

**RESIDENTS VULNERABILITY TO CRIMINAL VICTIMIZATION IN LAFIA,
NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The rate at which residents of Lafia are prone to criminal victimization is becoming alarming. Residents' susceptibility to criminal activities is prevalent in Nigeria generally. This paper therefore, explores urban residents' vulnerability to criminal victimization in Lafia Metropolis. The study underscored variables that make the lives and property of residents at risk. The study employed the survey research design. Questionnaire and in-depth interview were employed to elicit data from 384 respondents, selected via the simple random and purposive sampling techniques. The paper found that poverty which influences criminal behaviour was also a cogent variable capable of making residents prone to victimization. It was also established that ethnicity, illiteracy, unemployment and reporting of criminals to the police are factors that also make residents' vulnerable to criminal victimization. It was recommended among others that poverty should be addressed through appropriate alleviation programmes such as training of youths in diverse entrepreneur skills, government should provide security for the masses and reduces the number of security personnel attached to the privilege class as it is currently being practiced in the Country. Government at all levels should ensure that education is given adequate attention and should be free for all citizens irrespective of their gender, religion and class. Finally, government should employ the services of Private Security Organization to provide security for her institutions, so that the Police force can be allowed to provide security for the masses.

Keywords: Vulnerability, Residents, criminal, victimization, Urban

Introduction

It is generally conceived that crime is an inevitable part of every society. As society begins to undergo development, a portion of the population often succumbed to the temptation of yielding to criminal behaviour. While crime is an inevitable part of all societies, its rates vary among households, communities and countries. The upsurge in crime is explainable from social, economic, environmental and psychological paradigms. The unfavourable socio-economic conditions in most developing countries has inevitably push many into criminal activities. The pressure of socio-economic crises and the structural adjustment programme (SAP) introduced in Nigeria and most third world countries in the 80s had a devastating effect on people, especially the poor. The cumulative effect was observed in the pool of unemployed youths and continuous rise in food prices. Prices, declining real wages, reduction in public expenditure on basic services and infrastructure, with a resultant increase in crime and other anti-social activities (Sen, 1994, Michael, 2010). Ukwayi, Agba and Michael (2014) posit that the worsening economic misfortunes in terms of declining growth, increasing unemployment, galloping inflation, high incidence of poverty among others eventually triggered criminal activities in our society. Data from Nigeria indicate that various government policies such as commercialization, privatization of government owned enterprises and poverty alleviation could not alleviate the problems ushered by SAP. Poverty and unemployment are twin problems that have continued to ravage the Nigerian society. The consequence is the increase in the occurrence of criminal activities and victimization.

As the number of criminals increases, there is the likelihood that the number of people vulnerable will increase. Michael (2010) was of the view that as the number of criminals increase in any society, individuals, households, communities and countries become vulnerable to criminal victimization. Although crime and victims of crime are as old as the human race, the earliest emphasis was on the etiology of crime. Then crime victims were relatively few because criminals were also few. With progress of time, the number of criminals, types of crime keep increasing with a resultant effect on the incidence of victimization. Omonona (2009) observes that in the past, the society was relatively stable with the rate of crime and victimization relatively low, but the industrialized society has and continue to witness steady increase in various types of crime and victims. The rapid population growth rate, urbanization, poverty, unemployment, neglect of agriculture, inequality, materialism among others, are responsible for the increase in crime. Vulnerability to criminal victimization is the condition determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of a person or community to the harms of crime (Wisner, 2002). It is the characteristics and circumstances of an individual or community that make it susceptible to the damaging effects of crime. Gencer (2013) posit that in all societies' people and communities are engulfed by physical, social, demographic, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of people to the impact of crime.

People of various socio-economic and demographic statuses are prone to suffer the harm or pain of crime (Ikoh, 2014, Michael, 2010). Social, economic psychological characteristics make some people more vulnerable to criminal victimization than others. Ademola and Ademola(2012) observes that some populations are more vulnerable than others and disparity exist between individuals and communities in victimization rate. Different households may be affected differently and even within households, the vulnerability of individual household members may vary (Samir, 2013). The variation in

the susceptibility of various population to the harm of crime is underpinned by social, economic, psychological and environmental factors.

Jonathan (2009) has linked vulnerability to criminal victimization to social, economic and psychological variables. Vulnerability is triggered by the above factors in the society. Killias (1990) suggest that there are physical, social and situational aspects of vulnerability. These indices are cogent factors in the analysis of vulnerability to criminal victimization in all societies of the world. Lyon, Kinney and Colquhoun (2002) suggested that gender and age play a significant role to vulnerability in a rapidly changing environment. Physical changes in old age reduce the ability to conduct activities of daily living and maintain independence. Physical limitations of the elderly significantly restrict or change their functions which have a close bearing with vulnerability to criminal victimization (Agbola, 1997, Moschis, 1994). Kim and Geistfeld (2007) establish that some socio-economic and psychological variables accounts for vulnerability to crime among residents. Could the same socio-economic and psychological variables that influences criminal behaviour also be responsible for residents' susceptibility to criminal victimization, or are there other factors that make residents vulnerable to victimization in Lafia Local Government Area, Nasarawa State.

Worldwide statistics reveal that increasing number of people are becoming vulnerable to criminal victimization in developed and developing nations. Samir (2013) avers that only within the past few decades, the unstable socio-economic conditions especially in developing countries have made many susceptible to criminal victimization. Within the last decades, more than 246 million people have become susceptible to victimization from diverse criminal activities in developing nations (Laquain, 2005). It has been observed that 8 in every 10 persons in most developing countries are susceptible to the harm of crime (Makinmojo, 2013). This is partly attributed to political instability, election and other forms of violence, poverty, insecurity and corruption which have increasingly become the major feature of most African society. Michael (2010), Michael, Ojedokun and Chinwukwu (2013), observe that a society engulfed with the above indices of a failed state, leaves its masses at the mercy of various arm bandits to harm and inflict pains of various degree. Susceptibility to criminal victimization varies among continents, nations, states, communities and household (Toya & Skidmore, 2006). Some populations are more vulnerable to criminal victimization than others, and disparity exists between nations, communities and cultures. Within countries different households maybe vulnerable and affected differently and even within households, the rate of susceptibility to crime victimization may also vary (Barker, 2006)

Empirical analysis of criminal victimization have been conducted at international, national and sub national levels (Alemika, 2011, Ikoh, 2011 Michael, 2010, Kin & Geistfeld, 2007, wright & hill, 2004, Jinlook & Soberon-Ferrer, 1997). Kin and Geistfeld (2007) and Jinlook and Sobero-Ferrer (1997) in their analysis established that older adults are more vulnerable to exploitation or abuse in most advanced nations. Michael, (2010) pointed out that, females more than males are vulnerable to crimes being committed by criminals using motorbikes. Elaborate study by Ikoh (2011) revealed the pattern and trend of criminal victimization among people of diverse socio-economic status in Nigeria. These studies could not advance reasons or factors that make some population more vulnerable to victimization than others.

Studies by Iwarimie-jaja (2012) found the nexus between socio-economic factors (poverty and unemployment) as motivation for criminality. Robertson (1980) has also established

the interaction between socio-economic variables and criminality in developing societies. Whether these socio-economic variables that promote criminality are also capable of making residents vulnerable to criminal victimization has continued to trigger debate among scholars. Smith's (2009) work in this direction pointed out that some socio-economic variables prevalent in Africa are capable of making urban resident vulnerable to victimization by criminals. A similar study was carried out by Ukwai, Agba and Michael (2014) and it was pointed out that socio-economic status influences vulnerability of urban residents to criminals and that commuters in possession of valuables are more vulnerable to criminal using motorbikes in Uyo Metropolis. Elsewhere Peterson (2011) has argued that a careful observation of the pattern and trend of crime in developing nations, reveals that socio-economic status is not a cogent determinant of vulnerability to criminal victimization. This contradictory position of scholars require clarification so that adequate policy on crime management can be formulated. This study therefore seeks to determine whether socio-economic factors that encourage criminality will also be responsible for making residents of Lafia vulnerable to criminal victimization. The questions that needed to be answered are: 1. Does poverty make residents vulnerable to criminal victimization in Lafia? 2. Does illiteracy make residents susceptible to criminal victimization in the study area? 3. Does unemployment make residents prone to criminal victimization? 4. Does ethnicity predispose residents to criminal victimization? 5. Does reporting of crime to the police make residents susceptible to criminal victimization?

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts the descriptive survey design to analyze the vulnerability of residents of Lafia to criminal victimization. This is a process of selecting a sample from the population using some techniques of sampling. It is interested in some characteristics of the population, but relied on carefully selected sample from the population for intensive study of the characteristics of the population (Asika, 2006). The study will utilize quantitative and qualitative techniques to generate data.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Lafia, Nasarawa State. It is one of the urbanized areas in Nigeria. (2009). The 2006 census put the population of 330,712 (NPC,2006). The incidences of crime in recent times have been high, with majority of the people becoming more vulnerable to victimization of diverse types of crime. The recent establishment of Federal University Lafia, the presence of State Polytechnic, and College of education has attracted attention of many people into the town. The town is not properly planned and the level of insecurity is high. This has been captured by (Yahuzi, 2015). The major ethnic groups in Lafia include Eggon, Mada, Gwandara, Kambari, and Alago.

Study Population

The study focus on two categories of respondents. The Public and the Nigeria Police. The public comprised adult males and females who are 18 years and above, who must have resided in the community for at least three years. The Police officers serving in the study area were also involved in the study.

Sample Size Determination

The Yamane's (1967) sample size determination technique was employed to determine the sample for the study. It states that for a population greater than 100, 000, a sample size of 400 be selected at $\pm 5\%$ level of precision. The population of Lafia is put at 330712

according to 2006 population census. The population has 169,398 males and 161,314 are females. Thus the sample size was 400 at $\pm 5\%$ level of precision.

Sampling Procedure

Lafia has 13 political wards. The simple random sampling techniques was employed to select 8 political wards. Three (3) enumeration areas (EAs) each were selected from the eight (8) wards, making a total of twenty four (24) enumeration areas via the simple random sampling methods. From the 24 enumeration areas that were selected 390 heads of households (HHs) were selected purposively for the study. In addition, 10 Police officers in Lafia Local Government Area headquarters were interviewed. This implies that 390 members of the public and 10 Police officers (making a total of 400) in the study area were involved in the study.

Instrument of Data Collection

There was triangulation of quantitative and qualitative instruments. The quantitative instrument was the questionnaire. It was divided into five (5) sections, the first section focus on the socio-demographic characteristic of respondents while, the remaining four (4) sections covered the specific objectives of the study. The choice of questionnaire is because of its ability to cover a large geographical area and it is capable of concealing the identity of the respondents. The quantitative instrument was combined with the qualitative instrument (In-depth interview) to give the study a valid outcome. In-depth interview was conducted with senior male and senior female officers of the Nigeria police.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed with the use of statistical package for social science (SPSS). Univariate variable was described using frequencies and simple percentages. The bivariate variables will be analyzed using chi-square (X^2). This was used to explore relationship among variables. Qualitative data was analyzed using the content analysis and ethnographic summaries. The analysis of data from in-depth interviews demands personal intuition, imagination and internal logic guided by the cultural and behavioural context of the community or phenomenon being studied (Smith, 2003). The triangulation of methods gave the study a valid outcome.

Result and Discussion

Poverty and Residents' Vulnerable to Criminal Victimization

The table below shows the interaction between poverty and vulnerability to criminal victimization. The study reveals that majority of the male 133 (60.2%) respondents subscribed to the view that poverty was capable of making residents vulnerable to victimization by criminals. Only of 88 (39.8%) the male participants negated the relationship between poverty and vulnerability to victimization by criminals. In the same vein, 74 (45.4%) of the female participants vehemently agreed that poverty was capable of making residents vulnerable to victimization while 89 (54.6%) were in objection.

Table: 1 Distribution of Respondents on the Relationship between poverty and Vulnerability to criminal victimization.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
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Yes	207	53.9
No	177	46.1
Total	384	100

Sources: Fieldwork, 2015.

Table 2: Chi-square (χ^2) Analysis of the relationship between poverty and vulnerability to criminals victimization

Variables	Responses		Total	χ^2 value
	Yes	No		
Poverty	133 (119.1)	88 (101.8)	221	8.2346
Vulnerability	74 (87.8)	89 (75.1)	163	
Total	207	177	384	

Source: Fieldwork, 2015. $P < .05$, $df = 1$, critical = 8.2346

The result of the hypothesis (poverty is not significantly related to vulnerability to criminal victimization) as shown on table 3, ($\chi^2=8.2345$, $crit=3.04, df=1$.) revealed that the calculated value was greater than the critical value at 0.05. Thus the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, poverty is significantly related to residents' vulnerability to criminal victimization. This study reflects the extent at which poverty exert influence on many social issues in the study area. The finding aligns with Okoye's (2015) observation that poverty and illiteracy are dominant socio-economic variables that make people vulnerable to diverse calamities including crime. The above finding also contradicts Omoyo's (2010) deductions that the wealthy rather than the poor are vulnerable to criminal victimization in urban centres in Nigeria. Thus, it is deducible that although poverty influences criminality, it is also a cogent variable that explains vulnerability to criminal victimization. In Nigeria, the poor are prone to all forms of criminal victimization as the security operatives in the capitalist society are structured to protect the lives and property of the rich. The poor are incapable of hiring the services of both private and public security. Majority of the police officers are rather deployed to provide security for the political class, their cronies and relatives while the poor are left at the mercy of criminals. Poverty affects all facets of people's life. The poor are abused, dehumanised and molested by all manner of criminals.

Residents' illiteracy and vulnerability to criminal victimization.

The table below establishes that illiteracy was a determinant of residents' vulnerability to criminals' victimization. Majority 158 (71.5%) of the male respondents maintains that illiteracy was capable of making residents prone to criminal victimization, while only 63 (28.5%) of the male respondents were in objection. Similarly, of all the females that took part in the study, 97 (60%) of them were positive about the link between illiteracy and susceptibility of residents to criminal victimization while 66 (40%) did not see the link between illiteracy and vulnerability to criminal victimization.

Table: 3Distribution of Respondents on the Relationship between Residents Illiteracy and Vulnerability to criminal victimization

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	255	66.4
No	129	33.6
Total	384	100

Sources: Fieldwork, 2015

Table 4:Chi-square (χ^2) Analysis of the relationship between Residents Illiteracy and vulnerability to criminal victimization

Variables	Responses		Total	X ² value
	Yes	No		
Residents Illiteracy	158 (146.7)	63 (74.2)	221	
Vulnerability	97 (108.2)	66 (54.7)	163	6.0545
Total	257	129	384	

Sources: Fieldwork, 2015.P <.05, df = 1, critical = 3.04

The chi-square result as shown on table 5 ($\chi^2 = 6.0545$, crit =3.04, significant level = 0.05, df =1) revealed that the null hypotheses (There is no significant relationship between illiteracy and residents vulnerability to criminal victimization) was rejected. Thus there is a significant relationship between illiteracy and vulnerability to criminal victimization. This finding supports the popular belief that illiteracy affects many in various dimensions. A recent study by Michael (2010) reveals that the educated are better informed about security measures than the uneducated. Educated residents will be more aware or better informed of the risk as well as the ways of mitigating against crime (Samir, 2013). Illiteracy is of one major problem in many developing nations, including Nigeria. In Lafia, many youths had no access to formal education, taking precaution against victimization by criminals requires that the individual will be well informed. Illiteracy prevents residents from getting information and tips on how to prevent victimization by criminals. Ademola (2013) maintained that precautions against victimization could better be achieved by the educated than the uneducated.

Unemployment and Residents vulnerable to criminal victimization

The table below shows the relationship between Unemployment and vulnerability to criminal victimization. Majority 138 (62.4%) of the male participants agreed that unemployment was capable of making people vulnerable to victimization by criminals, while 83 (37.6%) of the male participants disagreed with the view. More so, 88 (54.0%) of the female respondents agreed that unemployment make residents prone to criminal victimization while 75 (46.0%) declined.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents on the Relationship between unemployment and Residents Vulnerability to criminal victimization.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	226	58.9
No	158	41.1

Total	384	100
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Sources: Fieldwork, 2015.

Table 6: Chi-square (χ^2) Analysis of the relationship between unemployment Residents and vulnerability to criminal victimization in Lafia.

Variables	Responses		Total	X ² value
	Yes	No		
Residents unemployment	138 (130.0)	83 (95.9)	221	
Vulnerability	88 (90.9)	75 (60.0)	163	5.5795
Total	226	158	384	

Sources: Fieldwork, 2015. $P < .05$, $df = 1$, critical = 3.04

The chi-square result of hypothesis three as shown on table 7 (unemployment is not significantly related to residents vulnerability to criminal victimization) revealed that ($\chi^2 = 5.5795$, crit = 3.04 significance level = 0.05, $df = 1$), the calculated value was $\chi^2 = 5.5795$. Thus the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that unemployment was significantly related to vulnerability to criminal victimization. This finding conforms to the fact that unemployment prevents residents from accessing valuables including the possibility of acquiring the services of the police or private security operatives to provide security for them. This finding is in consonance with the earlier observation of Ukwayi, Agba and Michael (2013) that poverty and unemployment are twin variables that are capable of making individual and household susceptible to preventable inflections including criminal victimization. In many cities across Nigeria, the poor and the unemployment are prone to various criminal victimizations because they do not have the financial capability to guarantee their security, since security has been commercialized and commoditized.

Ethnic Background and Residents Vulnerable to Criminal Victimization

The table below revealed that 136 (61.5%) of the male participants in the study maintained that ethnic background influences vulnerability to criminal victimization in Lafia, 85 (38.5%) of the male respondents disagreed with the view. Similarly, 77 (47.2%) of the females that participated in the study subscribed to the view that ethnic background is capable of making residents prone to victimization by criminals, 86 (52.8%) of the female respondents objects to the view.

Table 7: Distribution of Respondents on the Relationship between Ethnicity and Residents Vulnerability to criminal victimization.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	213	55.5
No	171	44.5
Total	384	100

Sources: Fieldwork, 2015.

Table 8: Chi-square (χ^2) Analysis of the relationship between Ethnicity and Residents vulnerability to criminal victimization.

Responses				
Variables	Yes	No	Total	X² value
Ethnic background	136 (122.5)	84 (90.4)	221	7.2661
Vulnerability to criminal victimization	77 (98.4)	86 (72.5)	163	
Total	213	171	384	

Sources: Fieldwork, 2015. P <.05, df = 1, critical = 3.04

The chi-square result for hypothesis four as shown on table 9 ($\chi^2 = 7.2661$. crit = 3.04, df = 1, level significance = 0.05), revealed that χ^2 calculated is greater than the critical value, thus, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between ethnicity and resident vulnerability to criminal victimization was rejected. Therefore there is a significant relationship between ethnic background and residents' vulnerability to criminal victimization.

This finding aligns with Skogan's (1995) postulation that the Blacks are more likely to exhibit panic than the White and are more likely to be victimized by criminals in United States of America. Salisbury and Upson (2004) points out that Blacks and minority ethnic groups were more likely to Witness high level of victimization by criminals, especially violence than their Whites counterparts. This finding further contradicts Omotala's (2008) assumption that there exist no connection between ethnicity and susceptibility to victimization by criminals. In most urban centers in Nigeria, the settlers are more likely to be prone to victimization especially if the criminals are indigenes. Ethnicity in Nigeria has been a thorny issue as it determines political and economic positions. Ethnicity has inevitably impede our level of development. Thus, it is a cogent variable in the social analysis of susceptibility to criminal victimization in Nigeria. Residing in a given location as a settler, among indigenes exposes you to all forms of victimizations. In Nigeria, a settler is often the victim of periodic attack by criminals

Reporting of Crime to the Police and Residents Susceptible to Criminal Victimization.

The study revealed that reporting crime and criminals will to the Police is likely to make the reporter vulnerable to victimization by criminals. One of the interviewee has this to say:

In this country, you have to be very careful in your dealings. You do not report a criminal or suspected criminal to the police and go around telling people. If you do he or other criminals may come back for you. This will be possible if he gets to know you are the one that reported him.No sensible officer will give important information to the criminal.

This interviewee was of the opinion that people who report criminals or suspects to the police may be vulnerable to criminal victimization. This can be possible when the reporter go around revealing what he or she has done.

Another Police Officer have this to say:

I must tell you the truth, any person who has made up his or her mind to report criminals to the police may be at risk, especially if after that he goes around

informing people of his or her action then, he is at risk. We always advise people who report criminals to the law enforcement agencies not to let even their friends to be aware because the information may get back to the criminal who may go for an attack in future.

This respondent share a similar view with the former that those who report criminals to the law enforcement agencies may be at risk if the information is divulged to the criminals. His perception was that it is the reporters that often divulge to friends and relatives which may eventually get to the criminal or suspected criminals upon his return from detention and not the police.

In a similar manner, this respondent maintained that:

For someone to be prone to criminal victimization, the person must have played a role that will warrant that. Ordinarily, reporting crime, criminal and suspected criminals to the police has no much risk, provided the reporter did not go back and spread the information and the police force on the other hand did not divulge the information to the criminal. Unfortunately, corrupt elements within the force may do so for economic or social reasons. Apart from the police force, the reporter may go back spreading the information. That kind of situation make the reporter prone to victimization by criminal involve or other criminals associated with the one who has been reported.

This respondent has the same opinion with the previous respondents that reporting of crime, criminals and suspected criminals to the police is capable of making one vulnerable to victimization by criminals. The qualitative data revealed that reporting criminals to the police has are relationship with susceptibility to criminal victimization. This finding corroborates Michael's (2010) observation that reporting of crime and criminals to the law enforcement agents has the tendency of making the informant prone to victimization by criminals, associates and their relatives. This scenario accounts for why many crimes go unreported in developing nations. The finding buttresses the observation of Owete (2015) that a People's Democratic Party (PDP) Chieftain Cairo Ojougbor has raised alarm over threat to his live for reporting a multibillion naira scam of the former Secretary to the Federal Government of Nigeria. Several persons have been murdered for reporting criminal activities of organized criminals to the police without a concerted effort by the police to bring the culprits to book. The periodic attacks by criminals on informant who cannot be protected by the police has made many Nigeria unwilling to provide important information to the police about criminals and their activities. Whistle blowers are susceptible to victimization by the criminals. The Department of State Security (DSS) has not made adequate preparations to guarantee the safety and the protection of crime reporters.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined residents' vulnerability to criminal victimization in Lafia, Nasarawa State with various specific objectives including the influence of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment ethnicity and criminal victimization. It was established that socio-economic variables such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment which influence criminal behaviour are also capable of making residents of Lafia prone to criminal victimization. The study further established that ethnicity which has remained a thorny issue in the Nigerian socio-economic and political landscapes was capable of triggering victimization.

The settlers in a community are prone to victimization by criminals than the indigenes. This problem is overtly witnessed in many cities in Nigeria where settlers are frequently victimized by criminals without any perfervid effort by the formal agencies of crime control in addressing it many Nigerians have become victims of criminals attack because they exercise their civility through reporting criminals and their nefarious activities to law enforcement agents. The fear of reprisal attacks from criminals, cronies and their relatives has dissuaded many residents from reporting criminals to the police, this inevitably has affected the official crime statistics in Nigeria.

We recommend that the new government at the center should through adequate policy formulation and implementation address the problems of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy which are not only the triggers of criminality but factors that make residents vulnerable to victimization by criminals. This could be achieved via poverty alleviation and employment programmes designed for Nigerians who are really poor and unemployed. Since many policemen are deployed to protect government institutions, the political class and their relatives, government through the ministries of police affairs and defense should work out modalities where private security organizations can be deployed to protect government institutions, so that police can be deployed to protect the masses.

There is need to sensitize the masses to cultivate the culture of always reporting suspicious people around their locality to the police. Finally, the commissioner of police at the state level and the divisional police officers at the local government levels should periodically embark on enlightenment campaign to sensitize the masses on security tips in their communities

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