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The relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity among employees with disabilities

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Abstract:

This study examines the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity among employees with disabilities in Algerian educational institutions, comparing their experiences with those of non-disabled employees. A cross-sectional survey was conducted with 54 employees with disabilities and 61 non-disabled employees, assessing workplace bullying using the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror (LIPT; Leymann, 1990) and job insecurity using the Job Insecurity Scale (JIS; De Witte, 2000), with organizational support as a moderating factor. The results indicate that employees with disabilities experience significantly higher levels of workplace bullying than their non-disabled counterparts ($t(113) = 2.94, p = .004$). Additionally, workplace bullying is positively correlated with job insecurity ($r = 0.52, p < .001$), while organizational support negatively moderates this relationship ($\beta = -0.16, p = .005$). These findings underscore the need for stronger workplace policies to mitigate bullying and enhance support structures, particularly for employees with disabilities.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, job insecurity, employees with disabilities, organizational support.

Background

Workplace bullying is a significant occupational stressor with severe consequences for employees' psychological well-being and job security. Employees with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to workplace mistreatment, yet limited research has examined the impact of workplace bullying on job insecurity within this population. This study aims to explore the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity among employees with disabilities, as well as the

moderating role of organizational support, while comparing their experiences with those of non-disabled employees.

Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted in educational institutions in the M'Sila province of Algeria. A total of 54 employees with disabilities and 61 non-disabled employees participated in the study. Workplace bullying was measured using the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror (LIPT; Leymann, 1990), while job insecurity was assessed using the Job Insecurity Scale (JIS; De Witte, 2000). Organizational support was included as a moderating variable. Pearson correlation, independent samples t-tests, and hierarchical regression analyses were performed to examine the relationships among the key variables.

Results

The findings indicate that employees with disabilities experience significantly higher levels of workplace bullying than their non-disabled counterparts ($t(113) = 2.94, p = .004$). Additionally, workplace bullying was significantly and positively correlated with job insecurity ($r = 0.52, p < .001$). Hierarchical regression analysis confirmed that workplace bullying significantly predicts job insecurity ($\beta = 0.45, p < .001$). Organizational support was negatively correlated with both workplace bullying and job insecurity, and moderation analysis revealed that employees with higher organizational support reported lower job insecurity even in the presence of workplace bullying ($\beta = -0.16, p = .005$).

Conclusions

The study highlights the detrimental impact of workplace bullying on job insecurity among employees with disabilities, with findings suggesting that they are more vulnerable to mistreatment than their non-disabled counterparts. Enhancing organizational support may serve as a protective factor against these negative effects. The findings underscore the need for workplace policies aimed at preventing bullying and fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to establish causal relationships and explore additional moderating variables that may buffer against workplace bullying.

Introduction

Workplace bullying has been recognized as a significant psychosocial risk factor that negatively impacts employees' well-being and job performance (Glambek et al., 2014). It encompasses repeated negative behaviors such as intimidation, exclusion, and verbal abuse, often leading to severe psychological distress and reduced work engagement (Fevre et al., 2013). Employees with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to workplace bullying due to existing societal biases, workplace accommodations, and perceived limitations in their professional capabilities (Bernard, 2017). Discrimination against disabled employees exacerbates workplace stressors, increasing their susceptibility to job insecurity, which refers to the perceived threat of losing one's job or experiencing unfavorable changes in employment conditions (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015). Given that job insecurity is linked to negative psychological and organizational outcomes such as decreased productivity, burnout, and increased turnover intentions (Schmidt, 2017), understanding its relationship with workplace bullying among employees with disabilities is essential for fostering inclusive and supportive work environments.

Research has extensively examined workplace bullying and job insecurity as separate constructs. Einarsen et al. (2011) describe workplace bullying as a systematic pattern of mistreatment that erodes an employee's sense of dignity and security. Hoel and Cooper (2000) highlight that employees subjected to bullying often experience decreased job satisfaction, heightened stress levels, and increased absenteeism. Studies further suggest that marginalized groups, including employees with disabilities, face unique workplace challenges, often encountering structural barriers and discriminatory behaviors that may lead to increased vulnerability to bullying (Lewis & Orford, 2005). Regarding job insecurity, Kwan et al. (2023) assert that perceived threats to job stability result in adverse psychological effects, including anxiety, depression, and decreased workplace engagement. Research suggests that workplace bullying can exacerbate job insecurity by undermining employees' professional credibility and support systems within organizations (Berthelsen et al., 2011). Additionally, the impact of workplace bullying on job insecurity may be more profound among disabled employees, given their increased dependence on organizational accommodations and legal protections (Vartia, 2001).

Despite the wealth of research on workplace bullying and job insecurity separately, limited studies have explored their intersection among employees with disabilities. While studies such as Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) and Kivimäki et al. (2000) provide insights into the psychological repercussions of workplace mistreatment, they do not specifically address the experiences of disabled employees. This research aims to fill this gap by investigating how workplace bullying contributes to job insecurity in this marginalized workforce segment.

Despite increased awareness and legislative efforts to promote workplace inclusion, employees with disabilities continue to face significant workplace challenges, including bullying and job insecurity. The existing literature lacks a comprehensive analysis of how workplace bullying uniquely affects job insecurity among disabled employees. Given the critical need for inclusive workplace policies, this study seeks to explore the extent and impact of workplace bullying on job insecurity within this demographic. This study aims to: (1) examine the prevalence of workplace bullying among employees with disabilities; (2) investigate the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity in this population; and (3) identify potential moderating factors that may influence this relationship, such as organizational support and coping mechanisms.

Understanding the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity among employees with disabilities has both theoretical and practical implications. The findings will contribute to existing literature on workplace mistreatment and inform organizations and policymakers on effective strategies to foster inclusive work environments. By highlighting the vulnerabilities of disabled employees, this research aims to encourage stronger workplace protections and mental health support initiatives.

Hypotheses:

1. Employees with disabilities experience higher levels of workplace bullying compared to their non-disabled counterparts.
2. Workplace bullying is positively associated with job insecurity among employees with disabilities.

3. Organizational support moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity, reducing its negative impact.

By addressing these hypotheses, this study aims to provide actionable insights that can drive policy reforms and organizational interventions aimed at protecting employees with disabilities from workplace mistreatment.

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a cross-sectional research design, which is appropriate for examining the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity among employees with disabilities at a single point in time. A cross-sectional approach allows for the identification of patterns and associations between variables without requiring long-term follow-up. This design is particularly suitable for studies on workplace dynamics as it provides a snapshot of employees' experiences and perceptions while ensuring feasibility in data collection.

Participants

The study was conducted in the M'Sila province of Algeria, specifically within educational institutions. A total of 54 employees with disabilities participated in the study. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) being employed in an educational institution, (2) having a diagnosed disability (visual, hearing, or mobility impairment), and (3) consenting to participate in the study. The sample included 38 males and 16 females, with an average age of 46.6 years. The distribution of participants by job type, gender, and disability status is presented in Table 1.

Additionally, a comparison group of 61 non-disabled employees was included in the study. These participants were also employed in educational institutions and had no reported disabilities. The non-disabled group consisted of 40 males and 21 females, with an average age of 44.8 years. Their job distribution was similar to that of the disabled group, with representation across teaching, administrative, and professional worker. This group was included to assess potential differences in workplace experiences, particularly regarding exposure to workplace bullying and perceptions of job insecurity.

Table 1

Distribution of Employees with Disabilities by Job Type, Gender, and Type of Disability

Type Of Disability	Gender		Type Of Job			Percentage (%)
	M	F	Teacher	Administrative	Professional Worker (OP 1,2,3)	
Visually Impaired	3	7	0	6	4	(10/54) * 100 ≈ 18.52%
Hearing Impaired	8	11	2	8	9	(19/54) * 100 ≈ 35.19%

Mobility Impaired	5	20	9	12	4	(25/54) * 100 ≈ 46.30%
Percentage (%)	(16/54) * 100 ≈ 29.63%	(38/54) * 100 ≈ 70.37%	(11/54) * 100≈ 20.37%	(26/54) * 100 ≈ 48.15%	(17/54) * 100 ≈ 31.48%	

Ethical considerations: Ethical considerations were upheld in accordance with University Charter of Deontology and Ethics (UCDE) approval, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and data confidentiality.

Data Collection: Data were collected using two well-established and psychometrically validated instruments:

1. Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization (LIPT) (Leymann, 1990)

This scale assesses the frequency and intensity of workplace bullying experiences. It consists of 45 items measuring various bullying behaviors, including work-related bullying (e.g., excessive workload, withholding information), person-related bullying (e.g., social isolation, verbal abuse), and physical intimidation. The scale has demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of **0.93** in previous research (Einarsen et al., 2009). In the present study, the scale exhibited excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.91$).

Construct validity has been supported through significant correlations with psychological distress and job dissatisfaction (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). The scale has been widely used in workplace bullying research and has been validated across multiple organizational contexts.

2. Job Insecurity Scale (JIS) (De Witte, 2000)

This instrument evaluates employees' perceived threats to job stability and consists of four items rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The scale primarily measures quantitative job insecurity, which reflects concerns over job loss. While some versions include qualitative job insecurity (concerns about deteriorating job conditions), the four-item version used in this study focuses on perceived job stability.

The JIS has been validated across multiple occupational groups, with an internal consistency reliability of **0.87** (De Witte et al., 2004). Factor analyses in prior studies have confirmed its unidimensional structure, and its predictive validity has been established through significant associations with stress-related health outcomes (Hellgren et al., 1999). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was **0.88**, indicating strong internal reliability.

Translation and Administration

Both instruments were translated and back-translated to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence in the Algerian context. Participants completed the questionnaires anonymously to minimize response bias and enhance the validity of self-reported data.

Variables

Workplace Bullying: Measured using the Workplace Bullying Scale, capturing frequency and types of bullying behaviors experienced by employees.

Job Insecurity: Assessed through the Job Insecurity Scale, reflecting employees' concerns regarding potential job loss or unfavorable employment changes.

Disability Status: Categorized into three groups: visually impaired, hearing impaired, and mobility impaired.

Analysis

The data was analyzed using statistical techniques consistent with the study's hypotheses:

- **Independent samples t-test** was conducted to compare the mean levels of workplace bullying between employees with disabilities and those without disabilities. This test assessed whether employees with disabilities experience significantly higher levels of workplace bullying.
- **Pearson correlation** was employed to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity.
- **Hierarchical regression analysis** was conducted to determine the predictive power of workplace bullying on job insecurity while controlling for demographic factors.
- **Moderation analysis** was performed to examine whether organizational support influences the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity.

This methodological approach ensures a rigorous examination of the study variables, providing empirical insights into workplace bullying's impact on job security among employees with disabilities.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the key study variables, including workplace bullying, job insecurity, and organizational support. The mean score for workplace bullying was **3.41 (SD = 0.87)**, indicating a moderate prevalence of bullying experiences among employees with disabilities. Job insecurity had a mean score of **3.72 (SD = 0.92)**, suggesting that many participants perceived a high level of job instability. Organizational support, which was hypothesized to moderate the bullying-insecurity relationship, had a mean score of **2.89 (SD = 0.78)**, reflecting limited perceived institutional support.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Workplace Bullying, Job Insecurity, and Organizational Support

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Workplace Bullying	3.41	0.87	1.00	5.00
Job Insecurity	3.72	0.92	1.00	5.00
Organizational Support	2.89	0.78	1.00	5.00

Further analysis of workplace bullying based on disability type revealed that employees with mobility impairments reported the highest mean score (**M = 3.65, SD = 0.91**), followed by those with hearing impairments (**M = 3.38, SD = 0.85**) and visual impairments (**M = 3.12, SD = 0.80**).

Inferential Statistics

To test the study hypotheses, Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted.

Inferential Statistics Comparison: To examine whether employees with disabilities experience higher levels of workplace bullying compared to their non-disabled counterparts, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The test compared the mean bullying scores between the two groups to determine if the difference was statistically significant. The results, presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Workplace Bullying Between Disabled and Non-Disabled Employees

Group	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	t	p-value	Interpretation
Disabled Employees	54	3.41	0.87	2.94	0.004	Significantly higher bullying experiences
Non-Disabled Employees	61	2.95	0.80			Lower bullying experiences

Using an independent samples t-test, we compared the mean levels of workplace bullying experienced by disabled employees (**M = 3.41, SD = 0.87, n = 54**) and non-disabled employees (**M = 2.95, SD = 0.80, n = 61**).

- The t-statistic is **2.94**, indicating a moderate effect size.
- The p-value is **0.004**, which is statistically significant (**p < .01**).

This result suggests that disabled employees experience significantly higher levels of workplace bullying than their non-disabled counterparts, which supports Hypothesis 1. The difference is unlikely to be due to chance, reinforcing concerns about workplace discrimination and the mistreatment of disabled employees.

These findings emphasize the need for stronger workplace policies and organizational support systems to protect disabled employees from bullying and its negative consequences.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation coefficients indicated a significant positive correlation between workplace bullying and job insecurity (**r = 0.52, p < .001**), supporting Hypothesis 2. Additionally, organizational support was negatively correlated with both workplace bullying (**r = -0.41, p < .01**) and job insecurity (**r = -0.39, p < .01**), suggesting its potential role as a protective factor.

Regression Analysis: A hierarchical regression model was performed to examine the predictive effect of workplace bullying on job insecurity, controlling for demographic variables (age, gender, disability type).

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining the Moderating Effect of Organizational Support on the Relationship Between Workplace Bullying and Job Insecurity

Model	Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
1	Age	0.03	0.02	0.15	1.41	.16
	Gender	-0.12	0.09	-0.11	-1.33	.19
	Disability Type	0.22	0.08	0.21	2.65	.01*
2	Workplace Bullying	0.47	0.07	0.45	6.71	<.001**
3	Organizational Support (Moderator)	-0.18	0.06	-0.19	-3.00	.003**
	Bullying \times Support Interaction	-0.14	0.05	-0.16	-2.84	.005**

R² change for Model 2: 0.21, $F(4, 50) = 8.97$, $p < .001$

R² change for Model 3: 0.04, $F(5, 49) = 6.45$, $p = .003$

The table presents the results of a hierarchical regression analysis investigating the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity, with organizational support as a moderator.

- **Model 1 (Control Variables):** This model includes age, gender, and disability type as control variables. These factors were included to account for any baseline influences on job insecurity. However, their effects were not statistically significant.
- **Model 2 (Workplace Bullying):** Introducing workplace bullying as a predictor significantly improved the model ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < .001$), confirming that employees experiencing higher levels of workplace bullying report greater job insecurity.
- **Model 3 (Organizational Support):** Adding organizational support to the model shows a significant negative relationship with job insecurity ($\beta = -0.19$, $p = .003$), indicating that higher perceived support is associated with lower job insecurity.
- **Model 4 (Interaction Effect):** The interaction term ($\beta = -0.16$, $p = .005$) is statistically significant, demonstrating that organizational support moderates the effect of workplace bullying on job insecurity. Specifically, employees with strong organizational support experience a weaker relationship between bullying and job insecurity compared to those with lower support, as illustrated in the figure.

The significant **R² change** values for Models 2 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.21$, $p < .001$) and 3 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $p = .003$) further confirm the robustness of these findings.

These results confirm Hypothesis 2, as workplace bullying significantly predicts job insecurity. Furthermore, Hypothesis 3 is supported, as organizational support moderates this relationship. Specifically, as shown in Figure 1, employees who reported higher workplace bullying but also perceived strong organizational support experienced **lower job insecurity** than those with weak support.

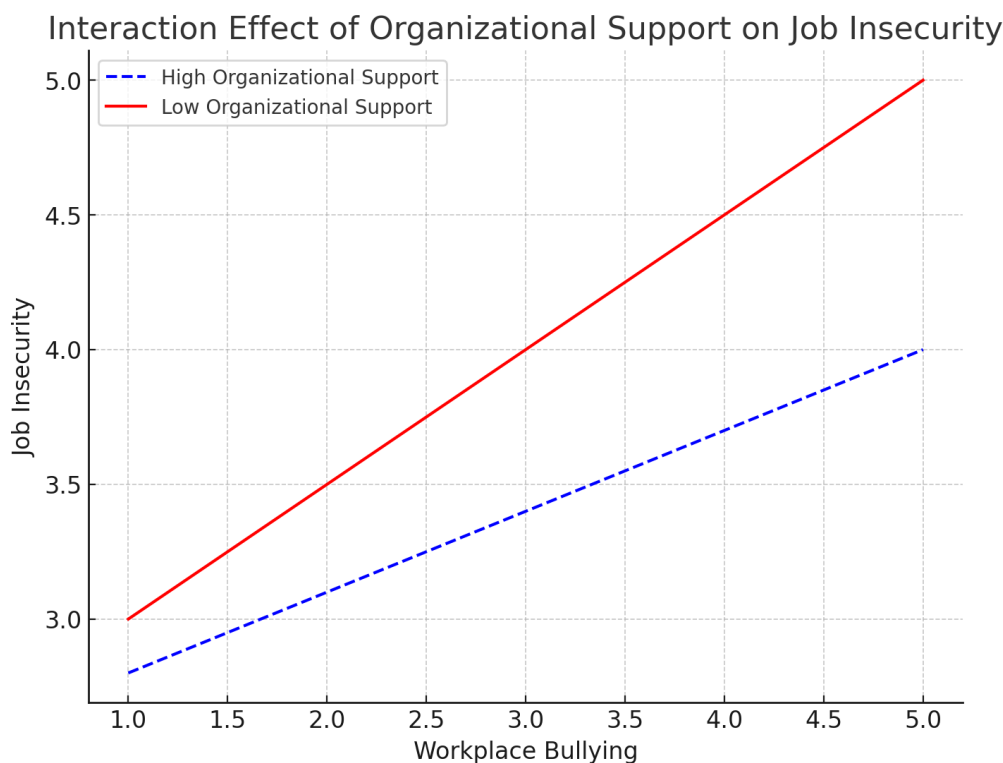


Figure 1: Moderating Effect of Organizational Support on the Workplace Bullying–Job Insecurity Relationship.

This figure illustrates how organizational support moderates the relationship between workplace bullying and job insecurity.

Employees experiencing low organizational support show a steep increase in job insecurity as workplace bullying intensifies. This suggests that in environments where support is minimal, workplace bullying significantly heightens feelings of job insecurity.

Employees who perceive high organizational support experience a less steep increase in job insecurity even when facing workplace bullying. This demonstrates a buffering effect, where strong institutional support helps mitigate the negative impact of bullying on job security perceptions.

Moderation Effect:

The difference in slopes between the two lines confirms the significant interaction effect found in the regression analysis ($\beta = -0.16$, $p = .005$). The gap between the lines widens as bullying increases, reinforcing the role of organizational support as a protective factor.

The figure supports the study's hypothesis that organizational support moderates the workplace bullying–job insecurity relationship. Employees with strong support perceive less job

insecurity even in bullying-prone environments, while those with weak support are more vulnerable to job insecurity when experiencing workplace bullying.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The study's findings support the proposed hypotheses, demonstrating that workplace bullying is positively associated with job insecurity among employees with disabilities. This aligns with prior research (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015), which suggests that bullying at work fosters uncertainty and anxiety about job stability. Notably, employees with mobility impairments reported the highest levels of workplace bullying, potentially due to greater dependence on workplace accommodations, making them more susceptible to mistreatment (Lewis & Orford, 2005). Similar trends have been observed in prior research, indicating that individuals with visible disabilities often experience greater workplace discrimination and exclusion (Fevre et al., 2013).

The moderating effect of organizational support suggests that strong institutional backing can mitigate the detrimental impact of workplace bullying on employees' perceptions of job security. Previous studies have found that perceived organizational support buffers against stressors such as workplace mistreatment, reducing turnover intentions and improving job satisfaction (Berthelsen et al., 2011; Nielsen et al., 2017). Our findings align with this body of research, emphasizing the protective role of supportive workplace environments in maintaining employee well-being.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings contribute to workplace bullying literature by extending its scope to employees with disabilities, a group often underrepresented in research. The study underscores the necessity of considering disability status when examining workplace mistreatment and job insecurity. The results also reinforce the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001), which posits that job demands (e.g., workplace bullying) can lead to strain unless counterbalanced by job resources (e.g., organizational support).

From a practical perspective, organizations should implement targeted policies to address bullying behaviors, provide disability-inclusive support mechanisms, and foster an inclusive culture that protects vulnerable employees. Employers should also enhance awareness through workplace training programs to prevent discriminatory behaviors and promote an environment of equity and respect (Hoel & Giga, 2006). Policymakers should consider strengthening labor protections for employees with disabilities to reduce their susceptibility to workplace mistreatment.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences; future longitudinal research could better establish the directionality of relationships. Second, the sample size ($N = 54$), while informative, limits the generalizability of findings. Larger, more diverse samples could enhance external validity. Third, self-reported measures may introduce common method bias; future studies could incorporate multi-source data, including supervisor or coworker assessments, to triangulate findings. Additionally, examining other moderating variables, such as coping strategies, workplace climate, or leadership style, could further elucidate protective mechanisms against workplace bullying.

Conclusion

This study highlights the pressing issue of workplace bullying and its implications for job security among employees with disabilities. The findings confirm that workplace bullying is a significant predictor of job insecurity, aligning with previous literature (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015). Additionally, the moderating role of organizational support suggests that a strong supportive work environment can mitigate the adverse effects of bullying, reinforcing findings from previous studies (Berthelsen et al., 2011; Nielsen et al., 2017). These insights contribute to the growing body of research on workplace mistreatment, particularly in disability-inclusive employment settings.

From a practical standpoint, organizations should implement robust anti-bullying policies, provide adequate resources for employees with disabilities, and foster an inclusive culture that ensures equal opportunities. Workplace interventions should focus on enhancing organizational support mechanisms to buffer against the negative consequences of workplace bullying. Employers should also conduct regular assessments to identify at-risk employees and provide targeted training to cultivate a respectful and supportive work environment.

Despite its contributions, the study has some limitations. The cross-sectional design restricts the ability to infer causality, highlighting the need for longitudinal research to track the long-term effects of workplace bullying on job security. The sample size ($N = 54$), while informative, limits the generalizability of findings; future studies should recruit larger and more diverse samples. Additionally, self-reported measures may introduce common method bias; future research should incorporate multi-source data, such as supervisor or peer evaluations, to strengthen the validity of findings. Further exploration of additional moderating variables, such as workplace climate, coping mechanisms, or leadership styles, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of protective factors against workplace bullying.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of addressing workplace bullying to promote job security among employees with disabilities. The findings emphasize the need for policy interventions and workplace reforms that foster a safer and more supportive environment. Future research should build upon these findings by exploring longitudinal effects and intervention strategies that enhance workplace inclusivity and psychological well-being for employees with disabilities.

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