

Study of Quality of Life of Working Women in Construction in Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract: *This paper is an attempt to study the quality of life of women working in the construction in Uttar Pradesh. The quality of life, in general, is the standard of health, comfort, and happiness experienced by an individual or group. As the nature of the job in the construction industry is very unstable, unorganized, poor wage and has other barriers, it is difficult to have better quality of life of a working woman in the construction. There is some goodness to the qualified and well-placed women but very critical for the women working on the sites at lower level like unskilled worker and semi-skilled worker. The challenges like work life balance, hectic working schedule, unsafe and unhealthy working and living environment, safety issues during the work, physical and mental harassment, gender biasness, poor growth opportunities and several other factors are the influencing factors of the quality of life of working women in construction. Government and other agencies are working very seriously to improve the quality of life of these work forces.*

Keywords: Quality of Life, Skilled, semiskilled and unskilled. Growth opportunity, Hazards, Discrimination,

1. Introduction

The Quality of life (QOL) is defined by the World Health Organization as "an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns". Standard indicators of the quality of life include wealth, employment, the environment, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure time, social belonging, religious beliefs, safety, security and freedom. QOL has a wide range of contexts, including the fields of international development, healthcare, politics and employment.

The quality of life is a concept, which in recent years, has generated a great deal of interest but it is not only a notion of the twentieth century. Rather it dates back to philosophers like Aristotle (384-322 BC) who wrote about "the good life" and "living well" and how public policy can help to nurture it.

The Quality of Life requires that people's basic and social needs are met and that they have the autonomy to choose to enjoy life, to flourish, and to participate as citizens in a society with high levels of civic integration, social connectivity, trust, and other integrative norms including at least fairness and equity, all within a physically and socially sustainable global environment.

The Quality of Life includes both the objective and subjective realities, measurable and non-measurable aspects of human living. Quality of Life is a multi-faceted phenomenon which means welfare in general and health prosperity in particular.

Construction sector is the world's largest industrial employer with seven per cent of total world employment and 28 per cent of industrial employment. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), construction jobs in most countries are undertaken almost exclusively by men. In India it is estimated that up to 30 per cent of construction

workers are women. They are integrated into the bottom end of the industry, as unskilled workers or head-load carriers. (Patel & Pitroda, 2016)

There are many studies discussing the reasons why female workers shy away from the construction industry as a whole. Among the common barriers are social acceptances of employment, sexually-inappropriate occupation, sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, physical incapability, unqualified for blue-collar jobs and labour conditions such as extreme weather, unsociable work-hours and exposure to hazards.

Contrary, there have been few studies focusing on factors influencing women entry into construction and what their expectations are [Bennett et al, 1999].

In spite of their large numbers, women construction workers are seen as secondary/ temporary workers with seldom any opportunities for training, upward mobility, wage guarantees, fringe benefits or social protections.

Women in Construction Industry:

In construction industry women are working at three levels:

- 1) Women in technical position as an engineers or architects
- 2) Women in administrative position like managers (Finance, HR) etc
- 3) Women as construction labours

Construction is the second largest industry in India after agriculture and contributes significantly to the GDP. It provides employment to both skilled and unskilled workers and is presently growing at the rate of around 7 percent per annum. With over 35 million people engaged in this sector, women occupy nearly 30 percent of the workforce. Almost 65percent of the women work as construction laborers since their families are already in the workforce or male members of their family are employed there. (Businessworld, 07 Aug, 2022)

However, there is a paucity of women in technical and managerial roles, particularly civil engineers, architects, structural engineers, electrical engineers, maintenance and supervisory staff, as just 1.4 percent of women are engaged in such technical roles within the industry. Out of these less than 2 percent reach leadership positions in construction companies. (Businessworld, 07 Aug, 2022)

This is primarily attributed to the gender bias that exists within Indian society, which frowns up on women working on-site. The ratio of male to female students in Civil Engineering courses is 4:1. From this pool, only 20 percent women join the construction sector and the rest move on to other jobs/sectors. It is a constant challenge to hire women in such a male field for various reasons but the most glaring – not many women look at construction or civil engineering as a career option. More than within the industry, this stigma is due to environmental and societal pressures that make this disparity unbreachable. (Businessworld, 07 Aug, 2022)

Construction industry is fast growing industry equipped now with lot of technical advancement with changing scenario of architectural development also; hence it is the need of the day for technocrat to remain up dated with the changing scenario and to cope-up with this. they need to undergo many institutional training programmes. Because of family commitment women staffs find it very difficult. More over construction industry has long working hours, presence of technical staff at construction site is necessary which results in extensive travelling, and nature of this industry is such that it does not promote flexible working hours except designing and architectural planning. All these become limiting factor for women to hold higher technical position in construction industry.

The situation of women is administrative position favourable or not as difficult as they are not required to travel to construction site and may have option to work in flexible working hours.

The construction sector has the largest number of unorganized labours in India next only to agricultural sector. Though, women are employed in semiskilled and sometimes in skilled jobs in other industries, in the construction industry, women are employed mostly as unskilled and semi-skilled labour and by choice are by design, they are not allowed to acquire specific skills that may enable them to become skilled. Women join as unskilled workers and remain unskilled till that end of their working life span.

The main issues found related to working of women in construction industry are:

- 1) The general mind set up is till that construction industry is male dominant industry and it is hardly accepted higher technical position of women in the society. It is frequent augmented that woman is physically not strong to endure the strenuous task.
- 2) Women inexplicably run a greater risk than men of work-related Musculoskeletal Disorder (MSD).
- 3) The whole workplace culture poses problems to female workers on site.
- 4) The type of covert discrimination women workers face is in the form of maintenance of a cultural long and

hectic working hour and enforced geographical instability.

- 5) A study of ILO, women workers in the construction industry do the most strenuous and 'unskilled' jobs like brick-making, stone quarrying, assembling of construction materials, lifting of stones, bricks and cement, etc. Despite their principal role in the construction industry, they are not considered as the main workforce. Employers generally consider them as mere helpers and give them less wages than the male labourers.
- 6) Discrimination never ends at the wage levels. The number of physical hardships and their consequent effects upon the health of women, especially to pregnant women and lactating mothers are important issues.
- 7) Sexual harassment of women workers in this industry is also quite widespread though government agencies and other stake holders are very cautious to eliminate this issue on the work place.
- 8) Mostly women workers are not given any required training on health and safety; hence there is a greater incidence, as well as severity of accidents in the industry.
- 9) The immediate causes of accidents have been identified as follows: not wearing proper PPE, unawareness and negligence of safety rules, poor training on safety, failure or collapsing of scaffolding, centering or shattering, improper guards, night work without proper lighting, inadequate care regarding fire and against electrocution, excessive noise, handling of heavy finished and semi-finished materials like metals, blasting, underground, confined space work.
- 10) There are several factors causing the health hazards on the sites like cement dust, dust etc.
- 11) Although various acts exist under which women are entitled to maternity leave and benefits, creches facilities etc but in practice still they are not getting such benefits as per the expectations and provisions.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

The women workers that are employed in the construction in Uttar Pradesh mostly belong to states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal. It was explored that most of them face the similar issues and challenges in their working environment irrespective of their socio-demographic profile and place of working. The study investigated the working conditions, issues and challenges they face on job and what are their inputs on bettering their work environment and career growth and long-term employments in the field.

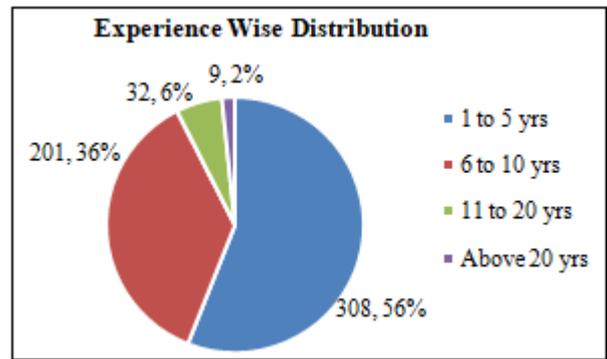
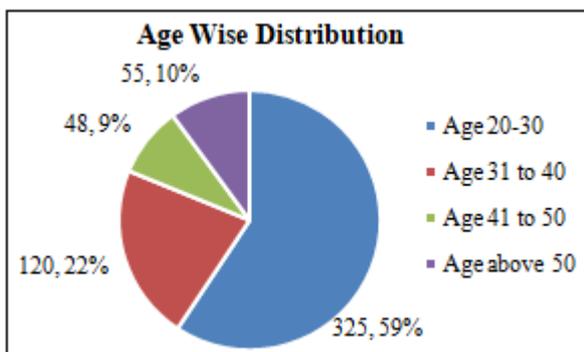
During the survey on women workers in Construction Industry we got very good responses from most of the respondents and they were very happy to understand that some recommendations may be made to improve their life. We have got 550 responses from seventeen districts of Uttar Pradesh. These districts are: Gorakhpur, Kushinagar, Maharajganj, Ballia, Deoria, Sant Kabir Nagar, Varanasi, Prayagraj, Kanpur Nagar, Kanpur Dehat, Lucknow, Sitapur, Ghaziabad, Agra, Greater Noida, Meerut, Mirzapur.

S. No	District	Number of respondents
01	Gorakhpur	40
02	Kushinagar	22
03	Maharajganj	20
04	Ballia	20
05	Deoria	20
06	Sant Kabir Nagar	20
07	Varanasi	30
08	Praygraj	24
09	Kanpur Nagar	38
10	Kanpur Dehat	30
11	Lucknow	44
12	Sitapur	20
13	Ghaziabad	53
14	Agra	25
15	Greater Noida	77
16	Meerut	35
17	Mirzapur	32

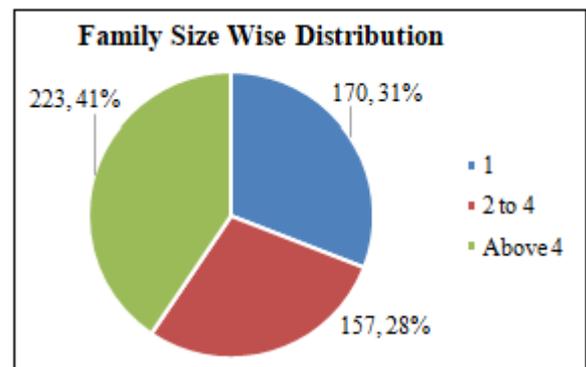
In accordance with the current research framework and based on the objectives it is not feasible to adopt a secondary data collection approach. The current study will use the survey method for collecting data. In accordance with this, a **primary data collection technique** will be utilized. Further, with a quantitative data collection approach, the study will use a survey-based questionnaire technique to amass this data. The study will use a snowball sampling method, a type of non-probability sampling technique.

Various questions based on Age, Experience, Family Size, Wage Level, Skill Level, Wage levels, Occupational Hazards, Work Life Balance, Career growth in construction, Job Satisfaction, Career break due to personal reasons & Harassment at work place etc have been prepared and asked for the study.

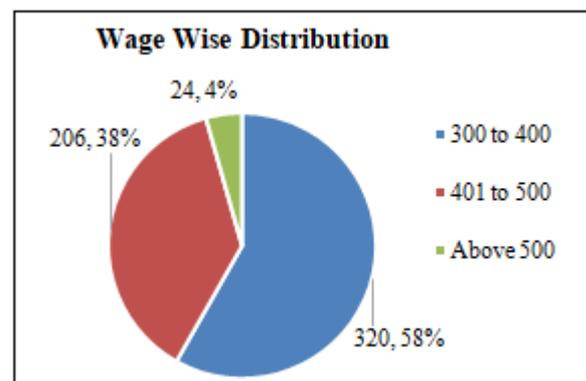
- **Age:** According to survey out of 550 participants there are 325 members of 20 to 30 years, 120 members of 31 to 40 years, 48 members of 41 to 50 years & 57 members of age above 50 to. As observed, there are lot of young women in the industry.
- **Experience:** According to survey out of 550 participants there are 308 members have 1 to 5 years of experience, 201 members have 6 to 10 years of experience, 32 members have 11 to 20 years of experience & 09 members have above 20 years of experience.



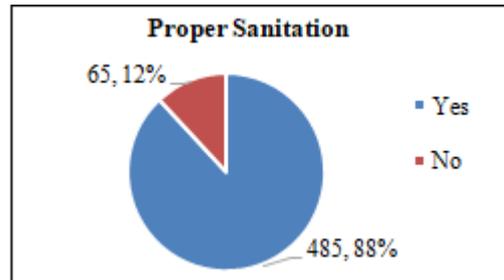
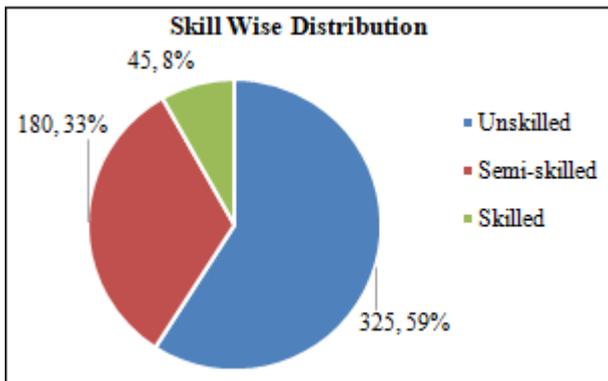
- **Family size:** According to survey out of 550 participants there are 170 participants unmarried, 157 participants having family members 2 to 4 and 223 participants having family members more than 4. As observed, we can say most of the women with bigger family size are working.



- **Wage Level:** According to survey we got the results as number of participants having wage between Rs 300 to Rs 400 per day is 320, having wage between Rs 401 to Rs 500 per day is 206 and having wage above Rs 500 per day is 24. As we can observed that the wage is in lower side for most working women.



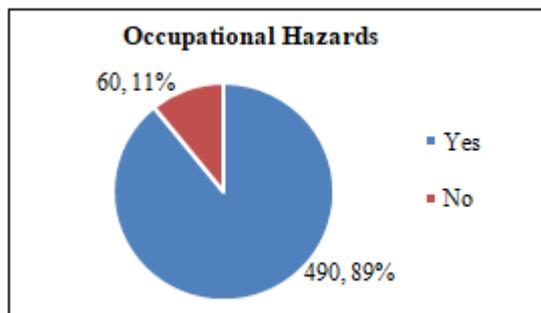
- **Skill Level:** According to survey we got the participants as number of unskilled members is 325, semi- skilled is 180 and skilled is 45. Based on the observation, we can say the skill level is not as per the requirement of the industry and most women workers are working as either unskilled or semi-skilled.



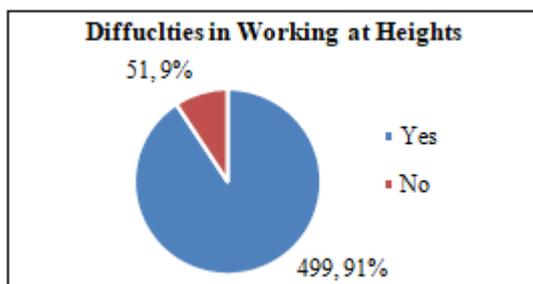
3. Results and Discussions

Based on the responses of 550 participants from 10 districts of Uttar Pradesh, the results may be summarised as:

- Opinion on Occupational Hazards:** When we asked women workers regarding occupational hazards, they expressed their concern on the issue. 490 participants are agreed that they experienced the occupational hazards in the work site and 60 participants have the positive opinion on the provision of measures to handle the occupational hazards.

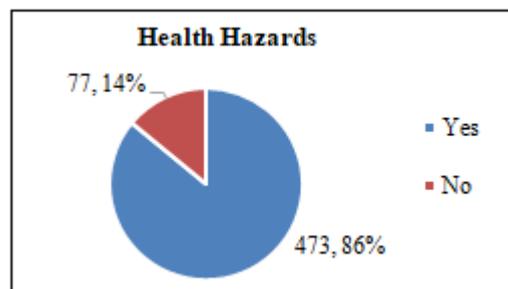


- Difficulties in Working at Height:** According to survey conducted, more than 90% women workers experience the difficulties while working at height.

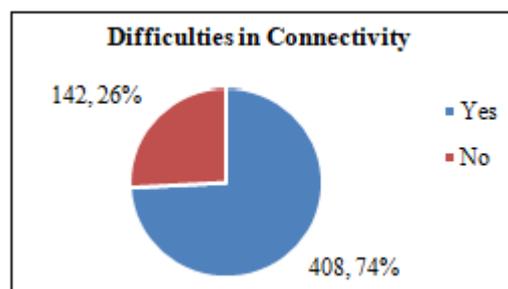


- Difficulties in proper sanitation:** 88 % of the women workers agreed that they don't have proper sanitation facilities at working sites.

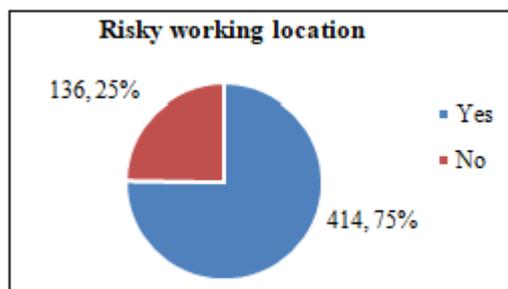
- Health hazards:** 86 % of the respondents experience the health hazards at working site.



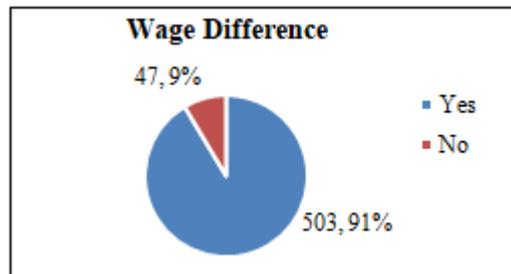
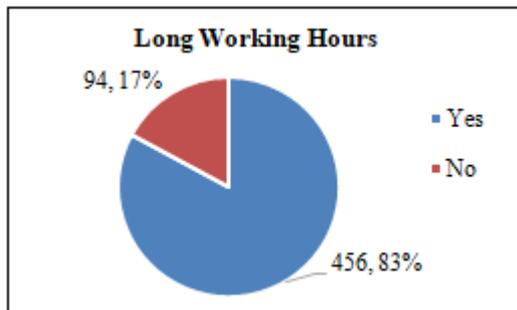
- Difficulties in Connectivity to working place:** According to survey 74% of the women workers face problem in reaching the working place due to weak connectivity.



- Risky work locations:** 75% of the respondents agree that there are risky work locations and sometimes it become very risky to work.

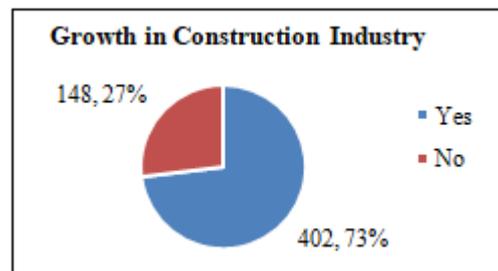
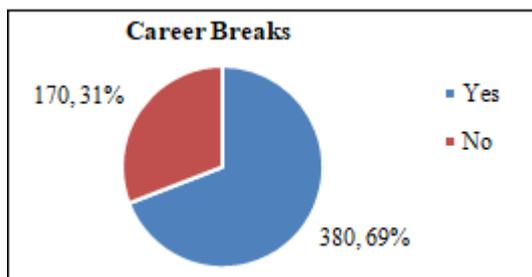


- Long working hours:** About long working hours at work place, 83% women agreed that their personal life is affected due to long working hours at work place.



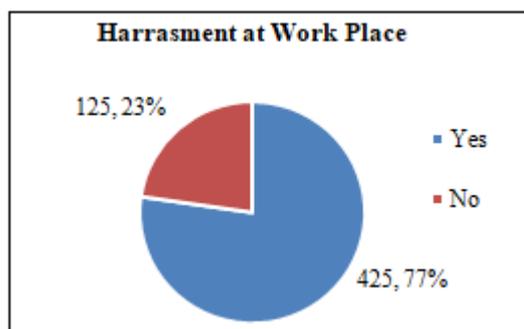
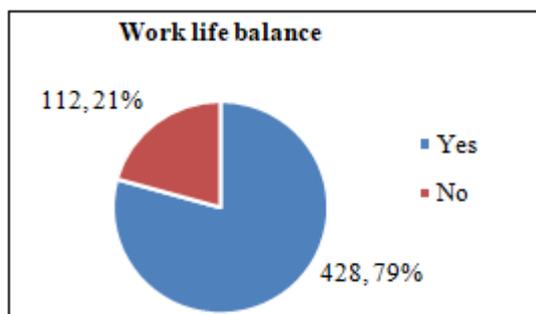
- **Career Breaks:** 80% of the respondents have career breaks due to their personal issues.

- **Growth at Construction industry:** 73% of the respondents agreed that they are not getting good growth in construction industry.

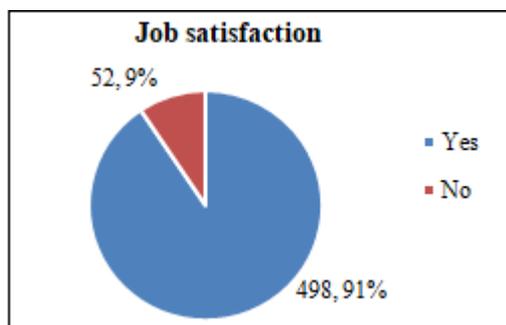


- **Work life balance:** 79% of the women workers complained about the imbalance in their work life.

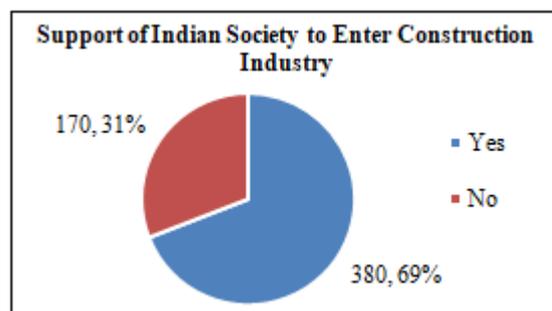
- **Harassment at work place:** Harassment at work place is one of the major problems with construction industry which hinders the women to opt for construction industry. 77% of the respondents agreed that there is harassment at work and they seek the help from the authorities to come forward to take the issues seriously.



- **Job Satisfaction:** It is one of measure issues found in the working women as most of them are not happy with their job and job conditions. 91 percent women workers are not satisfied with their job and job conditions.



- **Support of India's patriarchal society for women to enter construction industry:**69% of the respondents agreed that India's patriarchal society doesn't support them to enter construction industry.



- **Wage difference:** The wage differences compared with male co-workers were noted by 91% of the respondents of the survey. This is one of most critical points of women workers in construction.

4. Conclusions

Women were found to have progressed at a lower rate in the construction while confronting many obstacles and barriers.

At sites the representation is more of unskilled workforce and in offices women are more in administrative positions as compared to professional technical positions. A range of interrelated structural and cultural factors affecting their quality of life are unsafe working and living environment, occupational hazards, upgradation of skill, sexual harassment, vulnerability of work, poor facilities specially required for a woman like separate toilets, creche, lactating space and time, maternity leave etc. The fewer opportunities of career development, together with the interactive strategies of men and women in coping with career constraints and exploiting career opportunities is one of the major issues to improve their quality of life. There is substantial disparity between their employment status, pay and professional up gradation opportunities as compared to men in the industry. These are issues specific to construction industry.

To encourage women participation in construction and to enhance their quality of life, they must be provided with support and encouragement for non-traditional choices at an early age. They must have provided several awareness programs on challenges, opportunities, rules and regulations effective to support them, welfare schemes and their other rights. Women must be aggressively recruited into training programs with the aim of configuring the curriculum and skills training to assimilate them into non-traditional employment.

The Government of India and the State Governments are seriously trying to overcome the challenges. The GoI is developing good and safe working environment for women workers in the construction industry. As GoI with their organisations like Construction Industry Development Council (CIDC), National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and Sector Skill Councils, is giving the several opportunities to upgrade the skill and knowledge. The state Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board (UPBOCW Board) is providing several welfare schemes to the female workers in the construction. In addition to the governments' efforts, the other stake holders should also take the responsibilities to provide the good working condition, proper wage, safe environment and growth opportunities to the women workers to improve their quality of life. We can hope now that the women workers may have knowledge and skill about their job, roles & responsibilities and their rights at the work place.

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