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Family and Student Success in Benin: A Comparative Study of Students From Single-Parent and Two-Parent Families in the District of Ketu in Benin

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Abstract

This study examines the living conditions of children from single-parent and two-parent families to assess their academic performance and have an idea of the impact of these two family models (single-parent, two-parent) on the academic success of children in the municipality of Ketu. The quantitative and qualitative survey involved 90 people including 60 students from single-parent and two-parent families on the one hand, and 30 parents in a situation of single parent or two-parent families on the other. The results show that the social and economic living conditions of children from single-parent families are precarious and are not conducive to an efficient academic success when we compare such results to those of children from two-parent families. The study further revealed that the absence of one parent in the household, the difficulties related to the payment of school tuition that might lead to temporary or definite exclusion of the child from school ... are some of the obstacles to school success. As a result, the backup and consolidation of marital bonds turn out to be some of the psychosocial and emotional factors

that are required to ensure academic success and, in turn, the future and the full development of children in our societies.

Key words: Benin; Ketu; Children; Students; Families; Single parenthood; Dual parenting

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INTRODUCTION

Human socialization is ensured by several social agents, the most important of whom being the family, which is regarded as the foundation of society, and turns out to be a privileged entity where basic education takes place. A good emotional climate within the family is the guarantee of a model for the child and remains essential for its development. But what we experience nowadays is nothing but a disruption of the family unit leading to instability in the emotional, social, economic, etc. life of the family, and the literature points out that one of the main reasons for this family disorganization could be single parenthood.

According to Lagadec (1999), a single-parent family is a cell comprising, by descent, only one parent and one or more children. The single parent is in charge of all expenses relating to the child's education. There may be several reasons for single parenthood. We can mention among others: divorce, separation, death of one or of both parents ... This phenomenon leads to the disruption of family units, engendering instability in every field. In this nuclear family, only one parent is in the home (either the father or the mother). For Ekpinsè (2008), the family comprises two individuals who are united with the will to live together as long as possible, with the desire to

be fulfilled by one another ... And a two-parent family is a family cell in which both parents are present in the household (a regular family).

Given the importance of academic studies today, the learner has the duty to make all required efforts to ensure his successful socio-professional integration. He can do this only when living in favorable family conditions. Unfavorable family conditions hinder academic performance because, according to Some (1987), the child needs, for its sound development, understanding, affection and the joint education of his father and mother. Yet, it cannot enjoy all this when it is deprived of either of its parents. Such children, now devoid of the warmth and support that its two parents can provide, see that there is no assurance for their future given that their academic performance depends largely on their family living conditions. They would therefore have to struggle to do the best they can in class.

Public opinion suggests that the absence of a parent in the home creates an emotional, material and financial vacuum, which might influence the academic performance of such children. To this end, Calixte (2008) states that children living in a single-parent family structure have a greater tendency to fail than their peers who live in a two-parent family structure.

All the above justifies our commitment to the realization of this study, "Family and school success in Benin: A comparative study of students from single-parent and two-parent families in the district of Ketu in Benin". We shall have to check in Benin context and particularly in Ketu, in the Plateau Department, if children whose parents live in couples are more successful than those from single parent families.

Our study then seeks to understand the impact of a family model on the academic success of children. We will show the living conditions of children from single-parent and two-parent families and their impact on the performance of those children. We will also make a comparison between the educational outcomes of students from single-parent and two-parent families.

This article focuses on three axes. The first axis presents the problems and the theoretical framework. The second area focuses on the methodology chosen for this study. As far as the third axis is concerned, it presents and analyzes the results.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Benin, according to the 3rd General Census of Population and Housing (RGPH, 2002), there are more and more single-parent families. The data revealed that 22.72% of women are heads of households. Single parenthood takes its source mainly from divorce, separation or death of one or the other spouse. In economic terms, the standard of living of a single parent might be lower with his/her only income (RGPH, 2002).

According to a study involving young teenager students in Porto-Novo in Benin in 2009, children whose parents are living in a couple are more successful than those whose parents are not (Dakpo & Avocétien, 2009). According to Calixte (2008), children living in a single-parent family structure have a greater tendency to fail in their studies than their peers who live in a two-parent family structure. The author concludes by stating that the involvement of both parents in teenagers' school activities has a leading role in the latter's academic success.

In addition, the work of Calixte (2008) has ultimately revealed that the level of interactions between parents and adolescents is not the only variable that determines the academic success of adolescents... Given these considerations we would like to know:

- What is the impact of a family model on the academic performance of children in the municipality of Ketu in Benin?

- Between single-parent and two-parent family models, which one enables children to achieve academic success?

The objective of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between family models (single-parent and two-parent) and the academic success of children. We shall be specifically:

- assess the living conditions of children from single-parent and two-parent families;
- compare the academic performance of children of single-parent and two-parent families;
- assess the impact of the family model for the academic success of children.

We postulate that children from single-parent families are less successful than those whose parents live in couples because of the former's difficult living conditions.

2. THEORETICAL DATA AND CONCEPTS

2.1 Theoretical Framework

To better understand the relationship between the family model and the academic success of children, our study has used concrete action system concepts, basing on the Strategic Analysis principles of Crozier and Friedberg (1977) because the family is a sub-system of the society which may be considered as an organization.

Indeed, the current strategic analysis that underlies the sociology of organizations theory, which was developed in the 70s in France, was theorized first and foremost by Crozier and Friedberg (1977) in their book *L'acteur et le système*. According to these authors, the concrete action system is a structured human group which coordinates the actions of participants in relatively stable gaming mechanisms that maintain its structure, that is to say, the stability of its games and the relationship between them, by control mechanisms that become new games.

The behavior of an actor can be understood through the gamely relation system in which he is involved. At the family level, the game is the set of strategies that actors i.e. the children, the father and mother develop to ensure the socioeconomic development of their families. It depends on the socioeconomic conditions of the family members. Therefore the loss of a link within this system disrupts the latter and causes its disintegration. Thus, the loss of one or the other of the spouses, by death, separation or divorce, affects the rest of the family members especially children who are vulnerable beings.

The non-satisfaction of the needs of a family can have some serious consequences regarding the socialization of children and especially their academic success. The socioeconomic development of the family cannot be effective without the satisfaction of those needs with the contribution of the father and mother. Therefore this study aims to determine the family model (two-parent or single parent) that might permit adolescent children's better performance and academic achievement.

2.2 Conceptual Clarification

2.2.1 School Success

According to the literature, it is difficult to understand the concept "academic success". Baby (2002) quoted by Calixte (2008) highlights this difficulty by stating that, presently, the appraisal of academic success may well depend on the ability of the one who decides to undertake such a task to overcome the ambiguity of the question. To define "academic success" we may refer to Bouchard and St Amant (1993) for whom the achievement of enrollment targets is linked with the mastery of specific knowledge, that is to say, the way gone through by the student within the school system.

Furthermore, Baby (2002) highlights the nuances that make academic achievement an ambiguous concept. The author mentions that the definition of the concept "school success" varies with the objective of those involved in the school system. Indeed, for him, some actors (such as teachers) are located within the academic path, others, such as the Ministry of education, are at the end. For those that are located within the academic path, success means getting a passing grade in each subject. Baby (2002) refers to "success in progress" or "academic success properly speaking", whereas for those who are located at the end of the path, success means getting a degree that completes a level of studies. The author then speaks of "success in the end". For Baby (2002), when we speak of academic achievement, we should precise which type of success we mean. In the framework of this study, we will define academic success as the achievement of an educational objective, as precised by the performance or academic results of the student. We will retain as a performance (or result) indicator the average of the marks or grades obtained by the students in their respective school transcripts.

2.2.2 Child

The Convention on children's rights defines a child as a human being whose age is between 0 and 18 years old. It is also the being that represents a potential wealth because educators have so far regarded it (and continue to regard it) as the focus of all educational exchanges. It is a major concern for the international community. This is surely the reason why several national and international organizations have been set up to address the issue of children worldwide.

In our sample population we will consider students between 14 and 23 years old who do not have any financial and material autonomy, and who still depend financially on their parents. They are young people who still need the daily support of their parents.

2.2.3 Family

A family may be historically defined as a group of people who recognize that they have the same blood relations and the same ancestor. All those who live in the same house, and form a household in the modern economic sense of the term, may be referred to as a family (Microsoft Encarta, 2007).

The creation of a family requires that either of two families should be reduced by one of their members. The family is a social institution with a biological foundation. Therefore, even if there are universal considerations for the definition of the family (reproduction, prohibition of incest, wedding rings, etc.), each society defines different features, according to its demographic structure, its social or religious organization, its beliefs, etc. In the context of our study, the family specifically involves the father, mother and children.

2.2.4 The Single-Parent Family

It is a nuclear family with a single parent at home. The single parent is either the father or the mother. But in most cases, it is women who have the custody of children (Lagadec, 1999). We speak in these cases of women heads of households. The concept of "single-parenthood" refers to the specificity of a French approach, and has been completely replaced by other denominations (matrifocal cell, matricentric cell, etc.) closer to the English term "matrifocality" (Tichit, 2005).

2.2.5 The Two-Parent Family

As far as it is concerned "the two-parent family" refers to a family unit in which both parents are present in the home. We may refer to such cases as regular families.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

3.1 Study Type and Scope of Realization

It is a descriptive study which is quantitative and qualitative and has used sociological techniques (questionnaire surveys, interviews, available archive documents).

It has taken into account the data collected through the transcripts of students from single-parent and two-parent families. An analysis of the academic performance of these students over three years has been done. The surveys took place in the Secondary Schools of Ketu (CEG1 Ketu) and Idigny in the department of Ouémé / Plateau in Benin. The choice of these two institutions is justified by the fact that they are in two districts whose school enrollment rates, according to the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Analysis (INSAE, 2008), are still the highest: 68.7% in the district of Ketu and 51.9% in the district of Idigny, while in the other districts the rates are much lower: 48.5% at Okpomèta, 38.9% at Adakplamè, 33.0% at Kpankou and 27.0% at Odomèta, in the same department.

3.2 Target Population and Sampling

The target population consists of students from two-parent and single-parent families in these two districts and parents of these two model families. The study sample was made purposive, i.e. it consisted of only those who had agreed to participate in the study for having understood that it was a worthwhile undertaking.

In total 90 people including 60 students from single-parent and two-parent families, and 30 relatives (15 bi-parents and 15 single parents). Note that all students from two-parent families live with both parents and those from single-parent families live with either the mother or the father.

3.3 Data Collection Tools and Techniques

The students were interviewed with a questionnaire and an interview grid. Both data collection tools were preceded by a documentary compilation.

3.4 Conduct of the Survey

The survey itself was carried out through a self-administration of the questionnaire, with the students who had filled in the questionnaire forms on the spot, in the assembly halls of their respective institutions. Each session took place under the supervision of four previously trained investigators.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

The data collected by questionnaire were processed with the software ‘Statistica Soft Inc. (5.5 version)’ and SPSS, 11.0 version.

Design: Descriptive quantitative and qualitative
Survey sample: 60 students from single-parent and two-parent families + 30 relatives (15 single parents and 15 bi-parents)
Venue: CEG 1 Ketu and CEG of Idigny
Sample size: 90 people
Tools: Literature, questionnaire and interviews
Variables: Socioeconomic conditions and annual school results over three years
Processing software: “Statistica” Version 5.5

Figure 1
Summary of the Sample Collection Tools and Data Processing

4. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Noting that a stable and harmonious family environment ensures children’s good educational achievement, we undertook this study relating to the influence of family background on children’s academic achievement in the municipality of Ketu in Benin. The objective is to identify the living conditions of children in single-parent and two-parent families, to analyze the academic performance of these children and to foresee the impact of single parenthood on the latter’s education and future school results.

To achieve this goal, we followed a methodological approach combining both qualitative methods (interviews) and quantitative methods (questionnaires). All these methods involved a population consisting of those directly concerned (students and parents). Most of the information obtained and the results have been recorded in tables and processed in graphs. These results are analyzed, interpreted and discussed.

4.1 Presentation of the Results of the Questionnaires Filled in by the Children

Here below is the presentation of the results of the questionnaires filled in by the students:

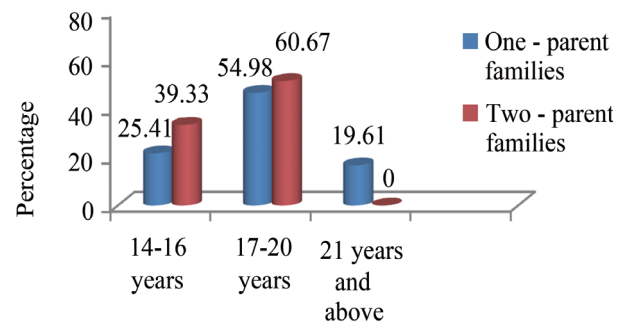


Figure 2
Distribution of Students According to Their Age

This Figure reveals that 54.98% of students from single-parent families are 17-20 years old in the 4th form (3ème) for 60.67% of students from two-parent families in the same form. This means that whether students from Ketu are from single-parent families or from two-parent families, their age differences are negligible when they are in the fourth form.

4.2 Conditions of Students From Single-Parent Families

The following figure reveal the children’s answer to the question relating to which parent they live with and whether or not they feel neglected by the absent parent.

Figure 3a, b show that 47.07% of children live with their father while 52.95% of them are with their mother. Whether with their father or their mother, 47.06% of

those children say that they feel neglected by their absent parent.

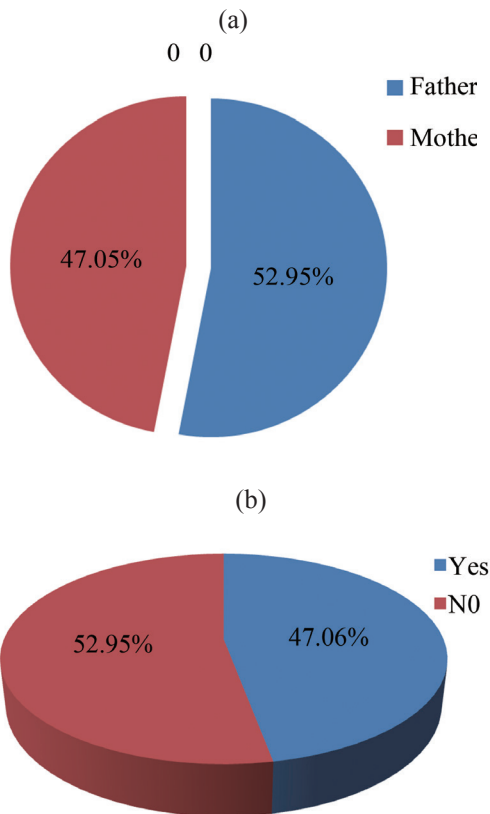


Figure 3
(a) Children's Custody By Their Father Or Mother, (b) Feeling of Negligence by Children From Single-Parent Families

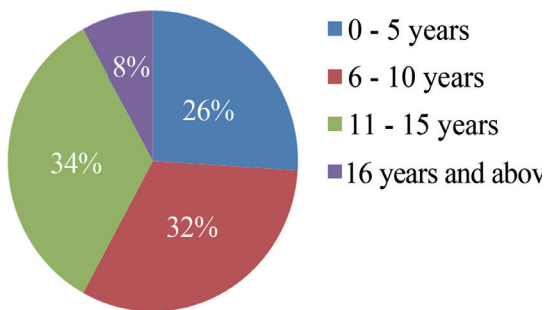


Figure 4
Age of Single Parent Family Children at the Time Their Parents Separate

At the time of separation from one of their parents, 58% of single parent family children were below 10 years old, 34% of them were between 11 and 15 years old and 8% of them were 16 years old or above. So, the children were relatively young at the time of separation from one of their parents.

Regarding Figure 5, we note that 74.45% of single parent family children said they had been excluded from school once, for 10.15% of two-parent family children

who had been excluded. So, the number of children from single-parent families who were kicked out of school is much higher than the number of children from two-parent families who were kicked out.

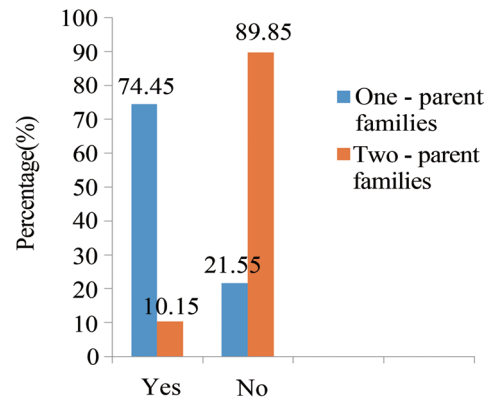


Figure 5
Exclusion From School

Figure 6 shows that 3.93% of single parent family children eat once a day, 84.35% of them eat two or three times a day, and more than 11.72% of them eat three times a day when none of the two-parent family children eat only once a day and 86.94% of the latter children eat more than three times a day.

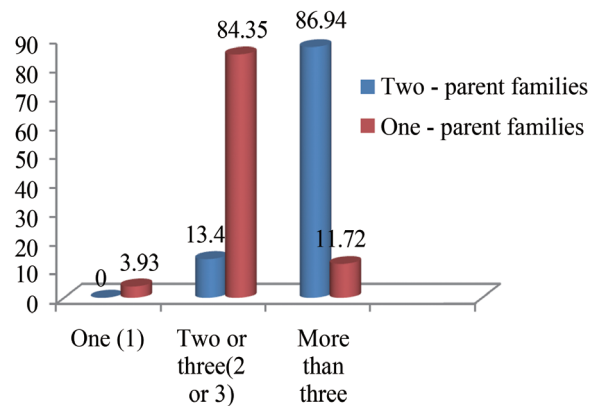


Figure 6
Number of Meals Per Day

Figure 7 shows that 33.33% of single parent family children have not experienced class repetition before the separation of their parents, while after separation such children have experienced a repetition rate of 45.02%. The separation of parents has had an obvious negative impact on the academic success of children.

It is clear from Figure 8 that the majority of children from single parent families have a school result average of between 10 and 11 out of 20 (76.28% of them) while the majority of the two-parent family children have a school result average of between 12 and 13. We can conclude that two-parent family children have better results than those from single-parent families.

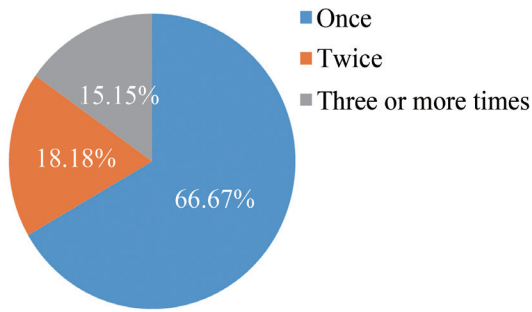


Figure 7
Number of Class Repetitions of Single Parent Children

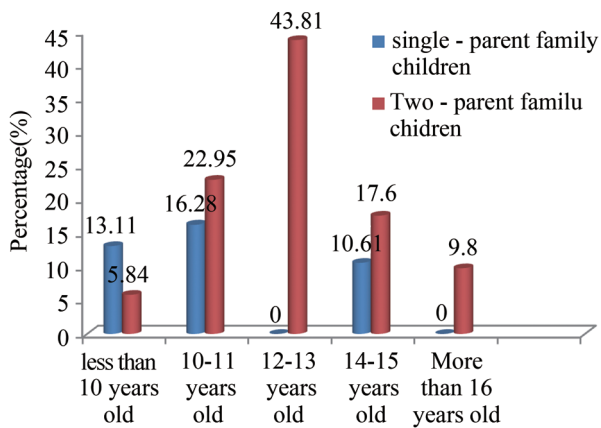


Figure 8
Class Result Averages Over Three Years

It is clear from Figure 8 that the majority of children from single parent families have a school result average of between 10 and 11 out of 20 (76.28% of them) while the majority of the two-parent family children have a school result average of between 12 and 13. We can conclude that two-parent family children have better results than those from single-parent families.

4.3 Results From Interviews

A total of 15 single parents were surveyed. Among them, 5 were male and 10 female. According to our respondents, this state of affairs is due to the fact that child care is often entrusted to the mother, which sometimes leads her not to get married with another man so as not to hurt her children. Regarding the age of the respondents, the majority of the parents were aged 30-50 years old; only 2 of them were between 50 and 65 years old. Marital life time varied: 7 experienced 5 to 10 years' marital life; 6 of them experienced 10 to 15 years' marital life, and 2 of them spent over 15 years living as a couple (husband and wife). These results show that the children were still young at the time of their parents' separation, which could affect them the most as parents (8/15) state that children have difficulty accepting their separation. Yet certain parents were shocked on the death of their partner (6/15). One parent said, "My companion fled after the announcement of my pregnancy." This case allows us to consider the

disappearance or escape of the second parent as one of the causes of the formation of single parent families.

Single parents said they depended exclusively on themselves with nobody to rely on. This is coupled with a great suffering as inside the couple it is seen as a painful failure, mainly for a partner to whom the other partner has been imposed (cases of death or unwanted separation). They claim (11/15) that "there is no greater punishment than losing the one you love and with whom there was a commitment for life."

Through the analysis of parents' views, verbally expressed, it emerges that:

- the education of children is difficult for both single-parent families and two-parent families;
- the difference lies in the fact that bi-parents enjoy a relative complementarity of each other, which enables them to take better care of their children.

DISCUSSION

The survey results allow us to say that 54.98% of single-parent children were aged 17-20 in the 4th form for 60.67% of their peers from two-parent families in the same form. If we consider the normal age for starting primary school, children should logically be 16 in their secondary school fourth form. The age of the single-parent students could be justified through a slight delay at the time of their enrolment in primary school or through school failure. Also, our investigations allow us to affirm that children from single-parent families are often taken care of by their mothers. Most of these women are widows, single mothers or mothers who, for one reason or another, were separated from their husbands. Moreover, cases of unwanted pregnancies or disappearing partners have the effect of creating many single parents. This exposes women to difficulties of all kinds, especially if we consider that most often the children concerned are very young, and therefore in need of much care.

Figure 8 shows that the majority of lone-parent children (76.28%) have an average of 10 to 11 out of 20 on their transcripts while children from two-parent families (43.81%) have an average of 12 to 13 out of 20. Also, none of the children from single parent families has an average of 16 out of 20, while their peers from two-parent families (9.80%) have an average of 16 or more out of 20. All this confirms our hypothesis that children from single-parent families are less successful than those whose parents live in couples because of their different living conditions.

CONCLUSION

The investigations on the topic "Family and school success in Benin: A comparative study of students from single-parent and two-parent families in the district of Ketu" was an opportunity for us to examine the situation

of children from the two types of families, especially their access to school and their relative success at school.

Indeed, our study showed that the living conditions in single-parent families are not favorable as such families face a lot of difficulties to ensure decent living and studying conditions for their children. All these are factors that limit their chance of academic success because, according to the latter, they would do better at school if their living conditions were better than those currently experienced by them.

The district of Ketu, like all the municipalities that are predominantly rural in Benin, is a district that requires the support of local authorities backed by the Government so that some substantial efforts might be made to mobilize domestic and external resources, for its development, especially as it has huge agricultural assets. Since we have to address Development as a “whole issue”, all links in the chain must be taken into account, particularly the development of the family because it is the basic unit of any society.

Single parenthood is nothing fatal. It is a recurring phenomenon in Benin whose future evolution should be carefully prepared given the difficult context of its underdevelopment. The crucial question is: What policy should be adopted to take into account these situations increasingly widespread and more and more heterogeneous, the disregard of which requires the collection of appropriate data on the issue. We hope, through this study, to draw the attention of political and administrative authorities and of parents on this evil which jeopardizes children's future.

Far from being the last step of a process, this research is the beginning of more consistent research that could develop concrete strategies for change in families so that children can benefit from decent family living conditions that will contribute to their well-being and especially to better academic results at school.

It is therefore essential that parents should understand that the breaking of their conjugal relationship does not result in putting an end to their parental duties vis-à-vis their children. And as Brunschwig (2001) put it, parents that are good enough and a home that is good enough give most infants and young children the chance of never having been left unattended to for a long time. For him, that is the way most children will have the opportunity to build confidence in themselves and in the world.

Given these results, the safeguard and consolidation of marital bonds prove to be affective and psycho-sociological factors that are necessary to ensure academic success and, in turn, the future and the full development of children in our societies.

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