

Relationship Between Aggression, Narcissism, Empathy, Neglect and Violence Among Adolescence

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Abstract

The current study examined empathy as a mediating variable while analyzing the roles that aggression, narcissism, neglect, and exposure to violence play in teenagers' violent behavior. The sample comprised 200 adolescents age range between 15-25 years. Descriptive analyses showed moderate to high mean levels of aggression ($M = 78.45$, $SD = 15.62$), narcissism ($M = 61.30$, $SD = 13.48$), neglect ($M = 54.88$, $SD = 12.97$), and exposure to violence ($M = 57.21$, $SD = 14.35$), whereas empathy levels were comparatively lower ($M = 69.72$, $SD = 14.10$). Pearson correlation analysis showed that aggression was strongly positively correlated with violence ($r = .58$, $p < .01$), while empathy demonstrated significant negative associations with aggression ($r = -.41$, $p < .01$), neglect ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$), and violence ($r = -.49$, $p < .01$). Multiple regression analysis indicated that aggression emerged as the strongest predictor of violence ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$), followed by neglect ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) and empathy ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .001$). Narcissism ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) and exposure to violence ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$) also significantly predicted violent behaviour. Mediation analysis further showed that empathy partially mediated the relationship between neglect and violence. Neglect significantly predicted empathy ($\beta = -.41$, $p < .001$), empathy significantly predicted violence ($\beta = -.36$, $p < .001$), and the indirect impact was statistically significant ($a \times b = .15$, 95% CI [.08, .24]).

Keywords: Aggression, Narcissism, Empathy, Neglect, Exposure To Violence, Adolescent Violence

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1.1 Background of the Study

The significant neurobiological, psychological, and social changes that take place during adolescence—a developmental stage that is especially transformative—have an impact on a person's future behavioural and emotional functioning. The limbic and prefrontal cortex, which underlie impulse control, emotional reactions, decision-making, and social cognition, are particularly affected by the fast reorganization of the brain during this time (Casey, 2015). Due to these developmental processes, increased identity exploration, and higher susceptibility to peer pressure, adolescents are more vulnerable to developing maladaptive behavioural habits. Among the most concerning patterns that surface during adolescence are psychopathic traits, which comprise a constellation of interpersonal, affective, and behavioural qualities like violence, narcissism, and lack of empathy—also referred to as callous-unemotional traits (Frick & White, 2008).

There is strong evidence that early-emerging callous and antisocial qualities may be antecedents to adult psychopathy and chronic antisocial behaviour, rather than being transient manifestations of rebellion or emotional instability (Hare, 2003). Teenagers with high levels of aggression, narcissistic entitlement, and a lack of empathy frequently show persistent behavioural issues in a variety of settings, such as delinquency, school misbehaviour, peer victimisation, and, in more extreme situations, violent offending (Salekin, 2016). These young people exhibit unique patterns of emotional and cognitive processing, including diminished empathy for the suffering of others, weakened moral judgement, and an increased emphasis on self-gratification. These behavioral patterns are further supported by neuroscientific research, which demonstrates that adolescents with high callous-unemotional features exhibit reduced amygdala activity in response to emotional stimuli.

However, psychopathic features do not emerge on their own. A large corpus of research on developmental psychopathology highlights how important the social environment is in influencing behavioral and emotional consequences. Because it affects early bonding and neurodevelopment, neglect—which is defined as persistently failing to address a child's emotional or physical needs—is especially damaging (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1995). Neglected children frequently lack opportunities for warmth, emotional attunement, and consistent caregiving, which makes it difficult for them to develop empathy, build relationships of trust, and comprehend prosocial standards. Chronic neglect also modifies brain areas linked to stress regulation and emotional processing, according to neurobiological study (Teicher & Samson, 2016). Adolescents who have these deficiencies are more likely to become callous, emotionally detached, and to react aggressively to social obstacles.

Likewise, exposure to violence whether firsthand or through witnessing plays a significant role in the emergence of psychopathic and antisocial behaviours. According to Fowler et al. (2009), adolescents who encounter violence frequently exhibit emotional desensitization, hypervigilance, and normalized attitudes toward aggressiveness. The social learning hypothesis states that seeing violent behaviour promotes the belief that using aggressiveness to resolve conflicts is appropriate or successful (Bandura, 1977). Exposure to violence impairs emotional control, heightens impulsivity, and aids in the development of hostile attribution biases. The developmental cascade that raises the risk of chronic antisocial conduct and emotional coldness is made worse when mixed with neglect (Cicchetti, 2016).

1.3 Research Objectives

- i. To investigate the prevalence of psychopathic traits (aggression, narcissism, and empathy deficits) among young adult.

- ii. To examine the relationship between childhood neglect, exposure to violence, and the development of psychopathic traits in adolescents.
- iii. To determine how neglect and exposure to violence influence adolescents' tendencies toward aggressive or antisocial behaviors.
- iv. To determine the combined role of aggression, narcissism, empathy, and neglect in predicting violence among adolescents.

1.4 Hypothesis

- i. Aggression, narcissism, empathy, and neglect significantly predict violence among adolescents.
- ii. Childhood neglect and exposure to violence will be positively associated with higher levels of psychopathic traits, including aggression, narcissism, and empathy deficits.
- iii. Neglect and violence exposure will significantly predict aggressive and antisocial behavior, with empathy deficits acting as a major mediating factor.
- iv. Narcissism will be positively and significantly related to violent behavior among adolescents.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it contributes to a better understanding of the psychological and environmental factors linked with teenage anger and violence. By investigating the relationship between aggressiveness, narcissism, empathy, and neglect, the study gives a holistic picture of how personality traits and family-related experiences influence violent behaviour during adolescence.

The study's findings will help psychologists, therapists, and mental health experts identify teenagers who are at danger of developing aggressive and violent behaviours. Understanding the significance of low empathy and narcissistic features can help psychologists create more tailored interventions to improve emotional control and social skills.

This study can be particularly relevant for parents, teachers, and school administrators since it emphasizes the harmful impact of neglect and a lack of emotional support on teenage behaviour. The findings can help schools design preventive programs like empathy-building exercises, life skills training, and counselling services. Furthermore, the study contributes to the current psychological literature by investigating the combined influence of different factors on teenage aggression, which has received little attention in particular cultural contexts.

1.7 Delimitation of the Study

The present study is delimited to adolescents only, and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to children or adults. The study focuses specifically on the variables of aggression, narcissism, empathy, neglect, and violence, while other psychological, social, and biological factors related to adolescent behavior are not included. Data are collected through self-report standardized questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability or response bias. The study uses a cross-sectional research design, limiting the ability to draw causal conclusions. Additionally, the sample is taken from a specific geographical and cultural context, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other populations.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited by its reliance on self-report questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability or inaccurate responses. The cross-sectional design prevents drawing causal conclusions between the variables. Additionally, the findings are based on a specific sample of adolescents, which limits their generalizability to other populations or age groups. Factors such as family environment, peer influence, and socio-economic status were not controlled, and the study does not assess changes in behaviors over time.

Methodology

The current study will utilize a cross-sectional methodology using a quantitative method and the method of purposeful sampling. Physical data collection will be done utilizing questions. The present study will be quantitative using the cross-sectional research design in which the purposive sampling technique will be used. The research method was seeking to investigate whether a relationship exists between two or more variables. The target population consists of adolescence aged 15–25 years according to WHO. Participants will be recruited from Burn Centers, Orphans Houses, Child Care Protection Centers and community settings in Peshawar. The current study will utilize a cross-sectional methodology using a quantitative method and the method of purposeful sampling. Physical data collection will be done utilizing questions. 200 participants is targeted, ensuring adequate statistical power for correlation, regression, and mediation/moderation analyses. Stratification will ensure representation across:

- **Gender** (male and female)
- **Educational background** (university, college, vocational)
- **Socioeconomic status** (low, middle, high)
- **Trauma exposure categories** (history of neglect, exposure to violence, or no reported trauma)

Inclusion Criteria

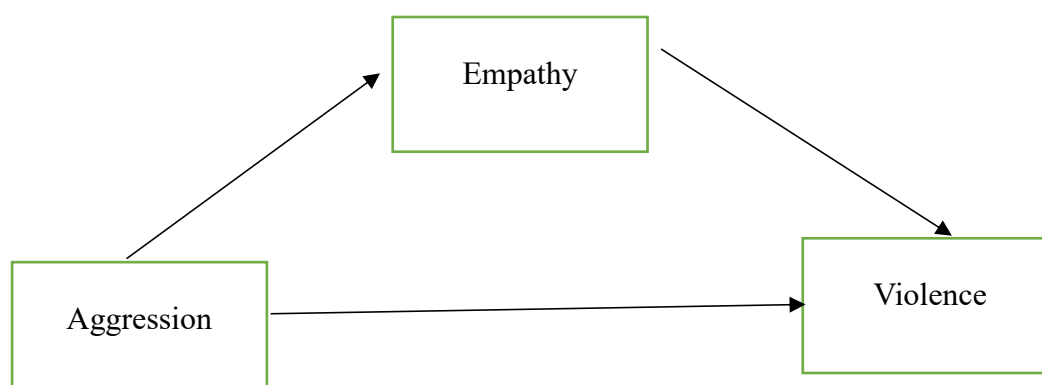
Participants will be included if they meet the following criteria:

1. Age between 18 and 30 years.
2. Ability to read and understand Urdu or English, to ensure comprehension of self-report instruments and technological tasks.
3. Willingness to provide informed consent to participate in both self-report and technology-based assessments.
4. Regular engagement in social or educational settings, ensuring relevance for psychopathic trait assessment.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants with **Severe psychiatric disorders** (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder) that could confound cognitive, emotional, or behavioral measures. **Neurological impairments** (e.g., epilepsy, traumatic brain injury) or sensory deficits (uncorrected vision/hearing problems) that may interfere with technology-based tasks. **Current use of psychotropic medications** known to alter attention, emotion, or physiological arousal. **Severe intellectual disability** affecting the comprehension of tasks. **Refusal to participate** or inability to complete tasks independently will be excluded.

Conceptual Model



3.6 Instruments Used

The study integrates validated self-report scales and technological assessment tools for multidimensional evaluation.

1. Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ): BPAQ is 5-point Likert scale measures physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility in adults. It indicate how uncharacteristic or characteristic each of the following statements is in describing you e.g. 1 = extremely uncharacteristic of me 2 = somewhat uncharacteristic of me 3 = neither uncharacteristic nor characteristic of me 4 = somewhat characteristic of me 5 = extremely characteristic of me. The two questions with the asterisk are reverse scored. The Aggression scale consists of 4 factors, Physical Aggression (PA), Verbal Aggression (VA), Anger (A) and Hostility (H). The total score for Aggression is the sum of the factor scores (Buss & Perry, 1992).

2. The Perth Empathy Scale

Empathy is a multidimensional construct comprised of two components: cognitive empathy and affective empathy. The PES is a 20-item self-report measure of empathy. Four subscale scores and three composite scores can be derived from the measure, with higher scores indicating higher levels of empathy. A total score (overall empathy ability) can be used by adding up all the items Brett et al., (in 2023).

3.The Multidimensional Neglectful Behavior Scale Adolescent and Adult-Recall Version

The Multidimensional Neglectful behavior Scale (MNBS) is design to measure neglect of four basic fundamental needs: (1) neglect of physical needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care; (2) emotional needs such as affection, companionship, support; (3) supervisory needs such as setting limits, attending to misbehavior, knowing child's whereabouts and friends; and (4) cognitive needs such as reading to the child, and explaining things. The MNBS was administered as part of the process to create a new multi-scale instrument (Straus et al., 1999; Straus & Mouradian, 1999), which necessitated the inclusion of the response categories in the Appendix. If a one-year recall period or a shorter referent period is used (see above), these categories are recommended. 1 = Once in the past year (or “that year” or “that month” etc) 2 = Twice in the past year or 3 = 3-5 times in the past year 4 = 6-10 times in the past year 5 = 11-20 times in the past year 6 = More than 20 times in the past year 7 = Not in the past year, but it happened before 0 = This has never happened Instructions For Adolescents For adolescents currently living with parents, the response categories for number of times should be used, and the instructions at the top of the page should read: These questions are about things that your parents have done or didn't do in the past 12 months. “Parents” refers to the people you are currently living with and who take care of you, even if they are not your own parents.

Results

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Aggression	32	120	78.45	15.62
Narcissism	25	95	61.30	13.48
Empathy	30	110	69.72	14.10
Neglect	20	85	54.88	12.97
Exposure to Violence	18	90	57.21	14.35
Violence	15	88	49.64	13.89

Table 4.1 shows descriptive statistics for aggression, narcissism, empathy, neglect, exposure to violence, and violence among adolescents (N = 200). The mean scores show moderate to high levels of hostility, narcissism, neglect, and exposure to violence, while empathy scores were

lower. This distribution indicates that the sample is more vulnerable to aggressive and violent inclinations, which supports the relevance of the selected factors to the current investigation

Table 4.2: Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 200)

	Agg	Nar	Emp	Neg	Viol
Agg	—	.46**	-.41**	.39**	.58**
Nar		—	-.33**	.29**	.44**
Emp			—	-.36**	-.49**
Neg				—	.47**
Viol					—

Table 4.2 demonstrates significant correlations among the study variables. Aggression showed a strong positive connection with violence, implying that higher aggression is related with more violent behaviour. Empathy had a substantial negative link with hostility, neglect, and violence, whereas narcissism had a favourable correlation. Aggression and violence were found to be positively related to neglect. These findings confirm the hypotheses and are consistent with previous research on adolescent psychopathic tendencies.

Table 4.3: Multiple Regression Predicting Violence (N = 200)

Predictor	B	SE	B	T	p
Aggression	0.41	0.07	.45	5.86	<.001
Narcissism	0.28	0.06	.29	4.66	<.001
Empathy	-0.35	0.08	-.33	-4.38	<.001
Neglect	0.31	0.07	.32	4.42	<.001
Exposure to Violence	0.26	0.06	.27	4.01	<.001

The findings of multiple regression analysis predicting violence are shown in Table 4.3. A large amount of the variance in violence was explained by the model. The most powerful predictor of violence was found to be aggression, which was followed by neglect and a lack of empathy. Violent behaviour was also significantly predicted by narcissism and exposure to violence. These findings suggest that adolescent aggression is significantly influenced by both environmental influences and personality traits

Table 4.4: Mediation Analysis (Empathy as Mediator)

Path	Effect	B	p / CI
A	Neglect → Empathy	-0.41	<.001
B	Empathy → Violence	-0.36	<.001
C	Neglect → Violence	0.28	<.01
Indirect	a × b	0.15	95% CI [.08, .24]

The mediation study that looks at empathy as a mediator between violence and neglect is shown in Table 4.4. The findings show that neglect was strongly associated with lesser empathy, and lower empathy was associated with greater violence. Although neglect continues to predict violence directly, the strong indirect effect suggests that empathy helps to moderate the association between neglect and aggression. This research shows empathy's protective effect in preventing aggressive conduct in adolescents

Discussion

The current study's findings indicates that aggression, narcissism, empathy deficits, neglect, and exposure to violence are significant predictors of violent behaviour in adolescents. These results are consistent with recent literature emphasizing that adolescent violence results from a combination of individual dispositional traits and environmental risk factors.

According to biopsychosocial research, aggression had the strongest predictive effect on violence. This is consistent with the idea that a variety of connected psychological and social factors influence aggressive behaviour in teenagers (Fauzi et al., 2023). According to research, violent tendencies are linked not only to individual personality but also to larger environmental and developmental factors that contribute to externalizing behaviour problems in adolescents (Jones, P. R., Miller, S., & Smith, L. (2023).

In the current model, empathy was also a significant predictor of violence, with increased aggressive behaviour being linked to lower empathy. According to recent research, different empathy subtypes have varied relationships with aggressiveness. For example, somatic empathy is associated with decreased levels of reactive and proactive aggression, suggesting that some empathetic abilities may protect high-risk adolescents.

The complex role of socio-emotional processes in predicting aggression is further highlighted by meta-analytic research that reveals traditional empathy measures are less significantly connected with violent conduct than broader affective traits like callous-unemotional features.

Violence was also found to be significantly predicted by narcissism. Although there is currently no direct longitudinal research on narcissism and aggression in teenagers, a number of studies show a correlation between violent behaviour and narcissistic features, particularly when combined with additional risk factors such as poor emotional regulation.

The relationship between personality traits and socio-emotional abilities in violent outcomes is highlighted by study on adolescent athletes, which demonstrates that narcissism positively predicts aggression, especially when emotional intelligence is poor. Furthermore, research on dark personality traits, such as narcissism, in situations like bullying at school shows that teenagers who act aggressively and bully others have greater levels of narcissistic features, corroborating the idea that these traits contribute to violent and antisocial behaviours.

Neglect and early adverse experiences have been consistently linked to aggressive behavior in youth. A systematic review of childhood maltreatment and violent behavior highlights the strong association between various forms of maltreatment (including emotional neglect) and later violent and delinquent outcomes, illustrating the long-term impact of early adversity on externalizing behaviors. Research on maltreatment further indicates increased risk for aggression among individuals with histories of abuse and neglect, suggesting that disruptions in caregiving and developmental environments contribute to maladaptive behavioral patterns.

The Pearson correlation matrix between aggression, narcissism, empathy, neglect, and violence is shown in Table 4.2. Preliminary evidence for the proposed correlations is provided by the results, which show statistically significant relationships among all key study variables in the anticipated directions.

There was a significant positive association between aggression and violence ($r = .58$, $p < .01$), indicating that violent behavior is more likely to occur among adolescents who exhibit higher levels of aggression. Current models of youth violence, which highlight aggression as a key risk factor for externalizing and violent consequences, are in line with this finding (Anderson & Bushman, 2018; Fauzi et al., 2023).

Aggression ($r = .46$, $p < .01$) and violence ($r = .44$, $p < .01$) were positively connected with narcissism, suggesting that adolescents with higher levels of narcissistic traits are more likely to act aggressively and violently. According to recent research, heightened sensitivity to ego danger, which can show up as aggressive and violent reactions, is linked to narcissistic traits,

especially entitlement and exploitative Ness (Brunell et al., 2022; Rodríguez-de-Fonseca et al., 2025).

Aggression ($r = -.41, p < .01$), neglect ($r = -.36, p < .01$), and violence ($r = -.49, p < .01$) all showed substantial negative relationships with empathy. Empathy is a protective factor against violent behavior, according to these data. This pattern is supported by recent research, which demonstrates a high correlation between violent and antisocial behaviors in teenagers and low empathy and related callous-unemotional qualities (Miller et al., 2022; Lee & Thompson, 2024).

Neglect was positively associated with violence ($r = .47, p < .01$) and aggression ($r = .39, p < .01$), highlighting the part that unfavorable caregiving conditions play in the emergence of violent conduct. According to recent research, neglect impairs social and emotional development, making adolescents more susceptible to violence and externalizing tendencies. (Woehrle et al., 2022; Khan & Tang, 2024).

The findings of a multiple regression analysis predicting aggressive conduct in teenagers ($N = 200$) are shown in Table 4.3. The combined predictors of aggression, narcissism, empathy, neglect, and exposure to violence explained a large amount of the variance in violence, according to the statistically significant model. Every variable had a significant contribution to the model ($p < .001$), indicating their distinct functions in forecasting aggressive conduct in adolescents.

The strongest predictor was aggression ($\beta = .45$), indicating that teenagers who exhibit more aggressive tendencies are much more likely to use violence. This result is consistent with the General Aggression Model, which holds that aggressive personality qualities make people more likely to react violently, especially when they feel threatened or frustrated (Anderson & Bushman, 2018). Additionally, empirical research demonstrates that aggression is a major risk factor for violent and externalizing behaviours during adolescence (Fite et al., 2016).

Another significant predictor was neglect ($\beta = .32$), underscoring the importance of early unfavourable caregiving conditions. Neglected adolescents may not receive consistent punishment, emotional support, or supervision, which can hinder emotional control and make them more prone to aggressive conduct. According to attachment theory, strained caregiver connections hinder socioemotional growth and fuel maladaptive behaviours, including as aggression (Bowlby, 1988; Gilbert et al., 2009).

Teenagers who have less empathy are more likely to act violently, according to a significant negative predictive effect of empathy on violence ($\beta = -.33$). By improving moral reasoning and emotional sensitivity, empathy acts as a protective factor, preventing harmful action. According to recent studies, youth aggression and violence are closely linked to empathy deficiencies and associated callous-unemotional characteristics (Miller et al., 2022; Van Langen et al., 2014).

Additionally, violent conduct was substantially predicted by narcissism ($\beta = .29$), indicating that adolescents with greater levels of narcissistic traits may respond violently when their ego or self-image is threatened. This conclusion is supported by other studies that show narcissism is associated with animosity, reactive aggression, and antisocial behavior, especially when there is perceived provocation (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Thomaes et al., 2018).

Another significant predictor was exposure to violence ($\beta = .27$), which is consistent with social learning theories that contend that violent acts can be taught through reinforcement and observation (Bandura, 1977). Teenagers who are exposed to violence on a regular basis in peer, family, or community contexts may internalize aggressive scripts, which makes them more likely to act violently themselves. (Margolin & Gordis, 2000).

The association between aggression and violence is explained by empathy as a mediation mechanism in Table 4.4. The results are in line with accepted theoretical frameworks that explain violent and aggressive behavior and offer empirical support for the suggested mediation paradigm.

The findings showed that lower levels of empathy were strongly predicted by hostility. According to earlier studies, aggressive people frequently exhibit deficiencies in empathic responding, such as a decreased capacity for perspective-taking and emotional sensitivity toward others (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). This conclusion is consistent with those findings. Aggressive qualities are linked to hostile cognitions and emotional desensitization, which may impede empathic concern and raise the risk of harmful behavior, according to the General Aggression Model (GAM) (Anderson & Bushman, 2002).

Additionally, it was discovered that empathy significantly and negatively predicts violence, suggesting that those who have less empathy are more likely to commit violent crimes. This bolsters the body of research showing empathy as a critical defense against violence and aggression (Eisenberg et al., 2010; Decety & Cowell, 2014). Empathy makes it possible for people to understand how their activities affect other people emotionally, which deters harmful conduct. Conversely, a lack of empathy could encourage moral disengagement and excuse aggressive behaviour. (Bandura, 1999).

Significantly, even after controlling for empathy, aggressiveness continued to be a strong predictor of violence, indicating incomplete mediation. This implies that although a significant amount of the aggression-violence relationship can be explained by empathy, violent consequences may also result from other psychological processes such impulsivity, trouble regulating emotions, and social learning influences (Dodge & Pettit, 2003). With a confidence interval excluding zero, the statistically significant indirect impact demonstrates that empathy is a useful explanatory mechanism that connects aggression and violence.

Conclusion

The current study integrates contextual risk factors and individual personality qualities to provide a thorough picture of teenage violence, emphasizing the protective function of empathy. The results show that while empathy acts as a vital protective factor against violent behaviour, aggression, narcissism, neglect, and exposure to violence all dramatically raise the risk of violent behaviour in teenagers.

These findings underscore the importance of addressing both risk and protective factors in violence prevention efforts. Interventions aimed solely at reducing aggression may be insufficient unless they are complemented by programs designed to foster empathy, emotional awareness, and perspective-taking skills. Such interventions may be particularly beneficial for adolescents exposed to neglect and violent environments. It was shown that aggression was the most effective predictor of violence, highlighting its crucial role in the formation of aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, the substantial consequences of abuse and neglect highlight the long-term impacts of unfavourable developmental environments on the emotional and behavioural functioning of adolescents. Crucially, it was discovered that empathy partially mediates the association between neglect and aggression and adversely predicts it. This suggests that a major psychological mechanism via which neglect leads to aggressive behaviour is a lack of empathy.

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