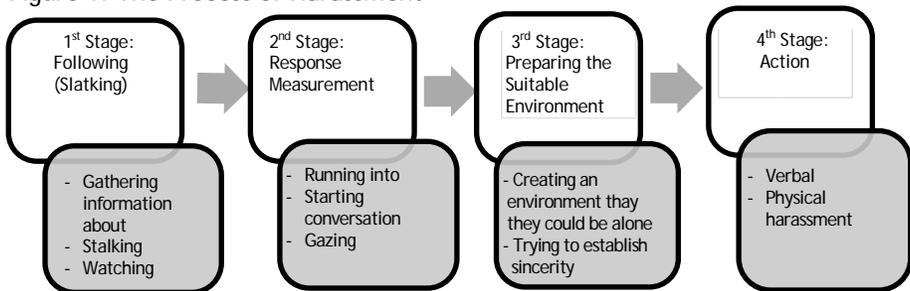
Table 5 : Behaviours After Harassment

Number of Women	Behaviours After Harassment
10 women	warning
100 women	quitted or changed job/workplace
20 women	filed a complaint to the executives
2 women	told their families
6 women	filed a judicial complaint
360 women	remained silent and did not do anything

### Conclusion and Discussion

As understood from the narratives of the participant harassment is an instantaneous act. A four-phased process is observed through analyzing the formation of harassment.

Figure 1: The Process of Harassment



The harasser appears to carry out harassment in the phases of "stalking", "measuring response", "finding an appropriate environment" and "action". For this reason, the emergence of the harassment will be prevented through the recognition of harassment and the attempts of preventing the harassment by women employees. Though not in all cases, the "timid" and "silent" attitude of women were an effective determinant for occurrence and continuity of the harassment in most of the cases. It will be a preventive strategy for the women to give up the "silent" attitude. On the other hand, it is necessary to make regulations in the workplaces that will prevent the formation of "suitable grounds" by employers and managers.

It is observed that the quality of life, as well as the social and family relations of women who are subjected to harassment has deteriorated as their success is also decreased. Sexual harassment is a serious crime and every case must be punished. Harassment at the workplace is not recognized and the strategies of struggle are not known. Women try to solve it through "individual" and "avoidant" approaches.

With the increase in women's access to working life, the problems they face are also diversifying and increasing. In particular, "sexual harassment" has become an increasing and diversifying problem in recent years. Despite

the increasing importance of women in working life, gender-based division of labor and gender-based assessments can lead to sexual harassment. The occurrence and probability of sexual harassment in the workplace has a deterrent effect on women's employment. On the other hand, it negatively affects the proportional distribution of male and female employees in terms of work and departments in the workplace and weakens the efforts and aspirations of women in the career process. This will deepen gender inequality. It causes low self-esteem and discouraged attitude in working life, leading to low career goals. Raising public awareness, submitting each case to the court, providing training for individual development, living in a community, imposing dissuasive punishments to the harasser, taringing of the harraser, ingraining gender equality are some of the proposed strategies.

Responsibility for preventing the harassment is attributed to the organization, family, state, police, and judicial institutions in turn. The responsibility of the organizations managers in preventing sexual harassment is important. Managers may not be aware that sexual harassment is a major problem. Training activities are important for the necessary information on this subject. Complaints about harassment need to be considered by management.

Communication channels which are necessary to prevent sexual harassment in workplaces should be established between management and employees and also emergency complaints mechanisms should be activated. Open communication and guidance should be provided for removing the taboo of silence which hides the cases of sexual harassment. Personnel meetings and group discussions are essential in this respect. Staff should also be informed about sexual harassment at work. Also, as an employer taking appropriate steps following a sexual harassment complain is crucial. Raising awareness for preventing harassment in the workplace is also important. Organizational culture should support strong ethical values in order to take necessary measures and to produce solutions. Women employees must fully understand the meaning of sexual harassment and share it with their environment when they encounter such an event.

Ensuring equality between women and men, preventing human rights violations are also important in terms of social justice. Ensuring equality, showing the necessary respect to women, and making women's voices heard are important for gender equality. Providing employees with a safe and happy workplace is indispensable in terms of gender, so this study aims to contribute to the literature by analyzing a current subject in detail and to contribute to the literature.

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